

The End of ‘The Golden Age Of SOF’? Is There a Role for Special Operations Forces in the Renewed ‘Great Power Competition?’

Colonel (Retired) Bernd Horn, PhD

Abstract

This article examines the rise of Special Operations Forces (SOF) from the end of the first Gulf War in 1991 to its position of eminence in the post 9/11 era. By 2020, analysts had come to equate SOF as being synonymous with the American way of war since 9/11. However, the American *2018 National Defense Strategy* began a shift in focus in the US military’s emphasis on SOF to ‘Great Power Competition’. This pivot clearly articulated a transition from the Department of Defense’s primary focus on counter-terrorism and the ‘war on terror,’ to a shift of emphasis on ‘great power competition’ with its peer and near-peer rivals. For the traditional Services, this transition back to conventional, traditional capabilities and threat scenarios was arguably welcome news. However, the pivot did create a question of whether SOF would once again be shunted to the periphery as Cold War-esque scenarios and priorities on mass and firepower once again takes centre stage. This article argues that despite the pivot, SOF will always remain a viable and quintessential military capability due to the realities of the current and future security environments. Quite simply, the use of grey zone / hybrid warfare operations by adversaries, the continuing growth and virulence of terrorist organizations and non-state actors, smouldering insurgencies around the globe, as well as a reluctance of Western governments and the public to become embroiled in lengthy and costly military engagements, assures SOF a continuing decisive role in operations in the era of Great Power Competition.

Keywords

Special Operations Forces (SOF), Great Power Competition, Insurgency, Counter Terrorism, Russia, China, Afghanistan, Iraq, Security Environment, Hybrid Warfare

*Colonel Bernd Horn, PhD is a retired Regular Force infantry officer and military educator. Dr. Horn has authored, co-authored, and edited more than forty books, including *A Most Ungentlemanly Way of War: The SOE and the Canadian Connection* and *No Ordinary Men: Special Operations Forces Missions in Afghanistan*. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy, (PhD) in War Studies from the The Royal Military College of Canada. He lives in Kingston, Ontario.*

The new millennium witnessed a surge in the trust in, and reliance by, governments with regard to their special operations forces (SOF). Monikers such as ‘force of choice’ and ‘SOF power’ were used repeatedly by politicians, scholars, military strategists and journalists. In fact, the former Commander of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), Admiral Bill McRaven, on his retirement from the military in 2014, proclaimed that we were in ‘the golden age of Special Operations’. He elaborated, “[It’s] a time when our unique talents as special operators are in the greatest demand. A time when the nation recognizes the strategic value of our services. A time when all that we train for, all that we work for, all that our predecessors planned for has come together.”¹

McRaven’s remarks are pertinent because they speak to the impact of both SOF’s unique capabilities, as well as the influence and impact they have had on operations across the globe. For the past two decades, SOF have been the sabre used to fight terrorism and conduct counter-insurgency (COIN) operations around the globe. However, the American Government’s announcement that the military will pivot from an emphasis on counter-terrorism and COIN to one of great power competition, specifically addressing peer and near-peer adversaries would seem to diminish the spotlight on SOF. Will they have a role in the new era of renewed great power competition? Are SOF and their golden era in descent? Or, will SOF’s intelligence-driven operations and innate excellence at targeting opponents find a substantial role, in kinetic and / or non-kinetic tasks, in the transforming security environment?

The answers to these questions lie in SOF’s ability to anticipate, adapt and change in accordance with the shifting security environment. As much as the conventional services may welcome the “back to the future” chimera of large mechanized forces, the great power competition has been long brewing and has transformed how conflict is waged. In this ethereal and murky battlespace, SOF still remains an essential, if not pivotal, tool in a government’s arsenal.

SOF DOMINANCE IN THE POST 9/11 ERA

From their inception at the start of World War II, SOF have always been viewed as a distraction, if not a nuisance, to real soldiering. Conventional military commanders despised SOF and consistently pushed them to the periphery of military capability. Only the inimitable patronage of a few power politicians and high-ranking officers ensured SOF’s survival in this inauspicious environment. Not until 1987, with the creation of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), did SOF finally find themselves in a position to control their own destiny.² By the 1990s, SOF were becoming the ‘easy button’ for political and military political decision-makers. As one senior SOF member revealed, if it’s really hard and really important let’s ask JSOC [Joint Special Operations Command] to do it.” He added, “it fell to JSOC because it was the no-fail, risk-averse environment from DoD [Department of Defense].”³

The universal image of SOF continued to grow. Internationally, SOF units scored repeated successes against adversaries. SOF forces gained important credibility and an elevated profile during the First Gulf War in 1990-1991. Coalition SOF conducted strategic reconnaissance, direct action raids, economy of effort activities such as deception operations, and liaison / training

missions with the less advanced non-NATO coalition partners. But, their most well-known, public mission was “‘Scud busting’” - a strategically essential task that was critical to maintaining the Coalition by keeping Israel from retaliating against Saddam Hussein’s continued Scud missile attacks on Israeli soil.⁴ SOF were given the difficult task of locating and destroying the mobile launchers.⁵

At the end of hostilities, of the 540,396 American troops deployed to Operation Desert Storm, approximately 7,000 were SOF personnel.⁶ Paradoxically, General H. ‘Stormin’ Norman Schwarzkopf III, who actually despised special operators because of his negative experience with them in Vietnam and later during Operation Urgent Fury (the invasion of Grenada in 1983) initially slapped severe restrictions on their employment in theatre.⁷ Yet, in the end, despite his preliminary reluctance to use SOF, he later singled out those forces as critical to the Allied victory.⁸

Special operations forces were now on the rise. They had proven themselves effective in the murky war against terrorists, in the blowing sands of a conventional war in the Gulf, as well as in the peace that prevailed. Globally, they were used for the traditional roles of unconventional warfare, strategic reconnaissance and direct-action raids. However, they now also specialized in counter-terrorism, foreign internal defence (i.e. training foreign militaries in counter insurgency and counter-terrorism (CT) in an effort to shape the environment before a problem in an at-risk state became so severe that it required a larger military intervention), counter-proliferation (i.e. combating the proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons; intelligence collection and analysis; support of diplomacy, arms control and export controls), civic affairs, psychological operations and information operations. They were also used to hunt down persons indicted for war crimes (PIFWC) in the Former Yugoslavia and Africa (e.g. Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia).⁹

Their importance increased because political decision-makers and senior military commanders began to realize the effective and efficient contribution they could make. Quite simply, relatively small, highly-skilled and mobile units that proved extremely effective in operations, and who presented a relatively small footprint, provided the political and military leadership with a scalable, viable response to global problems. SOF could be employed in a myriad of potentially politically sensitive operations but without the normal risk or negative optics of deploying a large number of troops. Mass could be replaced by quality. This realization was not only an economic factor but one of effectiveness. In the volatile, uncertain and ambiguous environment of conflict, SOF were normally more agile and adaptable than conventional forces. Their higher levels of intelligence, skill and ingenuity compared to their conventional brethren provided a better chance of success.

The change in momentum became obvious. Using the Americans as an example, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict reported, in 1992, that “our [SOF] deployments between Fiscal Years 1991 and 1992 grew by 83%.” This trend continued. “During 1997”, SOCOM commander, General Peter Schoomaker, revealed, “SOF deployed to 144 countries around the world, with an average of 4,760 SOF personnel deployed per week - a threefold increase in missions since 1991.”¹⁰ During the Fiscal Year 1997 alone, SOF conducted 17 crisis response operations, 194 counter-drug missions, humanitarian de-mining operations in 11 countries, and they participated in 224 combined exercises for training in 91 countries. The following year, SOF conducted 2,178 missions outside the continental USA in

152 different countries. A point worth noting is that the incredible capability and flexibility provided by the US SOF, which numbered about 45,690 members at the time, came at the cost of only 1 percent of their defence budget.¹¹

However, it was the events of 9/11, the cataclysmic terrorist attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001, which arguably propelled SOF into the mainstream of recognized national military capability. Decision-makers were looking for a means of striking back swiftly and effectively. SOF once again provided the answer. As part of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan, it took only 49 days from the insertion of the first American SF teams with Northern Alliance (Anti-Taliban) forces to the fall of Kandahar and the rout of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. This success was achieved with 316 US Special Forces (SF), some Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operatives and precision close air support. The SF operators rallied and forged cohesive teams out of the unorganized anti-Taliban opposition groups and more importantly, using a small amount of sophisticated targeting equipment, brought the weight of American airpower down on Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters.¹²

As an indication of their effectiveness, air strikes brought down by one of the first Special Forces (SF) teams in the country, aided by a lone Air Force combat controller, are credited with killing as many as 3,500 fighters and destroying up to 450 vehicles.¹³ Another team, Tiger Team 2, was attributed with 2,500 enemy killed, over 50 vehicles destroyed and over 3,500 prisoners captured, as well as the liberation of over 50 towns and cities.¹⁴ At one time just 10 American SF sergeants were responsible for 120 miles of battlefront.¹⁵ As Major-General Robert Scales explained, “A few well-trained and properly equipped special operations soldiers on the ground armed with the authority to call for and direct aerial precision missions from the ground made the difference between success and failure in the firepower campaign in Afghanistan.”¹⁶

As the Americans changed focus and put their priority of effort into the land invasion of Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) on 20 March 2003, SOF underscored its immense utility once again. One strategic assessment lauded, “raids by special operations forces were more impressive than the early air campaign.” It went on to explain:

“...Dozens of small special operations teams disrupted Iraqi command-and-control, seized oil infrastructure, prevented dams from being demolished and took hold of airfields in regions where Scud missiles might have been launched at Israel. They also provided information on the whereabouts of Iraqi leaders, permitting attacks against Saddam Hussein and the notorious General Ali Hassan Majid (Chemical Ali). Special Forces also disrupted internal Iraqi lines of communication in Baghdad and elsewhere, perhaps hastening the collapse of Iraqi forces once urban combat began.”¹⁷

Another account revealed that USSF were:

“...Usually ahead of the tip of the spear: as US troops pushed toward Baghdad, secret combat teams zipped into Iraq aboard specially outfitted MC-130 Combat Talon planes that used highways as landing strips, surprising the enemy at its rear. On the road to Tikrit, they fingered Iraqi vehicles fleeing the capital for destruction by M1 tanks. And inside the capital the elite Delta Force slipped into Baghdad’s back alleys and into its

*sewers to eavesdrop on communications, cut fiber-optic cables, target regime leaders and build networks of informants.*¹⁸

Specifically, Coalition SOF consisting of American SF, SEALs and Delta Force; UKSF (consisting of B & D Squadrons (Sqn) Special Air Service (SAS) and C Sqn Special Boat Squadron (SBS); the Royal Marines (RMs); Australian – 1 Special Air Squadron Regiment (SASR) and 4th Battalion (Commando) 4 Royal Australian Regiment; and the Polish GROM (Gtupa Reagowania Operacyjno Mobilnego) were deployed throughout the entire theatre. In the Western Desert, Coalition SOF hunted down mobile SCUD TEL launchers and denied Iraqis the ability to use potential launch sites. They also provided special reconnaissance on Iraqi military positions and conducted screening tasks in support of conventional forces.

In fact, Delta was actually the first SOF unit deployed on 19 March 2003 and they conducted a number of high priority Sensitive Site Exploitation (SSE) on suspected chemical weapons facilities before heading for the Haditha dam complex where they ‘marked’ armoured vehicles and anti-aircraft systems for destruction by Coalition air. Upon being reinforced by a Delta squadron and a battalion of Rangers they seized the dam.¹⁹ Delta forces also deployed to the north and conducted ambushes on the highway to Tikrit to tie up Iraqi forces and they captured high value targets (HVTs) attempting to flee to Syria.

In the Northern part of Iraq, Coalition SOF worked with local Kurdish Peshmerga forces to draw Iraqi forces away from reinforcing Baghdad, as well as capturing strategic sites to allow follow on conventional forces to deploy.²⁰ These positions became even more vital once Turkey denied staging rights for conventional forces to deploy from its soil. In addition, USSF infiltrated Iraqi territory to monitor the Karbala Gap.

SOF’s effectiveness was also demonstrated in the South where Coalition SOF seized national oil production facilities, provided Special Reconnaissance (SR), and captured key facilities and transport nodes. A Naval Task Group seized Umm Qasr, Iraq’s only deep-water port, the oil production facilities of the Al-Faw Peninsula and two offshore platforms fed by the pipelines. A fourth covert SOF unit searched for weapons of mass destruction and pursued HVTs within the Saddam Hussein regime. In addition, Coalition SOF also supported conventional forces and their seizure of Rumaylah Oilfield. USSF, specifically Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) 563, worked with local Sheikhs and their militiamen to capture a bridge and then supported the militia to take the town. The USSF then set up a police service and restored 80 percent of the town’s electricity within a fortnight. They also reopened schools and hospitals.

Furthermore, other Coalition SOF captured HVTs, including Palestinian terrorist leader Mohammed Abbas²¹ in Baghdad on 10 April 2003, and Iraqi deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz on 25 April. Delta and Naval Special Warfare Development Group (DEVGRU), also known as Seal Team 6, scored a huge success with the elimination of Saddam Hussein’s sons, Uday and Qusay. They also captured Saddam Hussein and killed the al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. In addition, Coalition SOF conducted numerous SSEs on suspected Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) sites, as well as countless direct-action raids, where they captured or killed over 100 AQI members including at least eight HVTs.

SOF was clearly on an upswing. By 2001, 5,141 SOF personnel were deployed to 149 countries and foreign territories.²² However, this number skyrocketed in the aftermath of 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq. As of May 2003, there were approximately 20,000 special operators, representing almost half of the entire special operations force of 47,000, involved in ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.²³ Moreover, US SOF were joined there by a large number of Allied SOF contingents. Not surprisingly, a 2003 House Armed Services Committee report assessed, “[SOF] is clearly a treasured national asset in the ‘War on Terrorism’ and our best asset in disrupting the enemy in foreign lands.”²⁴

As American focus and effort in Iraq intensified, the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated. By 2003, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda were flowing back into the country and by 2005, they had plunged the country deep into a brutal insurgency. SOF once again became a central factor in the resurgent COIN campaign. SOF quickly became the “invisible hand” in Afghanistan that conducted a war in the shadows, providing a significant impact to Coalition force protection, an increase in host nation governance and security, as well as destruction of enemy capability. Moreover, SOF became a vital contributor to the successful fight for the hearts and minds of the population.²⁵

Not surprisingly then, the Pentagon requested that special operations funding be increased by more than 50 percent from about \$4 billion in fiscal year 2003 to \$6.7 billion in 2004.²⁶ Moreover, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US Secretary of Defense expanded USSOCOM’s responsibilities in the 2004 Unified Command Plan (UCP), which assigned USSOCOM responsibility for coordinating the DoD plans against global terrorism and conducting global operations as directed. USSOCOM grew despite the fact that the conventional services were dramatically downsized.

Importantly, throughout 2004 SOF melded capabilities such as ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance) and the ability to use insurgents’ digital communications against them to create the dynamic process of F3EAD: Find, Fix, Finish, Exploit, Analyze, Disseminate.²⁷ In fact, in August 2004, the JSOC task force conducted 18 missions a month in Iraq. Two years later, by August 2006, it conducted more than 300 a month.²⁸ This increase led one SOF officer to quip, “We have to operate at the speed of war – faster, faster, faster.”²⁹ And, SOF was able to meet the challenge.

Task Force (TF) 714 in Iraq became the poster child for SOF innovation and effectiveness. Their evidence collection techniques had become so comprehensive that in excess of 80 percent of the insurgents the task force captured were later convicted in Iraqi courts of law. This success rate compares to the approximate 20 percent of suspected insurgents captured in traditional sweeps that focused on military-aged males of uncertain guilt or affiliation.³⁰

SOF had similar success in Afghanistan. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) working with the Tenth Special Forces Group formed the Counter IED Initiative in 2006. By 2008, the task force had seriously degraded three major Improvised Explosive Device (IED) cells operating in Kabul. They prevented 43 separate attacks targeting the Coalition and neutralized more than 150 known bombers and facilitators in raids.³¹

General Wayne A. Downing asserted, “SOF was structured for and conducted short-duration deployments and combat operations, but by 2005, SOF operators were conducting more operations

in a week, at a higher rate of complexity, than their pre 9/11 predecessors conducted in a career.”³² For example, in the first three months of 2011, Allied SOF in Afghanistan mounted more than 1,600 missions and captured or killed close to 3,000 insurgents.³³ Reportedly, SOF secured their target 80 per cent of the time, and less than 1 percent of the raids led to civilian casualties.³⁴ By 10 August 2011, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Joint Command reported, "there were 675 raids in 2009, 1,780 in 2010, and 1,879 by August 2011 - 49 percent of the raids captured or killed the principal target; 45 percent in 2009 /2010; and 84 percent of the raids achieved some success (i.e. captured or killed their target)."³⁵ Importantly, these figures represent only the kinetic aspect.

Additionally, throughout this period and extending beyond combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, SOF forces demonstrated their utility in conducting operations abroad whether combating terrorism and piracy, or conducting military assistance, special reconnaissance or special warfare.³⁶ In 2011, USSOCOM increased from 64,000 to 70,000 personnel at a time when the Army and the United States Marine Corps (USMC) were being cut by a combined 100,000 troops.³⁷ Moreover, on an average day, more than 12,000 SOF operators and support personnel were deployed to in excess of 75 countries world-wide.³⁸

With global threats omnipresent, international SOF organizations, often under an American framework, undertake a program of training and advising security forces in a number of countries around the world, with a particular focus on West African countries, as well as supporting the African Union in taking a larger role in African affairs. For example, in January 2013, British and French SOF assisted Mali Defence Forces turn back an Islamic militant (AQIM) offensive to increase their hold on territory they had seized from the Mali government in the previous year. As they began their renewed offensive pushing south to the capital of Mali, Bamako, government forces backed by Western nations halted and then turned back the militants. During the combat operations French and British SOF advised, supported and even commanded Malian troops who did much of the heavy lifting in terms of fighting.³⁹

Moreover, in 2014, in an era where virtually all Western countries were fiscally constrained, war weary and reluctant to deploy ground forces or become embroiled in a military intervention that could turn into a quagmire, SOF saliency once again resonated. SOF became a key player in the concerted effort of an international coalition to stop, neutralize, and then destroy, the Daesh (also known as the Islamic State) terror organization that swept through major parts of Syria and Iraq declaring the creation of a Caliphate. The brutal terror tactics, crimes against humanity, wealth and access to modern military technology, as well as Daesh’s ability to sway adherents through a sophisticated communication strategy that makes expert use of social media and the internet, made them an immense international security threat. Action had to be taken, but nations were reluctant to get involved in yet another potentially long, costly conflict.

SOF once again filled the gap because of its ability to provide governments with viable policy options, without representing an irrevocable ground force commitment. Former USSOCOM Commander, Admiral Bill McRaven captured SOF’s versatility. He explained, “SOF are rapidly deployable, have operational reach, are persistent and do not constitute an irreversible policy commitment.”⁴⁰

Key to the SOF response to the continuing global crises was a formal SOF interconnected approach. In many ways, the SOF global network, which has always been an informal web, under McRaven's tenure as Commander USSOCOM was promoted and nurtured as a more formal network of like-minded international SOF organizations. As such, it yields a viable response to the global terrorist threat. In an era of persistent, complex conflict within the context of globalization (i.e. proliferation of cheap, accessible information and technology, as well as worldwide access) political and military decision makers have realized SOF is a strategic implement of great utility. Steven Bucci, the director of the Center for Foreign Policy Studies at the Heritage Foundation captured this realization of SOF as the new "force of choice." He asserted:

*The world is more dangerous than it's been before with a lot of potential threats out there and SOCOM is offering policymakers ways to address those threats at a very low level with a low footprint in ways that can hopefully defuse those threats before they turn to violence.*⁴¹

In short, as analysts have summarized in 2014, "US Special Operations Command has grown tremendously since 2001. Its manpower has nearly doubled, its budget has nearly tripled, and its overseas deployments have quadrupled."⁴² Importantly, the American experience is not unique. Rather, it is indicative of the evolution of SOF. In the United Kingdom during their 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review, British Special Forces were spared cutbacks that resulted in the defence budget falling by approximately 7.7 per cent to around £33.5B between 2010-11 and 2014-2015.⁴³ In the Canadian context, the Canadian Armed Forces have experienced four notable iterations of defence cuts since 2010. SOF was spared in three of the rounds of cuts and only superficially impacted in the fourth. Significantly, it received in-year funds to meet all its commitments and is still in a period of growth in an era where other Services are looking at divestment.

Not surprisingly then, former USSOCOM Commander Admiral Eric Olsen asserted that "[SOF] are contributing globally well beyond what their percentage of the total force numbers would indicate. Every day they are fighting our enemies, training and mentoring our partners, and bringing value to tens of thousands of villagers who are still deciding their allegiances."⁴⁴

General Joseph Votell III echoed those sentiments when he assumed command of USSCOM in August 2014. "The command is at its absolute zenith", he proclaimed, "And it is indeed a golden age for special operations." He continued, "Our nation has very high expectations of SOF. They look to us to do the very hard missions in very difficult conditions."⁴⁵

For example, in Afghanistan, alone, SOF conducted 350 raids targeting al-Qaeda and Islamic State operatives in 2016, averaging about one per day, and captured or killed nearly 50 "leaders" as well as 200 suspected 'members' of the terror groups, according to American General John Nicholson, the top US commander in country.⁴⁶ Moreover, since 2016, DoD has assigned USSOCOM the roles coordinating authority over countering violent extremist operations (CVEO) and countering weapons of mass destruction (CWMD) operations.

With the increased responsibilities and tempo of operations, USSOCOM's budget mushroomed to \$10.8 billion in 2017.⁴⁷ Moreover, that same year US SOF alone deployed to 149 countries around the world, an increase from the 138 countries SOF deployed to in 2016.⁴⁸ In May 2017, General Raymond (Tony) Thomas III, the Commander of USSCOM at the time, briefed the Senate Armed Services Committee that "Since 9/11, we expanded the size of our force by almost 75 percent in order to take on mission-sets that are likely to endure. Since 2001, from the pace of operations to their geographic sweep, the activities of US Special Operations forces have, in fact, grown in every conceivable way." He added, "On any given day, about 8,000 special operators are deployed in approximately 80 countries." Significantly, he revealed, "[SOF] are the main effort, or major supporting effort for US VEO-focused operations in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, across the Sahel of Africa, The Philippines and Central/South America — essentially, everywhere Al Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria are to be found."⁴⁹

The growth and importance of SOF reached a point where the House Armed Services Committee ordered a review of exactly how much money SOF activities really cost each year as the USSOCOM budget request for 2020 was \$13.8 billion. The requested amount is actually deceptive, since each of the conventional Services support and enable SOF troops as well, through basing, equipment and salaries. These costs amount to an additional \$8 billion, thus, bringing the total amount requested for SOF to more than \$21.0 billion.⁵⁰

In sum, as one American think tank asserted, "US, SOF" ...[have]... been virtually synonymous with the American way of war since 9/11."⁵¹ But that may change. Andrew Knaggs, deputy assistant secretary of defense for special operations and combating terrorism announced, "It is fair to say you will see a rebranding of special operations forces." He did, however, note, "Our problems will not be addressed through conventional deterrence alone."⁵²

Thus, since 9/11, SOF have been at the forefront of the US-led global 'war on terror', whether in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria or other areas around the globe. However, the current *2018 American National Defense Strategy* (NDS), steered away from a focus on counter-terrorism and COIN to an emphasis on traditional big power rivals. As such, under the 2018 NDS, Europe and Asia are once again the "priority theaters" for US forces. As a result, the regions that had up until now consumed resources and attention will be pushed to the periphery of focus. The question becomes, is this shift the swan song of SOF's "Golden Era?"⁵³

THE PIVOT

The 2018 NDS was abundantly clear on the 'pivot', or in other words, the transition from DoD's primary focus on counter-terrorism and the global 'war on terror' to a shift of emphasis on great power competition with its 'peer and near-peer' rivals (i.e. China, Russia) and international rogue states / competitors (e.g. Iran, Republic of North Korea)⁵⁴ The 2018 NDS clearly states that DoD's "enduring mission is to provide combat-credible military forces needed to deter war and protect the security of our nation." As such, DoD "provides military options to ensure the President and our diplomats negotiate from a position of strength." Significantly, the strategy document also notes:

*“Today, we are emerging from a period of strategic atrophy, aware that our competitive military advantage has been eroding. We are facing increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order—creating a security environment more complex and volatile than any we have experienced in recent memory. Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security.”*⁵⁵

The document plainly labels Russia and China as revisionist powers who are set on remodeling the international system and, as such, pose "the central challenge to US prosperity and security." The conclusion drawn is resoundingly clear, namely a return of the big power rivalry reminiscent of the Cold War, but now in an increasingly multipolar world. From the perspective of the 2018 NDS this evolution has become the defining element of the international environment.

Not surprisingly then, the strategy document advocates enhancing the lethality of American military forces through such means as the greater deployment of autonomous robotic weapons, the modernization of missile defense and nuclear weapons, as well as the deployment of US forces to fight from smaller, dispersed bases. The 2018 NDS clearly underscores that for the first time in a generation, the strategic focus of American defence policy is to compete with near power rivals in a multi-polar world. This shift would seem to indicate that the period of unrivaled American power that emerged following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 has come to an end. As a result, the American Defense Secretary, Mark Esper, recently revealed, "We are focused on great power competition, first with China, then Russia." Esper conceded, "My aim is to adjust our [military] footprint in many places."⁵⁶

Arguably, the 2018 NDS is exactly what the three traditional Services have waited for since the demise of the Warsaw Pact and the fall of the Soviet Union, namely the peril of high-end state threats, which allow the conventional Services to focus their efforts on capability development, deployment and funding.⁵⁷ Predictably, this focus is more centred on traditional capabilities and threat scenarios than it is on the issue of “‘competition’.” Culture and deep-rooted perspectives based on service affiliation, training and experience are difficult to change.

WHAT IS THE ‘COMPETITION’ BATTLESPACE?

The ‘pivot’ is unsurprising in its own right. However, the challenge comes in correctly identifying the battlespace and the threats within. For too many conventional military commanders, it is seen as a return to “‘high-intensity’” combat harkening back to the Cold War stand-off between the superpowers. Danish General Martin E. Dempsey acknowledged, “It’s the first time in 41 years we’ve had a legitimate risk emanating from state actors, and we clearly have a persistent threat emanating from sub-state and non-state actors.” He concluded, “That makes for a very volatile mix and makes it difficult for us to balance our resources to deal with these multiple threats simultaneously.”⁵⁸ Additionally, there is the issue, namely, understanding the competition space and balancing resources correctly. A return to a traditional warfare model mindset has clear dangers, as does ignoring the capability of current rivals and rogue states. “The biggest problem

with DoD strategy development”, Brigadier General Don Bolduc, a former commander of USSOCOM, argued, “is it is tied to an antiquated organizational structure.” He insisted, “the department is in need of serious reorganization.”⁵⁹

Bolduc’s concern is well-founded. Retired admiral and former NATO Supreme Allied Commander James Stavridis warned of an over-reliance on the military for the American approach to foreign policy. He reasoned, “diplomacy is preventive medicine that will help avoid costly surgical procedures (i.e., military operations) in the future.”⁶⁰ This over-dependence on military solutions, or the use of force to achieve desired political outcomes, has left the US in a poor position to compete in the new “competition” battlespace. General Michael Mullen, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, lamented:

“My fear, quite frankly, is that we aren’t moving fast enough in this regard. US foreign policy is still too dominated by the military, too dependent upon the generals and admirals who lead our major overseas commands. It’s one thing to be able and willing to serve as emergency responders; quite another to always have to be the fire chief.”⁶¹

Mullen’s concern was that political decision-makers were too quick and too dependent on the military to deal with an ever-increasing gamut of missions in a constantly evolving complex international forum. As a result, they are competing with a limited tool set, while their competitors utilize the entire array of national resources.

Clearly, a sound understanding of what ‘great power competition’ is, as well as what it looks like, is essential. As a RAND report noted, “If the assertion that international politics is entering a new period of strategic competition has been widely accepted, there is no consensus about what this shift means.”⁶² For the previous two decades in the fight against terrorists and insurgents, the US and its Western allies have been able to compensate for any lack of a strategic coherence in their approach to less capable opponents through technological and resource advantages. Against more formidable adversaries its technological and military capabilities may be equaled. As such, what will be important is a change in strategic thinking that recognizes the exact nature of the current and future battlespace.⁶³

In this light, the prognosis for a high-intensity, traditional war scenario is ominous, if not downright horrendous. Globalization, the proliferation of technology and its exponential, consistently increasing capability has made a traditional war almost incomprehensible. An increasing number of nations with substantial nuclear arsenals, as well as the global propagation of stand-off precision missile systems and platforms, including highly manoeuvrable cruise missiles, as well as hypersonic weaponry (weapons that travel at five times the speed of sound) and glide vehicles, matched with networked sensors are capable of delivering large payloads of munitions at increased ranges so that targets can be engaged and destroyed almost anywhere with accuracy within a short period of discovery and decision-making.⁶⁴ Space based weapons, lasers, directed-energy munitions and high-powered microwaves will only increase lethality and reach.

Importantly, well-timed and accurate delivery of ordnance is not problematic. As innumerable analysts have identified, the world has become one big sensor making masking military deployments or actions virtually impossible. As one researcher noted:

“The amount of data generated by networked devices, is on pace to triple between 2016 and 2021. More significant, the proliferation of low-cost, commercial sensors that can detect more things more clearly over greater distances is already providing more real-time global surveillance than has existed at any time in history. This is especially true in space. In the past, the high costs of launching satellites required them to be large, expensive, and designed to orbit for decades. But as access to space gets cheaper, satellites are becoming more like mobile phones—mass-produced devices that are used for a few years and then replaced. Commercial space companies are already fielding hundreds of small, cheap satellites. Soon, there will be thousands of such satellites, providing an unblinking eye over the entire world. Stealth technology is living on borrowed time.”⁶⁵

This reality makes the fielding of large conventional armies and their platforms laden with risk. Added to this formidable array of threats is a myriad of additional perils. Jamming of communications, electronic warfare and cyberattacks that target networks and the vulnerable software programs that seemingly run the entirety of today’s society and militaries will only increase risk and consequence of a high-intensity war. The increasing development and deployment of autonomous systems only adds to this complexity.⁶⁶ In light of the lethality of the modern battlespace, as well as the substantive, imposing American military capability, no nation would purposely attempt to compete with the US in a traditional conventional war setting if at all avoidable. However, this situation is not to say American rivals and competitors will not wage a different form of conflict or competition.

Although competitors such as China and Russia maintain large military forces and continue to improve and expand their arsenals, arguably leading to a renewed arms race, they remain careful to avoid actions that would possibly activate the conventional war “trip wire”. Rather they maintain the military capability as a substantial, viable and overt threat, but compete on various levels under the threshold of a ‘hot’ or ‘shooting war.’ In fact, they utilize ‘hybrid warfare’, defined by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as “a wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures [...] employed in a highly integrated design.”⁶⁷ A 2014 British Ministry of Defence report captured its essence more lucidly. It asserted:

“Our adversaries are unlikely to engage us on our terms and will not fight solely against our conventional strengths. They will seek an asymmetric advantage and some will employ a wide range of warfighting techniques, sometimes simultaneously in time, space and domain. Their logic will not necessarily be our logic and thus our ability to understand adversaries – and our ability to make them understand our intent – will be challenging...In some conflicts, we are likely to see concurrent inter-communal violence, terrorism, insurgency, pervasive criminality and widespread disorder. Tactics, techniques and technologies will continue to converge as adversaries rapidly adapt to seek advantage and influence, including through economic, financial, legal and diplomatic means. These forms of conflict are transcending our conventional understanding of what equates to irregular and regular military activity; the conflict paradigm has shifted and we must adapt our approaches if we are to succeed.”⁶⁸

In essence, the new competitive landscape, blends conventional, irregular, asymmetric, criminal and terrorist means and methods to achieve a political objective. Importantly, this actuality makes the opponent largely irrelevant. Whether a state or non-state actor, adversaries will make use of the proliferation of technology and information that has accompanied globalization. Instruments such as cyber warfare, economic coercion or even blackmail, exploitation of social / societal conflict in a target country and the waging of disinformation campaigns and psychological warfare are all in the inventory. Criminal behaviour and terrorism are also in the repertoire of opponents. General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, distinctly articulated the application of this methodology of competing (or more accurately great power competition / conflict). He explained:

“Moscow is increasingly focusing on new forms of politically-focused operations in the future. In many ways this is an extension of what elsewhere I’ve called Russia’s ‘guerrilla geopolitics,’ an appreciation of the fact that in a world shaped by an international order the Kremlin finds increasingly irksome and facing powers and alliances with greater raw military, political and economic power, new tactics are needed which focus on the enemy’s weaknesses and avoid direct and overt confrontations. To be blunt, these are tactics that NATO–still, in the final analysis, an alliance designed to deter and resist a mass, tank-led Soviet invasion–finds hard to know how to handle.”⁶⁹

General Gerasimov markedly identified the weakness of modern states. He insisted that history has shown that “a perfectly thriving state can, in a matter of months and even days, be transformed into an arena of fierce armed conflict, become a victim of foreign intervention, and sink into a web of chaos, humanitarian catastrophe, and civil war.”⁷⁰ This state of affairs is due, in his estimation to the fact that, “the role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness.”⁷¹

In essence, rather than a kinetic solution to conflict, Gerasimov argues that the focused application of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other nonmilitary measures, when applied in a coordinated manner with internal discontent and protest can wield significant results. In addition, all of these actions are also combined, at the right moment, normally to achieve final success, with concealed military action, often “under the guise of peacekeeping and crisis regulation.” Gerasimov insisted, “Asymmetrical actions have come into widespread use, enabling the nullification of an enemy’s advantages in armed conflict. Among such actions are the use of special-operations forces and internal opposition to create a permanently operating front through the entire territory of the enemy state, as well as informational actions, devices, and means that are constantly being perfected.”⁷²

In fact, from a strategic perspective, the methodology of rivalry in the great power competition entails the mobilization of a wide range of a state’s resources, primarily non-violent to achieve a desired political end-state. In fact, the use of violence is not remotely desired. In essence, a ‘hybrid warfare’ approach is seen as a methodology of achieving the political end state without tripping the threshold of war, which would allow an opponent the recourse to legally use force and / or attract international intervention.⁷³ In fact, hybrid warfare creates a perfect ambiguity that paralyzes opponents since they are not even aware that they are under attack. The case of the Russian annexation of the Crimea and the conflict in Ukraine is a perfect example. Russia was

able to skillfully manipulate the US and its NATO allies to remain largely passive while Russia dismembered the Ukraine.⁷⁴ It was so successful that the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), General Phillip Breedlove, at the time, proclaimed that Russia's use of hybrid warfare in Eastern Ukraine represented, "the most amazing information warfare blitzkrieg we have ever seen in the history of information warfare."⁷⁵

Consequently, the challenge is recognizing that great power competition, as well as dealing with rivals and rogue states, is on a completely different playing field. Although conventional military capability will always be required, as both a deterrent and back-stop to military aggression, the majority of the never-ending competition / conflict will be waged on economic, informational, political, societal and technological planes. The Chinese use of cyberattacks, China's purchase of Western key industries and natural resource producers, as well as entertainment outlets; the dumping of steel thus continuing to strangle Western steel producing capability; the building of foreign infrastructure and lending of money to underdeveloped countries (e.g. belt and road initiative) thus allowing economic dominance and control; and trade boycotts, are all examples of how China is working to expand its influence and control in the international arena.⁷⁶

The Russians are no different. The use of proxy forces in Libya, Syria and Mozambique ; the use of state hackers and their cyberattacks on its former republics and international competitors; interference in US elections; troll farms dispensing disinformation meant to create cleavages in the social fabric of target nations; the RT news agency; private military contractors and the use of 'little green men' (SOF) to agitate, disrupt and divide opponents, all speak to their use of non-military means to reassert their position and gain advantage.

Within this competitive arena, the 2018 NDS clearly stated that the US strategy was to "compete, deter, and win in this environment. The re-emergence of long-term strategic competition, rapid dispersion of technologies, and new concepts of warfare and competition that span the entire spectrum of conflict require a Joint Force structured to match this reality." Therefore, the strategy called for:

"A more lethal, resilient, and rapidly innovating Joint Force, combined with a robust constellation of allies and partners, will sustain American influence and ensure favorable balances of power that safeguard the free and open international order. Collectively, our force posture, alliance and partnership architecture, and Department modernization will provide the capabilities and agility required to prevail in conflict and preserve peace through strength."⁷⁷

But again, the conventional military component is a small fraction of what is required. To compete on an equal footing, competition must be seen beyond the traditional warfare scenario. As Katherine Zimmerman, an analyst with the American Enterprise Institute in Washington assessed, "It's [the US] not losing militarily, but in the soft-power space."⁷⁸

WHAT, IF ANYTHING WILL CHANGE IN REGARD TO THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT?

The shift ushered in by the 2018 NDS has created some renewed interest in large exercises and the increasing funding for conventional military capability, as well as new modernized armaments. In fact, from May until the end of September 2019, “93 separate military exercises were held, with forces operating continuously in, above and around 29 countries.” The exercises were manifestly designed to send a message to Moscow and they represented “the most intense uninterrupted set of drills since the end of the Cold War.”⁷⁹ Although the US military was busy fighting in a number of theatres (e.g. Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq) and engaged in crisis deployments in response to both Iran and North Korea, the shift to practising ‘high end’ warfare scenarios still prevailed.

Nonetheless, despite the apparent willingness of conventional military commanders to return to a ‘Cold War mentality’, the pivot will not change dramatically the current state of the world or conflict. Great Power competitors, rivals, rogue states, non-state actors and violent extremist organizations (VEO) will continue to wage ‘war’ to gain political objectives such as increased influence, access, economic gain, military advantage and power. The full gamut of resources available to an opponent will be used whether proxy forces, cyberattacks, economic and political coercion, as well as disinformation meant to disrupt and divide societies. A focus on purely traditional war fighting scenarios and an abandonment of current realities is a cataclysmic mistake.

West Africa, specifically the Sahel, is a case in point. The American desire to withdraw from the Sahel to focus on great power competition misses the entire point of the current competitive battle space.⁸⁰ American Secretary of Defense Mark Esper confirmed, “Mission No. 1 is to compete with Russia and China.”⁸¹ To relax the focus on the smouldering state of the globe is arguably irresponsible, not to mention it defies the actual great power competition underway.

For example, initially, it is important to look at what has been done by the Americans and their Allies and Coalition partners in Western Sahel. They have deployed an impressive array of troops in the Sahel since 2014: 1,500 plus American; 6,100 French; 5,000 G5 Sahel Joint Force; 13,289 United Nations (UN) troops and 1,920 police under UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA); 7,500 Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) military and non-military personnel; and 3,000 African Union (AU) emergency contingency troops, for an approximate total force of 38,000 personnel.⁸² Yet, despite this enormous effort, the Western Sahel has experienced unprecedented terrorist violence, with more than 4,000 deaths reported in 2019, a fivefold increase in the number of fatalities caused by terrorist attacks since 2016. Burkina Faso alone accounted for 1,800 of the deaths reported last year, an increase of 2,150 percent over four years.⁸³ In the last two years alone, violence by terrorist groups in West Africa soared 250 percent. Moreover, the violence has displaced well over half a million people.⁸⁴ Significantly, extremist groups are now creeping south from the Sahel toward coastal countries such as Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire.

The growth and expansion of the terrorist groups and the apparent inability to defeat or even constrain them is worrisome in its own right. Additionally, the terrorists and militants have shown a disturbing ability to learn from their mistakes. They have taken on a more ‘complex’ approach to attaining power. They destroy infrastructure, assassinate local leaders and loot key army bases in coordinated strikes, all resulting in the separation of the people from the government. As such, the militants are attempting to inculcate their extremist view of Islamist values into one of the

youngest and fastest-growing populations on earth. Furthermore, they share their lessons learned worldwide with the fraternity of terrorists.⁸⁵

Moreover, the continued existence and global expansion of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, as well as the explosion of Iranian-supported popular mobilization forces in Iraq; slow burning insurgencies in a myriad of at-risk states; and, not to mention, the festering conflicts in Afghanistan, Syria and Libya, are but a few examples of the current state of affairs, which will not go away simply because great powers decide to rekindle Cold War-like military sabre rattling. All of these issues cannot be left to fester unattended, as the consequence, as was seen by the rise of Daesh in Syria and Iraq has global implications.

Aside from the need to deal with ongoing terrorism and insurgencies in order to create a stable and secure global landscape in which to continue to allow countries to flourish politically and economically, the struggle in these regions is also part of the great power competition for influence, access and economic supremacy. For instance, Russian and China have quickly tried to back-fill the apparent American desire to withdraw from the Sahel. Both nations have extended offers of military equipment and training to the struggling West African countries. Additionally, China has invested heavily economically in the region. In Senegal, Beijing paid local farmers a premium to buy the bulk of their harvest. In Mauritania, China is building ports and other infrastructure, as well as investing in local fisheries.⁸⁶ Furthermore, China has been offering African countries ‘smart cities’ equipped with facial recognition technology (and using that information for itself before delivering it to the host countries).⁸⁷ In fact, Johns Hopkins University research indicates that China has wooed African nations with an estimated \$5 billion per year.⁸⁸

Chinese interest in Africa is not surprising. Africa represents an important playing field in the great power competition, mainly due to its resources, economic and demographic potential. It is a continent rich in raw materials such as diamonds, gold and rare earth minerals. It has excellent farmland, and other natural resources including oil and vast, flowing rivers. Economically, Africa is the second-fastest-growing continent in the world. From a population perspective, it already represents 16 percent of the world population with 1.3 billion people, projected to grow to 2.5 billion by 2050 and perhaps 4.5 billion by the century’s end.⁸⁹

The point is, despite the desire to pivot the world has not dramatically changed. Great power competition focusing on traditional war fighting scenarios represents a small component of the actual competition. The major moves and flashpoints remain in the shadows, clandestine in nature and most often in the difficult human terrain where fighting the war of information and competing narratives for the support of the people remains omni-important.

WILL SOF HAVE A ROLE?

In view of a competition battlespace that competitors ensure remains under the threshold of a shooting / hot war, the struggle for access, influence, political and economic advantage will remain in the shadows. As such, irregular warfare will be a dominant methodology. Disinformation campaigns meant to sway, alienate and / or divide populations; cyberattacks, use of proxy forces,

agitation and support for political opposition and insurgent movements; will predominate, as will economic and political strategies. As such, SOF will remain influential military instruments for governments to employ in the great power competition. After all, “the world is more dangerous than it’s been before with a lot of potential threats out there”, Steven Bucci, director of the Center for Foreign Policy Studies at the Heritage Foundation, cautioned, “and SOCOM [SOF] is offering policymakers ways to address those threats at a very low level with a low footprint in ways that can hopefully defuse those threats before they turn to violence.”⁹⁰

This theme was reinforced by former USSOCOM Commander General Thomas, who, insisted that the murky domain between hot and cold war, “is arguably the most important phase of deterrence.”⁹¹ As he notes, this is where SOF excels. A report from the Center for Army Lessons Learned Repository echoed his thoughts. It stated:

“Pure military skill is not enough. A full spectrum of military, paramilitary, and civil action must be blended to produce success. The enemy uses economic and political warfare, propaganda and naked military aggression in an endless combination to oppose a free choice of government, and suppress the rights of the individual by terror, by subversion and by force of arms. To win this struggle, our officers and men must understand and combine the political, economic and civil actions with skilled military efforts in the execution of this mission. Regardless of the name we use—special warfare, counterinsurgency warfare, irregular warfare—one thing is for certain: it characterizes the nature of warfare we are experiencing, and will experience, for the foreseeable future. We must recognize that ‘pure military skill’ will not be enough. While the ability to conduct high-end, direct action activities will always remain urgent and necessary, it is the indirect approaches, working through and with others in building a global network of partners, that will have the most decisive and enduring effects.”⁹²

This rationale is why SOF will always maintain a pivotal role in the great power competition. Their characteristics and skill-sets are perfectly geared to irregular warfare and war in the shadows. SOF operations, and those who carry them out, are positioned to conduct clandestine, time-sensitive, high risk (i.e. political and to force) missions in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments. Much of the great power competition is taking place in the obscure domains and in regions around the world where gaining access and influence to populations and regional governments is key. On this playing field, information warfare, the competition over narrative and gaining acceptance goes hand-in-hand with having impact (i.e. economic, military, political, social) on the ground. Dr. Jonathan Schroden elucidated, “access equals influence; influence equals alignment; and alignment equals power.”⁹³

SOF, through their military assistance / special warfare⁹⁴ / irregular warfare programs of Security Force Assistance (SFA),⁹⁵ Foreign Internal Defense (FID)⁹⁶ and Unconventional Warfare (UW)⁹⁷ allow for a low cost (both in personnel and financial terms) methodology of developing favourable foreign relations with friendly and at-risk states to further political objectives. Their ability to train foreign security forces to deal with real or potential threats also works to pre-empt crises before they become out of control or trigger larger conflagrations.

SOF operations around the globe also act to create networks and important ‘lily-pads’ should the larger conventional joint force require basing options in times of crisis or war. In short, SOF programs develop access and influence that furthers favourable foreign relations in support of national objectives. Moreover, SOF’s situational awareness around the globe through the cultivation of long-term partnerships and creation of networks provides comprehension of emerging trends and threats worldwide. It also allows for influencing actors and events to coincide with desired outcomes. Admiral McRaven asserted, “SOF are rapidly deployable, have operational reach, are persistent and do not constitute an irreversible policy commitment.” He emphasized that “military success in today’s environment is about building a stronger network to defeat the networks that confront us.” He underscored that “the [SOF global] network enables small, persistent presence in critical locations, and facilitates engagement where necessary or appropriate.”⁹⁸

In essence, SOF allow for continual competition under the threshold of war through their non-kinetic activities and targeting of key actors and audiences. Admiral Olsen, another former USSOCOM commander underscored the non-kinetic activities and targeting of friendly and at-risk states. He underscored that, “Direct Action is important, not decisive; Indirect Action is decisive.”⁹⁹ He was not alone. “While the direct approach captures everyone’s attention”, acknowledged McRaven, “we must not forget that these operations only buy time and space for the indirect and broader governmental approaches to take effect. Enduring success is achieved by proper application of indirect operations, with an emphasis in building partner-nation capacity and mitigating the conditions that make populations susceptible to extremist ideologies.”¹⁰⁰ He insisted that “The ‘dead of night’ direct-action operations will be fewer in number, while the more touchy-feely missions ‘by, through and with’ partner nations will increase.”¹⁰¹

It is SOF’s ability to excel at their non-kinetic mission skill-sets that create security capability within partner nations; to develop relationships and networks; to target hostile agents, agitators, insurgents and terrorists, as well as to promulgate a narrative that counters opponent disinformation, that make SOF important players in the great power competition. As two SOF strategists assessed:

“SOF is uniquely positioned, across the globe to thoughtfully combine intelligence, information, space and cyber operations to affect an opponent’s decision making, influence diverse audiences, and unmask false narratives. Furthermore, SOF can coordinate operations, activities, and actions in the information environment with those across the other operational domains and, as a matter of routine, fuse ‘cognitive’ and lethal effects to obtain favorable outcomes. The SOF enterprise can inform more comprehensive understanding of adversary global operating systems and develop options that exploit vulnerabilities in those systems. Especially when paired with capabilities in the cyber and space domains, special operations allow the Joint Force to gain positional, political, or informational advantage in competition and enable a rapid transition to combat operations should the need arise.”¹⁰²

Notwithstanding SOF’s non-kinetic capabilities, SOF are able to transition to kinetic (or warfighting ability) seamlessly. Their ability to undertake kinetic actions as part of UW, COIN or counter-terrorist tasks, as well as direct action missions or special reconnaissance, on order without

delay, also make them indispensable. Admiral Olsen, former commander USSOCOM in his 2010 Posture Statement wrote, "These are warriors who can act swiftly with precision and lethality, yet remain simultaneously capable of building long-term relationships and trust with international partners."¹⁰³

Moreover, SOF also can be a substantive player in a conventional traditional warfare scenario such as peer-on-peer conflict. They can undertake a myriad of tasks:

1. Provide 'break-in' / access into theatre (i.e. seizure of airfields / ports / identified entry points);
2. Disrupt adversary anti-access / area denial (A2/AD) platforms and networks;
3. Conduct special reconnaissance;
4. Shape theatres for arrival of conventional forces;
5. Conduct direct-action raids and sabotage missions in enemy-occupied territories targeting key personnel, systems and networks (e.g. disruption of lines of communications; command and control nodes; nuclear delivery systems);
6. Conduct deception operations;
7. Conduct UW operations with resistance movements / guerrillas behind enemy lines; and
8. Penetrate and disrupt enemy networks.

Despite 'the pivot' to focus on great power competition, particularly with rivals such as China and Russia, as well as a resurgence in an emphasis on the three conventional services, SOF's current moniker of 'Force of Choice' and the 'golden age of special operations' will not soon fade away. SOF's ability to anticipate, adapt and change in accordance with the shifting security environment and their salience to national governments make them an indispensable military capability. After all, SOF will remain essential, if not pivotal, in a government's arsenal because they can deliver:

1. High readiness, low profile, task-tailored Special Operations Task Forces (SOTFs) that can be deployed rapidly, over long distances and provide tailored proportional responses to a myriad of different situations;
2. A wide spectrum of special operations options, lethal and non-lethal, to deter, disrupt, dislocate, and when necessary, destroy those that would do harm to the nation, its allies, or its national interests;
3. Highly trained technologically enabled forces that can gain access to hostile, denied, or politically sensitive areas;

4. Discrete forces that can provide discriminate precise SOF kinetic and non-kinetic effects throughout the entire spectrum of competition (i.e. 'peace' through high-intensity combat);
5. Deployed capable and internationally recognized forces, yet with a generally lower profile and less intrusive presence than larger conventional forces;
6. An economy of effort foreign policy implement that can be used to assist coalition and / or allied operations;
7. Rapidly deployable forces that can assess and survey potential crisis areas or hot spots to provide 'ground truth' and situational awareness for governmental decision makers;
8. Highly trained, specialized forces capable of providing a response to ambiguous, asymmetric, unconventional situations that fall outside of the capabilities of law enforcement agencies (LEA), conventional military or Other Government Departments (OGDs);
9. Forces capable of operating globally in austere, harsh and dangerous environments with limited support. SOF are largely self-contained and can communicate worldwide with organic equipment and can provide limited medical support for themselves and those they support;
10. Culturally attuned Special Operations Task Forces or teams that can act as force multipliers through the ability to work closely with regional civilian and military authorities and organizations, as well as populations through Defence, Diplomacy and Military Assistance (DDMA) / Security Force Assistance initiatives;
11. Forces capable of preparing and shaping environments or battlespaces (i.e. setting conditions to mitigate risk and facilitate successful introduction of follow-on forces);
12. Enablers to foster inter-agency and inter-departmental cooperation through its ability to serve as catalysts to unify, extend the reach and maximize the effects of other instruments of national power;
13. Highly trained and educated, adaptive, agile-thinking forces capable of dealing with the threat that has not yet been identified.

Renowned strategist, the late Colin Gray, declared, "Special operations forces are a national grand-strategic asset: they are a tool of statecraft that can be employed quite surgically in support of diplomacy, of foreign assistance (of several kinds), as a vital adjunct to regular military forces, or as an independent weapon."¹⁰⁴ He captured the essence of SOF. Simply put, SOF are / have indispensable relevance to decision-makers, providing them with a wide scope of cost efficient, low risk and effective options is precisely the driving force behind SOF power. Their ability to produce on short notice, courses of action and desirable outcomes, in a number of domains, regardless of location, with a high probability of success, give them great saliency to political and military decision-makers. After all, arguably, the acid test of strategic utility is what an

organization contributes to national power and the ability to project or defend national interests. As such, the golden age of SOF is unlikely to end anytime soon.

NOTES

¹ Dan Lamothe, “Retiring top Navy SEAL: ‘We are in the golden age of Special Operations’”, *The Washington Post*, 29 August 2014. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2014/08/29/retiring-top-navy-seal-we-are-in-the-golden-age-of-special-operations-2/>.

² The creation of USSOCOM provided an important benchmark in SOF evolution. The Americans who, in the post-WWII era, were normally the trendsetters in military affairs, whether equipment, doctrine, organization or technology oriented, recognized SOF as an independent joint command. SOF now had control over their own resources so they could better modernize their organizations. They had a single commander who could promote interoperability and ensure all SOF assets could operate effectively together. Finally, the provision of a ‘four-star’ Commander-in-Chief and an Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict gave SOF representation in the highest councils of DoD. Quite simply, SOF had come of age. They were now masters of their own destiny and could grow their force accordingly, both from the perspective of people and equipment.

³ Cited in Sean Naylor, *Relentless Strike: The Secret History of Joint Special Operations Command*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 2015. p. 61.

⁴ The Iraqi Scud missiles were known as the al-Hussein (aka al-Hossein) and the al-Abbas (aka al-Hijarah), which had a range of 750-900 km. US SOF and the SAS divided the responsibility for searching for the Scud launchers. The Americans operated in a several thousand square mile area northwest of the main Baghdad to Amman route up to the Syrian border (known as ‘Scud Boulevard’) and the SAS was given the same size area known as ‘Scud Alley’. The teams also destroyed fibre-optic links, blew up microwave relay towers and communication bunkers and attacked enemy vehicles. William Rosenau, *Special Operations Forces and Elusive Enemy Ground Targets. Lesson from Vietnam and the Persian Gulf War*, RAND, Santa Monica, CA, 2001. pp.30-39.

⁵ There is no firm number of how many TELs were destroyed, however, the Iraqi launch rate dramatically decreased. Overall, the Iraqis fired 88 missiles against Israel and Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. They fired 33 in the opening week of Desert Storm at a daily rate of 4.7 launches. During remaining 36 days, they fired 55 missiles at a daily rate of 1.5. B.J. Schemmer, “Special Ops Teams Found 29 Scuds Ready to Barrage Israel 24 Hours Before Ceasefire”, *Armed Forces Journal International*, July 1991. p. 36. See also: Mark Thompson/ Azadeh Moaveni/ Matt Rees/ Aharon Klein, “The Great Scud Hunt”, *Time*, 23 December 2002. And see: Cameron Spence, *Sabre Squadron*, Michael Joseph, London, 1997.

⁶ Susan Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding US Special Operations Forces*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC, 1997. p. 228. And see: Douglas C. Waller, *Commandos: The Inside Story of America’s Secret Soldiers*, Simon & Shuster, New York, 1994. pp.34, 241. Waller states that 7,705 SOF personnel participated.

⁷ Tom Clancy, *Special Forces* (New York: Berkley Books, 2001), 12; and Douglas C. Waller, “Secret Warriors”, *Newsweek*, 17 June 1991. p. 21.

⁸ B.J. Schemmer, “Special Ops Teams Found 29 Scuds Ready to Barrage Israel 24 Hours Before Ceasefire”, *Armed Forces Journal International*, July 1991. p.36. And see: Waller, *Commandos*, pp. 34 & 241.

⁹ Thomas K. Adams, *US Special Operations Forces in Action. The Challenge of Unconventional Warfare*, Frank Cass, London, 1998. pp. 244-286.

¹⁰ James C. Hyde, “An Exclusive Interview with James R. Locher III”, *Armed Forces Journal International*, November / December 1992. p. 34. See also: Lieutenant-General Peter J. Schoomaker, “Army Special Operations: Foreign Link, Brainy Force”, National Defense, February 1997. pp. 32-33.

¹¹ Scott Gourlay, “Boosting the Optempo”, *Janes Defence Weekly*, 14 July 1999. p.26. And see: Hyde, p. 34.

¹² Sean Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda*, Berkley Books, New York, 2005. p. 14.

¹³ Glenn Goodman, “Tip of the Spear”, *Armed Forces Journal International*, June 2002. p. 35. See also: Robin Moore, *The Hunt for Bin Laden: Task Force Dagger*, Random House, New York, 2003. Ch. xix, p. 2. This number represents 18 Operational Detachment-Alpha – 12-man teams. Initially only four SF teams were inserted by helicopter in the north to link up with Northern Alliance commanders in late October and early November 2001 when the US-backed anti-Taliban offensive appeared to be bogged down. The growing importance of their role as combat control teams is evident. In Afghanistan, 60 percent of munitions dropped were precision guided compared to 35 percent during the Kosovo air campaign in 1999 and 6 percent in the Gulf War in 1991. See also: Dr. Elinor Sloan, “Terrorism and the Transformation of US Military Forces”, *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol. 3,

No. 2, Summer 2002. Currently, these small SOF teams of about a dozen Special Forces personnel are establishing outposts deep in enemy territory and are working with Afghan units approximately 120 strong. See also: Michael Ware, "On the Mop-Up Patrol", *Time*, 25 March 2002, pp. 36-37. and Thomas E. Ricks, "Troops in Afghanistan to Take Political Role Officials Say Remaining Fights to be Taken by Special Forces, CIA", *Duluth News Tribune*, 7 July 2002, p. 1. The CIA has unleashed its 150 man covert paramilitary force in Afghanistan to conduct sabotage, collect intelligence and train Northern Alliance guerrillas.

¹⁴ Robin Moore, *The Green Berets*, Ballantine, New York, 1965, pp. 103-104, 139.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁶ Major-General (ret'd) Robert H. Scales Jr., *Yellow Smoke: The Future of Land Warfare for America's Military*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., New York, 2003, p. 21. See also Stephen Biddle, *Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy*, Carlisle, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2002, p. 1.

¹⁷ Anthony H. Cordesman, "Lessons from the Iraq War", Strategic Comments, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 7 May 2003. http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/iraq_instantlessons.pdf. The report went on to say "the combination of GPS-guided all-weather bombs, better all-weather sensors and real time joint communications networks denied Iraqi forces any sanctuary".

¹⁸ Michael Duffy/ Mark Thompson/ Michael Weisskopf, "Secret Armies of the Night", *Time*, 12 January 2004.

¹⁹ Leigh Neville, *Special Operations Forces in Iraq*, Osprey Publishing, Oxford, 2008, pp. 26-27.

²⁰ In late 2002, CIA and 10 SFG infiltrated into Kurdistan, into the Harir Valley to develop intelligence and organize and train Peshmerga guerrillas. These teams paved the way for SOF teams when the war started.

²¹ AKA Abu Abbas, convicted in absentia as mastermind of the 1985 hijacking of a cruise ship, the *Achille Lauro*.

²² Ray Bond (ed.), *America's Special Forces*, Salamander Books, Miami, 2001, p. 9. This includes an active force element of 29,164 personnel and a reserve component of 10,043. See also: US Department of Defense, US SOF: Posture Statement, 2000, p. 41.

²³ Roxane Tiron, "Demand for Special Ops Forces Outpaces Supply", *National Defense*, Vol. 87, No. 594, 1 May 2003, p. 18. <https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2003/5/1/2003may-demand-for-special-ops-forces-outpaces-supply>.

There were more than 12,000 deployed to Iraq and approximately 8,000 deployed to Afghanistan.

²⁴ Cited in Mike Moyer, *Oppose Any Foe: The Rise of America's Special Operations Forces*, Basic Books, New York, 2017, p. 277.

²⁵ See: Colonel Bernd Horn, *More Than Meets the Eye: The Invisible Hand of SOF in Afghanistan*, CANSOFCOM PDC, Kingston, 2011.

²⁶ Harold Kennedy, "Special Operators Seeking A Technological Advantage", *National Defense*, Vol. 87, No. 594, May 2003, p. 20.

²⁷ Naylor, *Relentless Strike*, p. 265.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 288.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 288.

³⁰ James Kitfield, *Twilight Warriors: The Soldiers, Spies, And Special Agents Who Are Revolutionizing The American Way Of War*, Basic Books, New York, 2016, p. 137. See also: Moyer, *Oppose Any Foe*, p. 278.

³¹ Kitfield, *Twilight Warriors*, p. 168.

³² Jim Thomas/ Chris Dougherty, "Beyond the Ramparts: The Future of US Special Operations Forces", Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2013, p. 32. Of note, the raid on Bin Laden on 2 May 2011, was only one of 14 operations conducted that night. *Ibid.*, 6.

³³ Rafael Epstein, "Diggers in Afghan Hit Squads", *The Age*, 5 May 2011.

³⁴ Carlotta Gall, "Night Raids Curbing Taliban, but Afghans Cite Civilian Toll", *The New York Times*, 8 July 2011.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/09/world/asia/09nightraids.html>. Another example from May 2010 through April 2011, demonstrates that out of 2,245 total CT missions conducted by SOF in Afghanistan, 1,896 (84 percent) saw no shots fired, while 1,862 missions captured or killed the intended target and /or their associates (83 percent). See: Jim Thomas/ Chris Dougherty, *Beyond the Ramparts: The Future of US Special Operations Forces*, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2013, p.19.

³⁵ Sean D. Naylor, "Chinook Crash Highlights Rise in Spec Ops Raids", *Army News*, 21 August 2011. Another account provides similar numbers. "From May 2010 through April 2011, out of 2,245 total CT missions conducted by SOF in Afghanistan, 1,896 (84%) saw no shots fired, while 1,862 missions captured or killed the intended target and /or their associates (83%). See: Thomas/ Dougherty, *Beyond the Ramparts*, p. 19.

³⁶ A RAND research report explains that, "Special Warfare campaigns stabilize or destabilize a regime by operating 'through and with' local state or non-state partners, rather than through unilateral US action." It goes on to explain that Special Warfare involves the comprehensive orchestration of all governmental capabilities to advance policy objectives. These campaigns have six central features:

1. Their goal is stabilizing or destabilizing the targeted regime;
2. Local partners provide the main effort;
3. US forces maintain a small (or no) footprint in the country;
4. They are typically of long duration and may require extensive preparatory work better measured in months (or years) than days;
5. They require intensive interagency cooperation; and
6. They employ 'political warfare' methods to mobilize, neutralize, or integrate individuals or groups from the tactical to the strategic levels.

See: Dan Madden/ Dick Hoffman/ Michael Johnson/ Fred Krawchuk/ John Peters/ Linda Robinson/ Abby Doll, “Special Warfare: The Missing Middle in US Coercive Options”, RAND Research Report, 2014. pp.1-2.

³⁷ Cited in Moyer, *Oppose Any Foe*, p. 310.

³⁸ Epstein, "Diggers in Afghan Hit Squads".

³⁹ See David Axe, “British and French Commandos Take Charge of Mali War”, *Wired*, January 2013.

<http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2013/01/mali-commandos/>. And see: Murielle Delaporte, “Mali: France’s Version of Shock And Awe, Add Allies, Crush AQIM, 19 February 2013. <http://breakingdefense.com/2013/02/mali-frances-version-of-shock-and-awe-add-allies-crush-aqim/>.<http://breakingdefense.com/2013/02/mali-frances-version-of-shock-and-awe-add-allies-crush-aqim/>.

⁴⁰ Written Statement of Admiral William H. McRaven, USN Commander, United States Special Operations Command Before the 113th Congress Senate Armed services Committee Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee, 9 April 2013.

⁴¹ Steff Thomas, “Post-Afghanistan, Special Operations to Shift to Conflict Prevention”, *National Defense Blog Post*, Undated.

⁴² General David Barno and Travis Sharp, “SOF Power”, *Foreign Policy*, 14 February 2014. https://foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/14/sof_power%20.

⁴³ Patrick Hennessy, “Special forces face big cuts in support network”, *The Telegraph*, 2 February 2013.

⁴⁴ Department of Defense (DoD), Joint Publication 3-05 Special Operations, DoD, Washington DC, Vol. II, No. 1, 18 April 2011.

⁴⁵ Nick Turse, “The Golden Age of Black Ops: Special Ops Missions Already in 105 Countries in 2015”, *TomDispatch.com*, 20 January 2015. <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2015/01/20/golden-age-black-ops-special-ops-missions-already-105-countries-2015>.

⁴⁶ Nick Turse, “For America, 2016 Was the Year of the Commando”, *The CSS Blog Network*, 10 January 2017.

<http://isnblog.ethz.ch/security/for-america-2016-was-the-year-of-the-commando>.

⁴⁷ James A. Warren, “Special Ops Rule in War on Terror”, *The Daily Beast*, 12 July 2017. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/special-ops-rule-in-war-on-terror?ref=scroll>.

⁴⁸ Nick Turse, “US Special Operations Forces Deployed to 149 Countries in 2017”, *warisboring.com*, 15 December 2017.

<https://warisboring.com/u-s-special-operations-forces-deployed-to-149-countries-in-2017/>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Kyle Rempfer, “Spec Ops’ Roles to Deter Russia May Shift More To Conventional Soldiers”, *Army Times*, 5 June 2019.

https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/06/05/spec-ops-roles-to-deter-russia-may-shift-more-to-conventional-soldiers/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Army%20DNR%2006-05-19&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Army%20-%20Daily%20News%20Roundup.

⁵¹ Alice Friend/ Shannon Culbertson, “Special Obfuscations. The Strategic Uses of Special Operations Forces”, *Center for Strategic & International Studies Brief*, March 2020.

⁵² Carlo Muñoz, “Exclusive: Special Ops to Turn Focus from War on Terror to China, Russia”, *The Washington Times*, 24 February 2019. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/feb/24/special-ops-mission-shifts-terrorism-china-russia/>.

⁵³ For an example, the Crisis Response Force (CRF) companies have been targeted for disbandment with their operators and equipment being redistributed among the remainder of USSF. The CRF companies are an elite cadre of Green Berets who specialize in Direct Action (DA), Counterterrorism (CT), and Hostage Rescue (HR) missions. Each Special Forces Group (1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 10th) has a CRF company. They are considered to be the strategic reserves of each combatant command in case of an emergency around the world. CRF used to be called Commander’s-in-extremis (CIF) companies. Nonetheless, United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) in conjunction with the 1st Special Forces Command (1st SFC) have decided to disband the CRFs because they are said to be underutilized and due to the shortage of operators. See: Stavros Atlamazoglou, “Exclusive: Army Special Forces Command Disbands Elite Units”, *SOFREP.com*, 4 March 2020. <https://sofrep.com/news/exclusive-army-special-forces-command-disbands-elite-units/>.

⁵⁴ The terms ‘peer and near-peer’ competitors often create push back, with detractors citing the fact that none of those entities listed are actually peers or near-peers and none could militarily defeat the USA. However, all of those states, as well as a number of non-state actors have the capability, and have in reality, undertaken actions that have frustrated, delayed and in some cases prevented the US and its allies being able to realize their political objectives.

⁵⁵ DoD, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, DoD, Washington DC, 2018. p.1. (henceforth *2018 NDS*).

⁵⁶ Jeff Seldin, “US Noncommittal on Keeping Troops in Africa”, *Voice of America*, 27 January 2020.

<https://www.voanews.com/africa/us-noncommittal-keeping-troops-africa>.

⁵⁷ In accordance with American doctrine, “Traditional warfare is characterized as a violent struggle for domination between nation-states or coalitions and alliances of nation-states... traditional warfare typically involves force-on-force military operations.” Conversely, Irregular Warfare (IW) “is characterized as a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s). In IW, a less powerful adversary seeks to disrupt or negate the military capabilities and advantages of a more powerful military force.” DoD, Joint Publication 1. Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States, DoD, Washington DC, 25 March 2013. Incorporating Change 1, 12 July 2017. <file:///J:/Doctrine%20for%20the%20Armed%20Forces%20of%20the%20USA.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Jim Garamone, “Dempsey: US Forces Must Adapt to Deal with Near-Peer Competitors”, *DoD News*, DATE.

<https://www.jcs.mil/Media/News/News-Display/Article/613868/dempsey-us-forces-must-adapt-to-deal-with-near-peer-competitors/>.

⁵⁹ Cited in Meghann Myers/ Shawn Snow, “After Decades Focused On Terrorism, Special Operations Is [sic] Broadening Its Horizons”, *Military Times*, 12 February 2020. <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/02/12/after-decades-focused-on-terrorism-special-operations-is-broadening-its-horizons/>.

⁶⁰ David Oakley, “The Problems of a Militarized Foreign Policy for America’s Premier Intelligence Agency”, *War on the Rocks*, 2 May 2019. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/05/the-problems-of-a-militarized-foreign-policy-for-americas-premier-intelligence-agency/>.

⁶¹ Cited in *Ibid*.

⁶² Cited in Joe Miller/Monte Erfourth, “SOF in Competition: Establishing the Foundation of Strategy”, *Small Wars Journal*, 7 June 2019. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/sof-competition-establishing-foundation-strategy-v13>.

⁶³ Strategists Joe Miller and Colonel Monte Erfourth argued, “The US has developed a threat-centric culture, focused on the development of capabilities, defined within individual warfighting cultures. When paired with the different institutional cultures and interests of the military services, threat-centrism risks the development of capability-driven strategy rather than strategy-driven capabilities”. See Miller/ Erfourth, *Ibid*.

⁶⁴ An example of the danger of sensor to shooter timeliness and accuracy was demonstrated by the Russians in the Ukraine since 2014. They had “shortened to mere minutes the time between when their spotter drones first detected Ukrainian forces and when their precision rocket artillery wiped those forces off the map.” See: Christian Brose, “The New Revolution in Military Affairs”, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-04-16/new-revolution-military-affairs>.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶⁶ The Turkish use of drone swarms to engage Syrian bases and chemical weapon depots in March 2020, as well as the South Korean demonstration of 1,218 autonomous drones equipped with lights collaborating to form intricate images in the night sky over Pyeongchang during the opening ceremonies of the 2018 Olympics provide a preview of what drone swarms are capable of achieving. See Seclan Hacaoglu, “Turkey’s Killer Drone Swarm Poses Syria Air Challenge to Putin”, *Bloomberg*, 1 March 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-01/turkey-s-killer-drone-swarm-poses-syria-air-challenge-to-putin>. And see: Christian Brose, “The New Revolution in Military Affairs”, *Foreign Affairs*, 16 April 2019. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-04-16/new-revolution-military-affairs>.

⁶⁷ András Rác, *Russia’s Hybrid War in Ukraine. Breaking the Enemy’s Ability to Resist*, FIIA Report 43, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 16 June 2015. p. 41. <https://www.fiaa.fi/en/publication/russias-hybrid-war-in-ukraine>. The Americans use a term called ‘grey zone conflict’ to describe hybrid warfare. Grey zone conflict is defined “as competitive interactions among and within state and non-state actors that fall between the traditional war and peace duality. They are characterized by ambiguity about the nature of the conflict, opacity of the parties involved, or uncertainty about the relevant policy and legal frameworks.” USSOCOM White Paper, *The Gray Zone*, 9 September 2015. p.1.

⁶⁸ United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Trends Programme: Future Character of Conflict*, Assets Publishing Service, gov.uk, 10 December 2015. p. 13.

⁶⁹ General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, “The Value of Science in Prediction” and “The ‘Gerasimov Doctrine’ and Russian Non-Linear War” from, *In Moscow’s Shadows: Analysis and Assessment of Russian Crime and Security*, 7 June 2014. <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/>.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*.

⁷¹ *Ibid*.

⁷² *Ibid*.

⁷³ For a detailed study of Hybrid Warfare see: Colonel Bernd Horn, *On Hybrid Warfare*, CANSOFCOM PDC Press, Kingston, 2016.

⁷⁴ Maria Snegovaya, “Putin’s Information Warfare in Ukraine Soviet Origins Of Russia’s Hybrid Warfare”, *Institute for the Study of War*, September 2015. pp. 7, 10.

⁷⁵ Patrick M. Duggan, “Strategic Development of Special Warfare in Cyberspace”, *Joint Forces Quarterly* 79, 4th Quarter, 2015. p. 47.

⁷⁶ The Chinese view of competition go beyond even the ideas discussed thus far.” According to Major-General He Fuchu, Vice President of PLA Academy of Military Science, “The sphere of operations will be expanded from the physical domain and the information domain to the domain of consciousness; the human brain will become a new combat space. Consequently, success on the future battlefield will require achieving not only “biological dominance” but also “mental /cognitive dominance” and intelligence dominance.” In fact, He Fuchu anticipates the development of a “new brain-control weaponry” that interferes with and controls people’s consciousness, thereby subverting combat styles.” Cited in Elsa B. Kania, “Minds at War: China’s Pursuit of Military Advantage through Cognitive Science and Biotechnology”, *Prism*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2019. p. 85.

⁷⁷ Reyes Cole, “The Myths of Traditional Warfare: How Our Peer and Near-Peer Adversaries Plan to Fight Using Irregular Warfare”, *Small Wars Journal*, 28 March 2019. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/myths-traditional-warfare-how-our-peer-and-near-peer-adversaries-plan-fight-using>.

⁷⁸ Eric Schmitt, “Terrorism Threat in West Africa Soars as US Weighs Troop Cuts”, *The New York Times*, 27 February 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/27/world/africa/terrorism-west-africa.html>.

⁷⁹ Although the NATO parliamentary committee continually warns of the lack of ground troops in Eastern Europe to repel a Russian invasion, analysts insist, “While the conventional view is one of Russian advantage, the new figures show that the United States and its European partners far outstrip Moscow.” William M. Arkin, “Exclusive: While The Press And Public Focus On

Iran, US Military Prepares for the War with Russia”, *Newsweek*, 31 January 2020. <https://www.newsweek.com/exclusive-cold-war-back-focus-iran-military-prepares-war-russia-1485088>.

⁸⁰ President Donald Trump has long called for an end to “endless wars”, particularly in places where he defined conflict to be “tribal” and not directly affecting the United States. Africa was one such location. See: Karen DeYoung, “French Defense Minister Visits Washington to Press for Continued US role in West Africa”, *The Washington Post*, 28 January 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/french-defense-minister-visits-washington-to-press-for-continued-us-role-in-west-africa/2020/01/28/39905e38-41e5-11ea-b5fc-efaf848cde99_story.html.

⁸¹ Robbie Gramer, “US Congress Moves to Restrain Pentagon Over Africa Drawdown Plans”, *Foreign Policy*, 4 March 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/04/africa-military-trump-esper-pentagon-congress-africom-counterterrorism-sahel-great-power-competition/>.

⁸² Lara Seligman, “In West Africa, US Military Struggles for Scarce Resources as Terrorism Threat Grows”, *Foreign Policy*, 24 February 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/24/in-west-africa-u-s-military-struggles-for-scarce-resources-as-terrorism-threat-grows/>. And see: Agence France Presse, “African Union says preparing 3,000-troop deployment to Sahel”, *Agence France Presse via CapitalFM.co.ke*, 27 February 2020. <https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2020/02/african-union-says-preparing-3000-troop-deployment-to-sahel/>. And see: Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram Fact Sheet. file:///G:/1%20-%20Virtual%20Library/Resource%20Library/Specialty%20Topic%20Areas/Regional%20Focus/Africa/Sahel/apf_factsheet_-_mnjtf.pdf.

⁸³ Méryl Demuyneck/ Julie Coleman, “The Shifting Sands of the Sahel’s Terrorism Landscape”, *International Council on Counter-Terrorism*, 12 March 2020. <https://icct.nl/publication/the-shifting-sands-of-the-sahels-terrorism-landscape/>.

⁸⁴ Shawn Snow, “With Limited Resources US Military Shifts Strategy From Degrading Militants in West Africa to Containment”, *Military Times*, 11 February 2020. <https://www.militarytimes.com/flashpoints/2020/02/11/with-limited-resources-us-military-shifts-strategy-from-degrading-militants-in-west-africa-to-containment/>. And see: Laurence-Aïda Ammour, “How Violent Extremist Groups Exploit Intercommunal Conflicts in the Sahel”, *AfricaCenter.Org*, 26 February 2020. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/how-violent-extremist-groups-exploit-intercommunal-conflicts-in-the-sahel/>. And see: StratFor Worldview, “Why Is Terrorism Rising in West Africa? Can it be Stopped?”, *nationalinterest.org*, 16 March 2020. <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/why-terrorism-rising-west-africa-132612>.

In Burkina Faso the number of people internally displaced rose from 40,000 at the end of 2018 to in excess of 500,000 at the end of 2019, which represents more than two percent of the population. In Mali, the number practically doubled during this time frame. See: Louise Dewast, “France Summit: Sahel Crisis in Danger of Slipping Out of Control”, *BBC News*, 13 January 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-51061229>.

⁸⁵ Danielle Paquette/ Joby Warrick, “Al-Qaeda and Islamic State groups are working together in West Africa to grab large swaths of territory”, *The Washington Post*, 22 February 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/al-qaeda-islamic-state-sahel-west-africa/2020/02/21/7218bc50-536f-11ea-80ce-37a8d4266c09_story.html.

⁸⁶ Lara Seligman, “In West Africa, US Military Struggles for Scarce Resources as Terrorism Threat Grows”, *Foreign Policy*, 24 February 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/24/in-west-africa-u-s-military-struggles-for-scarce-resources-as-terrorism-threat-grows/>.

⁸⁷ “US Officials: Some Troops to Stay in Africa Amid Moves by Russia, China”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/us-officials-some-troops-stay-africa-amid-moves-russia-china>.

⁸⁸ Abraham Mahshie, “African military chiefs: US winning war of influence by helping fight terrorism in Africa”, *Washington Examiner*, 24 February 2020. <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/defense-national-security/african-military-chiefs-us-winning-war-of-influence-by-helping-fight-terrorism-in-africa>.

⁸⁹ James Stavridis, “A More Secure Africa is in America’s Best Interests” *Bloomberg via Japan Times*, 18 February 2020. <https://www.japantimes.com.jp/opinion/2020/02/18/commentary/world-commentary/secure-africa-americas-best-interests/#.XkwVWWZYaUI>.

⁹⁰ Steff Thomas, “Post-Afghanistan, Special Operations to Shift to Conflict Prevention”, *National Defense Blog Post*, undated.

⁹¹ Carlo Muñoz, “Exclusive: Special Ops to Turn Focus from War on Terror to China, Russia”, *The Washington Times*, 24 February 2019. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/feb/24/special-ops-mission-shifts-terrorism-china-russia/>.

⁹² Center for Army Lessons Learned Repository, Newsletter 11-34, “Irregular Warfare: A SOF Perspective”, June 2011. p. 6. <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15040coll4>.

⁹³ Dr. Jonathan Schroden, panelist at the “Transforming SOF to Meet Future Challenges” SOF Symposium at the Joint Special Operations University, Tampa, Florida, 8 January 2020.

⁹⁴ Special Warfare (SW) is defined as, “the execution of activities that involve a combination of lethal and non-lethal actions taken by specially trained and educated forces that have a deep understanding of cultures and foreign language, proficiency in small-unit tactics, subversion, sabotage and the ability to build and fight alongside indigenous combat formations in a permissive, uncertain or hostile environment.” Its activities range from influence operations and political action to economic sanctions and diplomacy. SW can improve a government’s contextual understanding of potential partners and the situation on the ground before it commits to a course of action. SW strategic advantages:

1. Improved understanding and shaping of the environment;
2. Cost Effective / cost Imposing strategy – small footprint for you; opponent needs to spend disproportionate amounts of money;
3. Managed escalation and credibility risk – make no promises of larger commitments
4. Sustainable solutions – sustainable two parts – fiscal and political.⁹⁴

SW Limits and Risks

-
1. Divergent partner objectives;
 2. Ineffective partner capability;
 3. Unacceptable partner behaviour;
 4. Policy Fratricide; and
 5. Disclosure.

See: Dan Madden/ Dick Hoffman/ Michael Johnson/ Fred Krawchuk/ John Peters/ Linda Robinson/ Abby Doll, "Special Warfare. The Missing Middle in US Coercive Options", RAND Research Report, 2014. pp.1-2.

⁹⁵ SFA is defined as "The Department of Defense activities that contribute to unified action by the US Government to support the development of the capacity and capability of foreign security forces and their supporting institutions." See: DoD, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms Joint Publication 1-02* DoD, Washington DC, 2010. As amended through 31 January 2011. p. 326 (Henceforth DoD, JP 1-02). SFA building partner nation capacity can serve two purposes – 1. To deny space and sanctuary and to develop partner capability to conduct specialized missions, including DA against key terrorist group leaders but also elite capabilities to respond to a range of contingencies and threats as they emerge. Helping our foreign partners to provide for their own security and contribute to regional stability is an investment that pays immediate and long-term dividends by reducing the need for costlier US interventions in response to turmoil in regions critical to US interests. See: United States Senate Armed Services Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee, "Joint Statement For the Record by the Honorable Michael A. Sheehan Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations / Low-Intensity Conflict and The Honorable Derek H. Chollet Assistant Secretary of Defense For International Security Affairs on Emerging Counterterrorism Threats" (transcript), US.gov; 9 April 2013. p. 5. <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/download/official-transcript-emerging-threats-subcommittee---emerging-counterterrorism-threats---april-9-2013>.

⁹⁶ FID is defined as, "Participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to its security." DoD, JP1-02, p. 145.

⁹⁷ UW is defined as, "a broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, normally of long duration, predominantly conducted through, with, or by indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source. It includes, but is not limited to, guerrilla warfare, subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities, and unconventional assisted recovery." DoD, JP 1-02, p. 383.

⁹⁸ Written Statement of Admiral William H. McRaven, USN Commander, United States Special Operations Command Before the 113th Congress Senate Armed services Committee Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee, 9 April 2013. He also noted that "Extremist networks squeezed in one country migrate to others. Terrorist propaganda from a cell in Yemen can incite attacks as far away as Detroit or Delhi. Technology and globalization have made our countries and our communities interdependent and interconnected."

⁹⁹ Cited in Thomas and Dougherty, *Beyond the Ramparts*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ Cited in Ibid., 19. Admiral McRaven also stated, "Our 'new normal' is a persistently engaged, forward-based force to prevent and deter conflict and, when needed, act to disrupt and defeat threats. Long-term engagement is a hedge against crises that require major intervention and engagement positions us to better sense the environment and act decisively when necessary", Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁰¹ Cited in Stew Magnuson, "Special Operations Missions to Require New Doctrine", *National Defense*, May 2013. p. 26. McRaven added, "It's hard, slow and methodical work that does not lend itself to a quick win." He noted the indirect approach was key to preventing conflicts. Therefore, "patience, persistence and building trust with our partners – a trust that cannot be achieved through episodic deployments, or chance contacts [is required]."

¹⁰² Joe Miller/Monte Erfourth, "SOF in Competition: Establishing the Foundation of Strategy", *Small Wars Journal*, 7 June 2019. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/sof-competition-establishing-foundation-strategy-v13>.

¹⁰³ Admiral Eric T. Olson, *2010 Posture Statement*, United States Special Operations Command, Washington DC, 2010.

¹⁰⁴ Colin Gray, *Explorations in Strategy*, Praeger, Westport, 1996. p.149.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, Thomas K., *US Special Operations Forces in Action: The Challenge of Unconventional Warfare*, Frank Cass, London, 1998.

Agence France Presse, “African Union says preparing 3,000-troop deployment to Sahel”, Agence France Presse via CapitalFM.co.ke, 27 February 2020. <https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2020/02/african-union-says-preparing-3000-troop-deployment-to-sahel/>.

Ammour, Laurence-Aïda, “How Violent Extremist Groups Exploit Intercommunal Conflicts in the Sahel”, AfricaCenter.Org, 26 February 2020. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/how-violent-extremist-groups-exploit-intercommunal-conflicts-in-the-sahel/>.

Arkin, William M., “Exclusive: While The Press And Public Focus On Iran, US Military Prepares for the War with Russia”, Newsweek, 31 January 2020. <https://www.newsweek.com/exclusive-cold-war-back-focus-iran-military-prepares-war-russia-1485088>.

Atlamazoglou, Stavros, “Exclusive: Army Special Forces Command Disbands Elite Units”, SOFREP.com, 4 March 2020. <https://sofrep.com/news/exclusive-army-special-forces-command-disbands-elite-units/>.

Axe, David, “British and French Commandos Take Charge of Mali War”, Wired, January 2013. <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2013/01/mali-commandos/>.

Barno, General David / Sharp, Travis, “SOF Power”, Foreign Policy, 14 February 2014. https://foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/14/sof_power%20.

Biddle, Stephen *Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy*, Carlisle, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2002.

Bond, Ray (ed.), *America’s Special Forces*, Salamander Books, Miami, 2001.

Brose, Christian, “The New Revolution in Military Affairs”, Foreign Affairs, 16 April 2019. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-04-16/new-revolution-military-affairs>.

Center for Army Lessons Learned Repository, Newsletter 11-34, “Irregular Warfare: A SOF Perspective”, June 2011. <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15040coll4>.

Cole, Reyes, “The Myths of Traditional Warfare: How Our Peer and Near-Peer Adversaries Plan to Fight Using Irregular Warfare”, *Small Wars Journal*, 28 March 2019. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/myths-traditional-warfare-how-our-peer-and-near-peer-adversaries-plan-fight-using>.

Cordesman, Anthony H., “Lessons from the Iraq War”, *Strategic Comments*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 7 May 2003. http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/iraq_instant_lessons.pdf.

Delaporte, Murielle, “Mali: France’s Version of Shock And Awe, Add Allies, Crush AQIM, 19 February 2013. <http://breakingdefense.com/2013/02/mali-frances-version-of-shock-and-awe-add-allies-crush-aqim/>.

Demuynck, Méryl / Coleman, Julie, “The Shifting Sands of the Sahel’s Terrorism Landscape”, *International Council on Counter-Terrorism*, 12 March 2020. <https://icct.nl/publication/the-shifting-sands-of-the-sahels-terrorism-landscape/>.

Dewast, Louise, “France Summit: Sahel Crisis in Danger of Slipping Out of Control”, *BBC News*, 13 January 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-51061229>.

DeYoung, Karen, “French Defense Minister Visits Washington to Press for Continued US Role in West Africa”, *The Washington Post*, 28 January 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/french-defense-minister-visits-washington-to-press-for-continued-us-role-in-west-africa/2020/01/28/39905e38-41e5-11ea-b5fc-eefa848cde99_story.html.

Duffy, Michael / Thompson, Mark/ Weisskopf, Michael, “Secret Armies of the Night”, *Time*; 12 January 2004.

Duggan, Patrick M. “Strategic Development of Special Warfare in Cyberspace”, *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Vol. 79, 4th Quarter, 2015. p. 47.

Epstein, Rafael, “Diggers in Afghan Hit Squads”, *The Age*, 5 May 2011.

Friend, Alice/ Culbertson, Shannon, “Special Obfuscations. The Strategic Uses of Special Operations Forces”, *Center for Strategic & International Studies Brief*, March 2020.

Gall, Carlotta, “Night Raids Curbing Taliban, but Afghans Cite Civilian Toll”, *The New York Times*, 8 July 2011. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/09/world/asia/09nightraids.html>.

Garamone, Jim, “Dempsey: US Forces Must Adapt to Deal with Near-Peer Competitors”, *DoD News/Joint Chiefs of Staff Press Release*, undated. <https://www.jcs.mil/Media/News/News-Display/Article/613868/dempsey-us-forces-must-adapt-to-deal-with-near-peer-competitors/>.

Gerasimov, General Valery, “The Value of Science in Prediction” and “The ‘Gerasimov Doctrine’ and Russian Non-Linear War”, from *In Moscow’s Shadows. Analysis and Assessment of Russian Crime and Security*, 7 June 2014. <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/>.

-
- Goodman, Glenn, “Tip of the Spear”, *Armed Forces Journal International*, June 2002.
- Gourlay, Scott, “Boosting the Optempo”, *Janes Defence Weekly*, 14 July 1999.
- Gramer, Robbie, “US Congress Moves to Restrain Pentagon Over Africa Drawdown Plans”, *Foreign Policy*, 4 March 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/04/africa-military-trump-esper-pentagon-congress-africom-counterterrorism-sahel-great-power-competition/>.
- Gray, Colin, *Explorations in Strategy*, Praeger, Westport, 1996.
- Hacaoglu, Seclan, “Turkey’s Killer Drone Swarm Poses Syria Air Challenge to Putin”, *Bloomberg*, 1 March 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-01/turkey-s-killer-drone-swarm-poses-syria-air-challenge-to-putin>.
- Hennessy, Patrick, “Special forces face big cuts in support network”, *The Telegraph*, 2 February 2013.
- Horn, Colonel Bernd, *More Than Meets the Eye: The Invisible Hand of SOF in Afghanistan*, CANSOFCOM PDC, Kingston, 2011.
- Horn, Colonel Bernd, *On Hybrid Warfare*, CANSOFCOM PDC Press, Kingston, 2016.
- Hyde, James C., “An Exclusive Interview with James R. Locher III”, *Armed Forces Journal International*, November / December 1992.
- Kania, Elsa B., “Minds at War. China’s Pursuit of Military Advantage through Cognitive Science and Biotechnology”, *Prism*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2019.
- Kennedy, Harold, “Special Operators Seeking A Technological Advantage”, *National Defense*, Vol. 87, No. 594, May 2003.
- Kitfield, James, *Twilight Warriors: The Soldiers, Spies, And Special Agents Who Are Revolutionizing The American Way Of War*, Basic Books, New York, 2016.
- Lamothe, Dan, “Retiring top Navy SEAL: ‘We are in the golden age of Special Operations’”, *The Washington Post*, 29 August 2014. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2014/08/29/retiring-top-navy-seal-we-are-in-the-golden-age-of-special-operations-2/>.
- Madden, Dan/ Hoffman, Dick/ Johnson, Michael/ Krawchuk, Fred/ Peters, John/ Robinson, Linda / Doll, Abby, “Special Warfare: The Missing Middle in US Coercive Options”, *RAND Research Report*, 2014.
- Magnuson, Stew, “Special Operations Missions to Require New Doctrine”, *National Defense*, May 2013. p. 26.

Mahshie, Abraham, “African military chiefs: US winning war of influence by helping fight terrorism in Africa”, Washington Examiner, 24 February 2020. <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/defense-national-security/african-military-chiefs-us-winning-war-of-influence-by-helping-fight-terrorism-in-africa>.

Marquis, Susan, *Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding US Special Operations Forces*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC, 1997.

Moore, Robin, *The Green Berets*, Ballantine, New York, 1965.

Moore, Robin, *The Hunt for Bin Laden: Task Force Dagger*, Random House, New York, 2003.

Moyer, Mike, *Oppose Any Foe: The Rise of America’s Special Operations Forces*, Basic Books, New York, 2017. p. 277.

Multi-National Joint Task Force, Boko Haram Fact Sheet. file:///G:/1%20-%20Virtual%20Library/Resource%20Library/Specialty%20Topic%20Areas/Regional%20Focus/Africa/Sahel/apf_factsheet_-_mnjtf.pdf.

Muñoz, Carlo, “Exclusive: Special Ops to Turn Focus from War On Terror to China, Russia”, The Washington Times, 24 February 2019. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/feb/24/special-ops-mission-shifts-terrorism-china-russia/>.

Myers, Meghann/ Snow, Shawn, “After Decades Focused On Terrorism, Special Operations Is [sic] Broadening Its Horizons”, Military Times, 12 February 2020. <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/02/12/after-decades-focused-on-terrorism-special-operations-is-broadening-its-horizons/>.

Naylor, Sean, *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda*, Berkley Books, New York, 2005.

Naylor, Sean, *Relentless Strike: The Secret History of Joint Special Operations Command*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 2015.

Naylor, Sean D., “Chinook Crash Highlights Rise in Spec Ops Raids”, Army News, 21 August 2011.

Neville, Leigh, *Special Operations Forces in Iraq*, Osprey Publishing, Oxford, 2008.

Oakley, David, “The Problems of a Militarized Foreign Policy for America’s Premier Intelligence Agency”, War on the Rocks, 2 May 2019. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/05/the-problems-of-a-militarized-foreign-policy-for-americas-premier-intelligence-agency/>.

Olson, Admiral Eric T., *2010 Posture Statement*, United States Special Operations Command, Washington DC, 2010.

Paquette, Danielle/ Warrick, Joby, “Al-Qaeda and Islamic State groups are working together in West Africa to grab large swaths of territory”, *The Washington Post*, 22 February 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/al-qaeda-islamic-state-sahel-west-africa/2020/02/21/7218bc50-536f-11ea-80ce-37a8d4266c09_story.html.

Rácz, András, *Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine. Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist*, FIIA Report 43, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 16 June 2015. p. 41. <https://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/russias-hybrid-war-in-ukraine>.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, “US Officials: Some Troops to Stay in Africa Amid Moves by Russia, China”, *Small Wars Journal*, 31 January 2020. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/us-officials-some-troops-stay-africa-amid-moves-russia-china>.

Rempfer, Kyle, “Spec Ops’ Roles to Deter Russia May Shift More to Conventional Soldiers”, *Army Times*, 5 June 2019. https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/06/05/spec-ops-roles-to-deter-russia-may-shift-more-toconventionalsoldiers/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Army%20DNR%2006-05-19&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Army%20-%20Daily%20News%20Roundup.

Ricks, Thomas E., “Troops in Afghanistan to Take Political Role Officials Say Remaining Fights to be Taken by Special Forces, CIA”, *Duluth News Tribune*, 7 July 2002.

Rosenau, William, *Special Operations Forces and Elusive Enemy Ground Targets: Lessons from Vietnam and the Persian Gulf War*, RAND, Santa Monica, CA, 2001.

Scales, Major-General (ret'd) Robert H. Jr., *Yellow Smoke: The Future of Land Warfare for America's Military*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., New York, 2003. p. 21.

Schemmer, B.J., “Special Ops Teams Found 29 Scuds Ready to Barrage Israel 24 Hours Before Ceasefire”, *Armed Forces Journal International*, July 1991.

Schmitt, Eric, “Terrorism Threat in West Africa Soars as US Weighs Troop Cuts”, *The New York Times*, 27 February 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/27/world/africa/terrorism-west-africa.html>.

Schoomaker, Lieutenant-General Peter J., “Army Special Operations: Foreign Link, Brainy Force”, *National Defense*, February 1997. pp. 32-33.

Schroden, Jonathan, “Transforming SOF to Meet Future Challenges”, SOF Symposium at the Joint Special Operations University, Tampa FL, 8 January 2020.

Seldin, Jeff, “US Noncommittal on Keeping Troops in Africa”, *Voice of America*, 27 January 2020. <https://www.voanews.com/africa/us-noncommittal-keeping-troops-africa>.

Seligman, Lara, “In West Africa, US Military Struggles for Scarce Resources as Terrorism Threat Grows”, *Foreign Policy*, 24 February 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/24/in-west-africa-u-s-military-struggles-for-scarce-resources-as-terrorism-threat-grows/>.

Sloan, Elinor, “Terrorism and the Transformation of US Military Forces”, *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Summer 2002.

Snegovaya, Maria, “Putin’s Information Warfare in Ukraine Soviet Origins Of Russia’s Hybrid Warfare”, *Institute for the Study of War*, September 2015. pp. 7, 10.

Snow, Shawn, “With Limited Resources US Military Shifts Strategy From Degrading Militants in West Africa to Containment”, *Military Times*, 11 February 2020. <https://www.militarytimes.com/flashpoints/2020/02/11/with-limited-resources-us-military-shifts-strategy-from-degrading-militants-in-west-africa-to-containment/>.

Spence, Cameron, *Sabre Squadron*, Michael Joseph, London, 1997.

Thomas, Jim/ Dougherty, Chris, “Beyond the Ramparts: The Future of US Special Operations Forces”, *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments*, 2013.

Stavridis, James, “A More Secure Africa is in America's Best Interests” *Bloomberg via Japan Times*, 18 February 2020. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/02/18/commentary/world-commentary/secure-africa-americas-best-interests/#.XkwVWWZYaU1>.

Thomas, Steff, “Post-Afghanistan, Special Operations to Shift to Conflict Prevention”, *National Defense Blog Post*, undated.

Thompson, Mark/ Moaveni, Azadeh/ Rees, Matt/ Klein, Aharon, “The Great Scud Hunt”, *Time*, 23 December 2002.

Tiron, Roxane, “Demand for Special Ops Forces Outpaces Supply”, *National Defense*, Vol. 87, No. 594, May 2003. <https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2003/5/1/2003may-demand-for-special-ops-forces-outpaces-supply>.

Turse, Nick, “The Golden Age of Black Ops: Special Ops Missions Already in 105 Countries in 2015”, *TomDispatch.com*, 20 January 2015. <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2015/01/20/golden-age-black-ops-special-ops-missions-already-105-countries-2015>.

Turse, Nick, “For America, 2016 Was the Year of the Commando”, *The CSS Blog Network*, 10 January 2017. <http://isnblog.ethz.ch/security/for-america-2016-was-the-year-of-the-commando>.

Turse, Nick, “US Special Operations Forces Deployed to 149 Countries in 2017”, *warisboring.com*, 15 December 2017. <https://warisboring.com/u-s-special-operations-forces-deployed-to-149-countries-in-2017/>.

United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, Strategic Trends Programme: Future Character of Conflict, Assets Publishing Service, gov.uk, 10 December 2015.

United States Congress, Admiral William H. McRaven, USN Commander, United States Special Operations Command, Statement Before the 113th Congress Senate Armed Services Committee Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee, 9 April 2013.

United States Department of Defense, *US SOF: Posture Statement*, 2000.

United States Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-05 *Special Operations*, DoD, Washington DC, Vol. II, No. 1, 18 April 2011.

United States Department of Defense, Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, Joint Publication 1-02 DoD, Washington DC, 2010. As amended through 31 January 2011.

United States Department of Defense, Joint Publication 1. *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, DoD, Washington DC, 25 March 2013. Incorporating Change 1, 12 July 2017. file:///J:/Doctrine%20for%20the%20Armed%20Forces%20of%20the%20USA.pdf.

United States Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, DoD, Washington DC, 2018.

United States Senate Armed Services Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee, “Joint Statement for the Record by the Honorable Michael A. Sheehan Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations / Low-Intensity Conflict and The Honorable Derek H. Chollet Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs on Emerging Counterterrorism Threats” (transcript), US.gov; 9 April 2013. https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/download/official-transcript_-emerging-threats-subcommittee---emerging-counterterrorism-threats---april-9-2013.

USSOCOM White Paper, *The Gray Zone*, 9 September 2015.

Waller, Douglas C., “Secret Warriors”, Newsweek, 17 June 1991.

Waller, Douglas C., *Commandos: The Inside Story of America’s Secret Soldiers*, Simon & Shuster, New York, 1994.

Ware, Michael, “On the Mop-Up Patrol”, Time, 25 March 2002.

Warren, James A., “Special Ops Rule in War on Terror”, The Daily Beast, 12 July 2017. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/special-ops-rule-in-war-on-terror?ref=scroll>.