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UNITED STATES MILITARY SPECIAL OPERATIONS
FORCES: WHY THEY ARE OUR BEST MILITARY ASSETS
FOR LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICTS

By
STEPHEN LESLIE ROBINSON
B.A., Hampden-Sydney College, 1983

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Richmond
in Candidacy
for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
in
Political Science

August, 1986
Richmond, Virginia
UNITED STATES MILITARY SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES:  
WHY THEY ARE OUR BEST MILITARY ASSETS FOR LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICTS 

By Stephen Leslie Robinson 

in Candidacy for the MASTER OF ARTS in Political Science 

The University of Richmond, 1986 

Thesis Director: Dr. John W. Outland 

This thesis addresses the development of United States military assets for dealing with revolutionary warfare, terrorism, and other threats which could be identified under the rubric, "low-intensity conflict." Elite military units, collectively identified as Special Operations Forces (SOF), are examined for the characteristics and attributes which promote misunderstanding and mistrust about their capabilities. Some analytical distinctions are developed which may be useful in defining roles and missions for SOF elements. Cultural impediments which may inhibit SOF activities are considered as well. Research efforts included interviews and discussion with twenty Special Operations soldiers, both active and retired, a number of them flag-rank or general officers. As a result of his research in this sensitive area, the author concludes that military SOF are the most adaptable military forces the United States can field for operation in the current and prospective low-intensity environment.
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Introduction

Two factors have had a truly significant impact on U.S. foreign and national security policy since the end of World War II: the advent of nuclear weapons and the end of colonialism. Weapons of mass destruction have fundamentally altered our ways of thinking about warfare and have prompted extensive research and considerable national effort to forestall the terrible possibilities of their use. The second factor has not affected U.S. policy in such a dramatic way, but it does pose vexing problems that cannot be circumvented through negotiation and technological innovation.

Deterrence posture is vital to U.S. national security because societal survival is not merely one of a competing set of options. It is compelling, therefore, that we prepare strategic nuclear doctrine and nuclear capabilities for the various possible scenarios. Below strategic warfare, however, no clean line of demarcation exists to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, particularly as tactical instruments during a high-intensity conventional war, thus the fear of escalation both lessens the likelihood of their employment and deters conventional conflict. In that sense, U.S. and NATO policy is vindicated; that is, deterrence works. Moreover, the terrible toll modern conventional warfare may take on combatants, civilians, property, economies, and political structures has dictated prudence while complementing the nuclear threat in raising the threshold for conflict to high levels. When conflict
does occur, especially at lower levels, it is most likely to be found in the Third World.

The end of the colonial era has brought about the emergence of many new actors on the international stage. Internal difficulties, historic differences with regional neighbors, and developmental problems have beset many of these predominantly Third World states and turned them into breeding grounds for conflict. Since the developing world offers new markets and numerous resources to the world at large and serves as a source of instability, it has become a laboratory for competing ideologies and political systems as well as the focus of intense interest by more developed countries. In a strategic sense, the evolution of these states is becoming critical to U.S. national security interests. Should we ignore them, their problems may increasingly impinge upon our interests.

The United States, as a maritime nation, is particularly concerned with the relationship between emerging states and the protection of vital sea lanes. In that regard, conflicts in certain regions may affect U.S. interests rather markedly. To avoid association with colonialist postures and to affirm sensitivities to nationalism and state sovereignty, the U.S. must exercise considerable skill in dealing with conflict situations in these areas. In the future, traditional U.S. military approaches which are focused on conventional combat power and high-technology weapons systems will be even less viable for Third World conflicts and their associated problems, particularly since many of these conflicts
are likely to be unconventional in nature. New techniques, doctrine, force structure, and command, control, and coordination mechanisms should be developed to provide a more effective interplay between U.S. agencies and assets at home and abroad.

Before we can consider fresh approaches, however, we must establish an analytical framework within which conflict and U.S. politico-military preparations for it can be discussed. Today, certain forms of conflict have begun to predominate, such as revolutionary guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and subversion. Placed on a spectrum, they might appear as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Normal-Coercive</th>
<th>Revolutionary</th>
<th>Strategic</th>
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<tr>
<td>Diplomacy/Subversion/Terror/Guerrilla War/Conventional War/Warfare</td>
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Activities at the lower (i.e., left) end of this spectrum may overlap or occur as tactical appendages to conflicts of higher intensity. As we move from left to right, the numbers of potential nation-state actors diminish to a few at the strategic warfare level. In recent years, only a few states have been willing to accept the consequences of involvement in high-intensity conventional warfare (e.g., Iraq v. Iran). At the left of the spectrum, scenarios and participants become almost as varied as the imagination allows, because the risks of involvement are considerably lower. Beneath the mid-high intensity conventional level, conflicts are inherently more political and psychological than military, though they may have violent military overtones.

The term which has been applied to strife at the lower end
of the spectrum is "low-intensity conflict" (LIC), a concept which seems to defy definition, because it may be best described by what it is not. Although LIC may have been born of our deterrence posture, it has little to do with conventional or strategic warfare, even though it may become strategic in its impact on U.S. interests. The built-in ambiguities of LIC baffled the U.S. in Vietnam and are continuing to challenge the development of policy to cope with these phenomena, particularly considering U.S. cultural notions of peace and war and what seems to be a national affinity for clear-cut choices.

Several recent events have prompted an accelerated U.S. effort to come to grips with LIC: the Iran hostage crisis, the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Two salient points are relevant to these examples. The first is that there are striking differences between the milieus and actors involved. While one involved a superpower intervention and has resulted in a protracted revolutionary war, another involved the seizure of diplomats and embassy personnel by revolutionaries and had the eventual sanction of the ascendant revolutionary government.

Under a broad definition of LIC, a staggering number and variety of scenarios are possible; therein, perhaps, lies an inherent weakness in the term. A second point, from a policy perspective, is more important. A common thread seems to run through the three examples: all had a shock effect on U.S. policy. Considering that many events which may be described as LIC are
low-profile activities, where murky intentions and role-denial is the norm (e.g., Nicaraguan/Cuban support for El Salvadoran guerrillas), a general U.S. awareness primarily of high-impact events suggests that conceptual problems may hamper U.S. approaches to LIC.

Further study of the evolving nature of conflict must be conducted in an effort to categorize and draw distinctions, such as between events which have state sponsorship (e.g., 1986 Berlin disco bombing) and those which are symptomatic of revolution (Iran hostage crisis). Distinguishing revolution from other forms of conflict is critical to the development of sound U.S. policy. Were the purpose of this thesis to provide such distinctions or to analyze forms of conflict, it would be fruitful to continue in this vein. Nonetheless, we must think carefully about what we may mean by LIC, break it down into digestable elements, and attempt to develop consistent definitions at the policy level, as elusive as they may seem.

The ambiguity of LIC has sparked debate within the Reagan Administration over proper U.S. responses, notably in the case of state-sponsored terrorist attacks. U.S. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and Secretary of State George Shultz have been publicly at odds over this issue. Weinberger has expressed fear of collateral damage, a euphemism, as he calls it, for "how many women and children you are going to kill" in responding to terrorist attacks.

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1 Dr. Sam C. Sarkesian's work in this area is exceptional. For example, see Sam C. Sarkesian, ed. Revolutionary Guerrilla Warfare. Precedent Publishing: Chicago, 1975.
Moreover, he is concerned that U.S. troops may be committed to situations without popular support, reflecting, perhaps, latent Department of Defense post-Vietnam sensitivities. Shultz, on the other hand, has adopted an unusual position for a diplomat by lamenting that the U.S. may become "the Hamlet of nations" by not striking back against terrorists.  

Each position has some merit, and there may yet be a synthesis to their views. The American public must understand the reasons for U.S. involvement in certain types of conflict, particularly those of a protracted and revolutionary nature; otherwise, a lack of popular support for U.S. objectives will severely limit U.S. options. National policy-makers may feel a sense of urgency, however, about altering perceptions of U.S. credibility in dealing with attacks on its citizens, affronts to its national prestige, and assaults on its vital interests. This debate is only beginning.

By examining the Presidency of John F. Kennedy, we can develop greater insight into the current milieu. Kennedy recognized that Third World conflicts, encouraged by the Soviet Union, would pose peculiar problems for the U.S.. Perhaps he was too far ahead of his time, for he pushed the development of military assets suited to the tasks of nation-building and unconventional

2 See background bibliography. Although this debate has received intense press scrutiny, the positions of these advocates may not be so distinct, since the underlying reason for U.S. inaction is probably a lack of in-depth intelligence. Another factor is that some terrorist groups train in heavily populated areas (Qum, Iran, a religious pilgrimage site is one example). Moreover, penetration of such groups would be extremely difficult, as they utilize sophisticated cell structures.
warfare. Kennedy, alarmed by Khrushchev's avowed support of revolutionary wars, saw the U.S. Army Special Forces as the ideal resource for counteracting Soviet-inspired "wars of national liberation." With Kennedy's death, DoD emphasis on developing special warfare capabilities waned; not surprisingly, the emphasis upon Special Forces in Vietnam shifted correspondingly and took on a more conventional orientation. In that regard, Kennedy's advocacy of special warfare demands serious study, for it holds poignant lessons for the 1980's.

As in 1960, the U.S. is poised to resuscitate its special warfare capacity, now known as Special Operations Forces (SOF). It seems that misconceptions and misunderstandings concerning SOF have continued in abundance; traditional resistance to these forces has not abated with time. To complicate matters, the U.S. is attempting to develop SOF capabilities and doctrine simultaneously, without the benefit of a strategy or even a clear definition of the problem (LIC) at hand.

Today's world is more complex than was Kennedy's of 1960; state-sponsored terrorism, for example, a political weapon bearing psychological results far out of proportion to the acts committed, is a relatively new LIC phenomenon presenting serious challenges to the formulation of U.S. policy. Perhaps a greater challenge

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to U.S. leaders is the need to enhance public awareness of the threats to U.S. interests posed by revolution, terror, and subversion. Our culture seems to understand threats only in a black-white dichotomy; gray conflicts, or the shadow warfare of LIC, lack the clarity which we seem to crave (e.g., American identification of Muammar Khadafy as the epitome of terrorism).

This thesis will address the assumption that has run through the development and redevelopment of SOF -- that these elite units are our best military assets for LIC. It is comprised of three chapters: SOF Development; SOF Characteristics; The SOF Individual. The first chapter discusses the lineage of special operations, stressing factors which have influenced conventional military perspectives on SOF. Kennedy's advocacy of special warfare is central to this chapter. The second chapter draws out operational characteristics which distinguish SOF from conventional forces, and it explains why SOF is removed from the philosophical core of the military mainstream. The third chapter focuses on the attributes of the SOF soldier and examines why his adaptability suits the changing requirements of the LIC environment.

An underlying theme in this thesis is that U.S. cultural impediments may inhibit public and military-wide understanding of SOF activities and the nature of LIC. In each chapter, some analytical distinctions are developed which should prove helpful not only in defining SOF but also in determining roles and missions. If such distinctions are not made at this early stage of the redevelopment process, the U.S. will risk misapplication of its
Special Operations Forces, which seem to be its best military assets for low-intensity conflict.
Chapter I. SOF Development

The United States military has a long history of success in war. Not surprisingly, lessons learned from those wars have carried over into philosophy, doctrine, and planning for future conflicts. In its major wars of the twentieth century, WWI, WWII, and Korea, the U.S. had time to exploit its vast industrial base to develop the capability to overwhelm enemy forces and to destroy their economic infrastructures. Although the Korean conflict was a limited war from the U.S. perspective, it refined the WWII approach because it involved large troop movements, heavy applications of firepower, and a taxing drain on American and enemy resources. Also common to these conflicts was an institutional reinforcement of the perception that U.S. military objectives could be met by the approach employed in each, one which depended heavily upon mass and concentrated firepower.

The notable exception from this list is Vietnam because the unconventional nature of that conflict frustrated an American strategy based on attrition. The Vietnam conflict is an excellent prism for observing the relationship between conventional and special operations forces as well as the nature of low-intensity conflict. Certain aspects of the early and pre-Vietnam period which particularly pertain to SOF will be examined in this chapter.

This chapter will discuss the evolution of SOF by focusing on their WWII and post-war lineage, developing important distinctions between special operations units, and examining the cyclical
advocacy which SOF seem to receive. Emphasis will be placed on the Army Special Forces and the development of Army special warfare capabilities, although other forces will be discussed where they are pertinent. A history of SOF is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the nascent years of SOF hold the keys to understanding the halting and often confusing developments in DoD special warfare capabilities. By reviewing SOF origins, this chapter will grapple with what may be the underlying reasons for misunderstanding and antipathy towards SOF from regular military forces.

Long before the U.S. began to develop a powerful industrial base and, with some reluctance, a larger role in world affairs, it engaged in several conflicts in which some military forces relied on stealth, mobility, and surprise to achieve their objectives. Examples include Major Robert Roger's Rangers of French and Indian war fame, Francis Marion's partisans during the American Revolution, and John Mosby's Confederate Rangers during the Civil War. In all three examples, the activities of such groups were not critical for the achievement of political goals by the primary combatants, but they served to redress some of the imbalances in respective military capabilities.

The weaker antagonists utilized such organizations out of practical necessity, and in that sense ignored some of the traditional consensus of opinion on what was "fair" in war. For example, the unconventional approaches of Roger's Rangers during the French and Indian War were often misunderstood and found contemptible by
allied British officers.1 Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox" of South Carolina, was one of a number of Americans successfully utilizing irregular warfare tactics during the American Revolution. Frustrated by Marion's elusiveness, one British officer exclaimed, "Marion would not come out and fight like a gentleman and a Christian."2 During the American Civil War, Mosby's Rangers played havoc with Union supply lines, siphoned off large quantities of equipment for Confederate forces, and continually foiled attempts by Federal forces to ensnare them. Despite their difficulties with Mosby, Union successes in the Civil War encouraged development of a U.S. military attachment to an attrition style of warfare. In that conflict, an industrially developed North eventually overwhelmed a resource-poor South.

In the twentieth century, major land wars have been fought with the assistance of large industrial capacities and a reliance upon large troop maneuvers and massive firepower. For the American Army, industrial capacity and military power have become symbiotic; we have relied on this relationship to overwhelm the opposition. Economic might, then, is ideally suited to an attrition strategy. Tremendous resources and technological sophistication have provided the U.S. with great strength for modern warfare, but they have dulled memories of a revolutionary and sometimes unconventional


military past. Moreover, America depends upon maximizing weapons systems to minimize human loss in modern warfare, for we place great value on the lives of our soldiers/citizens. To quote General Fred C. Weyand:

War is death and destruction. The American way of war is particularly violent, deadly and dreadful. We believe in using "things"—artillery, bombs, massive firepower—in order to conserve our soldiers' lives.

America has wielded its industrially-based firepower with great effectiveness in modern conflicts, decisively ending the global contest of WWII with conventional combat power and a newly discovered atomic weapon. By the same token, American tactics in major conflicts have deemphasized less destructive or personal means of combat, the political and psychological nuances of war, and the complex skills necessary for deterring conflict at its lowest levels.

In spite of its total nature, WWII spawned the development of modern U.S. special warfare. While the U.S. girded its industries and military for battle, European and Pacific island nations relied to some extent on partisan organizations in order to cope with well-prepared and determined occupying powers. The nascent U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS), a civilian organization developed for intelligence collection and analysis, was utilized

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4 See F.O. Miksche’s Secret Forces. Faber & Faber, Ltd.: London, 1950. This is an excellent source for understanding wartime underground movements.
to coordinate and to implement U.S. approaches to guerrilla or unconventional warfare operations. It is noteworthy that unconventional warfare and other "unmilitary" activities were handled by a civilian organization. To the chagrin of regular military forces who saw themselves fighting the "real war," the OSS received glamorous press accolades and personal attention from President Roosevelt, neither of which discouraged the development of a rivalry between OSS and military forces.

Some guerrilla groups were troublesome and uncontrollable, as they sought to fulfill separatist ambitions or engaged in nefarious criminal activities. Wartime relationships with such organizations cast Americans into the seamy side of war, especially since guerrilla organizations often found the naturally clandestine infrastructure of criminal organizations to be valuable.


6 Paddock, op. cit., pp. 30-32. Roosevelt lent an open ear to OSS Chief William Donovan and provided support to the fledgling organization, setting a precedent which President Kennedy later followed.

7 Some guerrilla/partisan groups (not limited to WWII) have seen the dislocation of central governments as an ideal opportunity to achieve longstanding political aims. Such situations have sometimes discouraged military leadership from seeking to cultivate partisan resources. Moreover, in revolutionary situations outside of major conflicts, where political ambiguities abound, discerning the intentions of such groups and evaluating the propriety of their leadership may prove to be difficult (e.g., Sandinistas and FDN in Nicaragua; FNLA, MPLA, and UNITA in Angola).

To command and control guerrilla forces and retain their allegiance in wartime requires special skills. A perspective that such forces are of dubious value to the outcome of the conflict might preclude any desire to develop those skills. It seems that the unconventional operations of the OSS and foreign counterparts in WWII were not doctrinally central to U.S. war plans because these activities, in the final analysis, will not win a major conventional war, whether they are total wars such as WWII or limited conflicts as in Korea. 9

In addition to OSS operations in WWII, American commando troops were trained to perform direct action or strike missions and to assist in or spearhead conventional operations. Tracing their origins to Roger's Rangers, the WWII Rangers became the quintessential combat troops. In that war they earned tough reputations, as Darby's commandos "led the way" in the now-famous Allied assaults on the German positions at Normandy. Ranger concepts, which were taught to superior troops in a demanding environment, were drawn naturally from conventional combat doctrine, though they put a premium on self-reliance and focused on small unit tactics. Colonel Darby sought to maximize the effects of intense training on his special unit but to minimize symbols of eliteness by forbidding his Rangers to wear the distinctive beret worn by

9 Lt. General Samuel V. Wilson, USA (ret'd.), former DDO-CIA and DDIA, Personal Interview # 2, Crewe, VA, October 9, 1985. See also (as noted in Paddock, op. cit.) Harry Howe Ransome, Central Intelligence and National Security. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1958, pp. 64-65.
British and European commandos. Darby chose, then, to emphasize the G.I. nature of his troops rather than what was different about them.

Despite their secondary roles in WWII, both unconventional and commando forces augmented conventional operations by attacking strategic targets, reconnoitring enemy-held areas for tactical and strategic intelligence, and operating or organizing movements in rear areas. During America's major wars, an affinity for firepower and an attrition-based strategy seem to have precluded a comprehensive understanding of the value of unconventional and commando capabilities for use in war. For the "violent peace" which we call low-intensity conflict, wartime legacies have left the U.S. organizationally, doctrinally, and philosophically ill-equipped to conduct the types of warfare LIC demands. Moreover, the contrast between the commando operations of Rangers and the guerrilla organizational activities of the OSS has been lost on many observers because the post-WWII era thoroughly intertwined the concepts. Later organizational and doctrinal confusion became almost inevitable byproducts.

Following WWII, some U.S. military leaders recognized a need for well-trained military elements to conduct unconventional

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10 James J. Altieri, "Darby's Rangers," Gung-Ho Magazine, op. cit., p. 59. The significance of the beret in the assimilation of special operations units will be examined later in this chapter.
warfare behind the lines of a conventional war in Europe.\footnote{SF was probably conceived as a strategic element of a "roll-back" strategy. But after the failure of many CIA covert operations in Eastern Europe, the utility of SF in its partisan organization role may have become suspect.}

Brigadier General Robert A. McClure, supported by Lt. Colonel Russell Volckmann, Colonel Aaron Bank, and others, championed the development of these forces during the Korean conflict, at least partly out of frustration with the lack of CIA-Army coordination in clandestine activities. Born in 1952 as an outgrowth of the Psychological Warfare Center, the Army Special Forces (SF) traced their origins to WWII operations by the OSS, but, as Colonel Paddock has noted in his book, \emph{U.S. Army Special Warfare: Its Origins}, SF adopted the First Special Service Force (organized for arctic and other special operations) and the Rangers into its official lineage.\footnote{Paddock, op. cit., p. 23.} Brigadier General Don Blackburn put it in blunt fashion: "Special Forces have always been the bastards of the Army."\footnote{Brigadier General Donald D. Blackburn, USA (ret'd.), former SACSA to JCS at the time of the Son Tay Raid in 1970. Personal interview, McLean, VA: November 13, 1985. General Blackburn was not referring specifically to SF origins but was speaking about general perceptions of SF.} Though SF officially evolved from the Rangers, the concepts underlying their respective operations are fundamentally different.

Upon the creation of SF, many OSS veterans drifted into military service; others went to work for the progeny of their parent organization, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). From
that standpoint, some traditional soldiers looked upon the association between Special Forces, OSS, and the CIA with suspicion, wondering whether the practices of these unconventional groups and their unusual cast of operators had anything in common with warfare as our military professionals had come to know it. Moreover, the subsumption of SF under the Psychological Warfare center clouded distinctions between the roles and missions of SF and Psychological Operations units.14

Although unconventional warfare, as practiced by SF, may involve the direct action and strategic reconnaissance missions normally associated with commando operations, most SF activities are organizational and educational in nature. They may even include civic action projects such as medical care, construction, and teaching. Because SF operate in an alien and sometimes hostile environment for extended periods, it is essential that they understand the milieu and, naturally, the host language of the area in which they might work. Rangers, on the other hand, conduct primarily direct action or strike missions (as well as tactical or strategic reconnaissance). The short duration of their missions requires minimal regional understanding and area orientation.

These distinctions would seem self-evident, but they have not always been understood and applied by the conventional establishment which commands them, perhaps because commando or strike

14 Barnett, op. cit., pp. 240-244. Paddock, op. cit., extensively discusses the organizational marriage of Special Forces to Psychological Warfare.
operations devolve from conventional perspectives and military traditions whereas SF operations (with their OSS roots) do not. Within SOF units, there is sensitivity toward these distinctions. The recent creation, then, of counter-terror strike forces (i.e., units operating within the Joint Special Operations Command) is more in keeping with U.S. military tradition than are forces oriented toward revolutionary environments (as represented by SF).  

Even counter-terror developments have been confusing, though, since the underlying concept behind the creation of Delta Force, the Army's counterterrorist unit, pointed to the development of a multi-purpose special warfare force similar to the British Special Air Service (SAS).  

An American tendency toward specialization and its impact on SOF will be discussed in the conclusion of this paper. To shed more light on military special warfare development, other military units should be examined, particularly since many LIC contingencies would require joint SOF missions and an inter-service cooperation which, historically, has not been well-coordinated.

The Navy's SEALs (an acronym for Sea, Air, and Land) were developed from WWII-era Underwater Demolition Teams (UDT s), but

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they were cultivated during the Kennedy push for special warfare. Therefore, they trained for riverine and coastal operations which could effectively deny guerrillas their havens and supplies. SEALs developed a fearsome reputation in their multi-purpose roles during Vietnam. Unlike Army SF, who sometimes advised South Vietnamese forces, few SEAL operations in Vietnam were of an advisory nature; their roles, in that regard, bore some resemblance to those of the British SAS in Malaysia during the 1950's.17

Since then, however, SEALs have refocused on "blue-water" operations such as reconnaissance, obstacle clearance, and sabotage as opposed to "brownwater" activities such as counter-revolution. As one SEAL officer has said:

The SEALs have had to focus on providing operational support of the Navy's fleets, especially since the end of Vietnam combat; it's an organizational survival issue for us.

In contrast to the Navy, Air Force special warfare developed with a guerrilla orientation, due to the many resupply missions which the "Air Commandos" flew for OSS operators and foreign

17 A non-attributable conversation with an active-duty enlisted SEAL was helpful. He argued that though SEALs are currently training foreign naval commandos (El Salvador) and may play roles in protracted conflicts, their primary orientation is toward strike missions (including, of course, reconnaissance) in support of Navy (and Marine) objectives. Therefore, SEAL operations would seem to have more in common with the Army Rangers than with the Special Forces. As with the Army, the development of a counter-terror SEAL team flows naturally from their origins as direct action elements.

nationals in support of WWII regional objectives. In Vietnam, their missions were varied though often in a ground support role, hence the development of gunships such as the AC-47 and the Spectre. Because of the Air Force's strategic warfare considerations, however, SOF missions have been considered a minor concern within the Air Force, and equipment essential for low-profile or clandestine penetration missions has not always been in a high state of readiness, strangely enough, even following the collapse of the Iran rescue attempt. \(^{19}\) Low-technology transfer, training techniques, counter-insurgency, and civic action -- all potentially important Air Force roles in LIC -- have received even less attention than have airlift capabilities.

Within the Army, aviation needs have long been oriented toward ground missions. For that reason, Army SOF aviation has been developed to fill gaps left open by Air Force SOF, especially for short-range, rotary-wing (helicopter) missions. Shortfalls apparent in the Iran mission as well as a debilitated CIA paramilitary capability prompted the inception of Task Force 160th, a secretive aviation battalion based at Fort Campbell, KY. While the Air Force has retained certain missions and ordered new aircraft, Army aviation has indicated a willingness to accept new and more

\(^{19}\) Debates over Air Force SOF missions are at the forefront of the modern build-up. For a better understanding of this problem, see September-January 1985-86 issues of *Armed Forces Journal International*. For long-range penetration missions, state-of-the-art equipment is an imperative, so doctrine must be carefully developed to avoid the compromise/failure of missions. See also *The Role of AirPower in Low-Intensity Conflict*, 4 v., Airpower Symposium, Air University, Maxwell AFB, Alabama: March 1985.
diverse responsibilities if they are given resources adequate for their development. The issue of SOF aviation has even captured the attention of Congress, but it has not yet been resolved.

In many ways, these Army, Navy, and Air Force SOF units are similar in their orientation toward combat, though the substantial role differences between protracted (SF) and strike (Rangers or Delta Force) elements must be considered. There are, however, other more distinguishable units which are currently considered to be SOF. They are Army Psychological Operations (PSYOPs) and Civil Affairs units. Both trace their roots to WWII, where they had considerable wartime missions. That legacy has relegated much of their manpower base to reserve units. In their SOF relationship, both are well-suited to protracted conflicts, though they may support (PSYOPs primarily) strike operations.

PSYOPs units have a dual lineage, drawing both on a formal development under the Army's aegis and on the influence of OSS operations during WWII. As noted earlier, SF emerged as PSYOPs' "poor cousin" at the Psychological Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, NC; their organizational wedding complicated the development of either as a distinct entity. This situation has presented problems for the utility of PSYOPs as national strategic assets and in the early years probably inhibited the development of the Special

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20 There is legitimate concern that Army aviation could not fill critical preparedness gaps during an interim phase-out of rotary-wing (helicopter) Air Force SOF. The solution will probably come from an enhanced Army role for short-range missions, with long-range penetrations of hostile airspace left for the time-being with the Air Force.
Forces concept. Their relative positions changed in the 1960's, as PSYOPs became the weaker partner to SF, an alignment which has continued to the present. 

With a close special warfare relationship, PSYOPs will undoubtedly encounter coordination problems which will hamper U.S. efforts to develop themes designed to promote regional and international psychological objectives. To compound PSYOPs problems, Americans seem to feel that something is inherently "dirty" about psychological activities, particularly those associated with warfare. Likewise, unconventional warfare and other SOF-related terms seem to be distasteful to many Americans. So SOF semantic difficulties go beyond definitions in that the related terminology may strike a cultural nerve.

The original subsumption of special operations units under the PSYOP umbrella (and the modern reversal) may stem from General William Donovan's conception of the value of unconventional warfare as a psychological weapon. His comprehensive views contributed heavily to the development of CIA paramilitary capabilities -- which, interestingly, are also called special operations -- and to a psychological or propaganda apparatus within the CIA. To the chagrin of military proponents such as General


23 Ibid., p. 35.
McClure, the CIA sought to develop the Special Forces idea itself; that situation should tell the perceptive student that PSYOPs and SF activities were not necessarily considered to be endemic to the military profession, at least not by non-military members of the national security establishment.24

Besides PSYOPs, Civil Affairs units are the other unusual elements referred to as SOF. Like PSYOPs, they would play critical wartime roles in support of overall objectives, because they have unique capabilities for reorganizing war-torn areas. They demonstrated their value to expeditionary types of missions in the recent Grenada operation, and they have performed cooperative roles with the Agency for International Development (AID), the CIA, and other government agencies during Vietnam and less publicized conflicts.25 They offer special resources for either protracted (revolutionary guerrilla war) or short-term (expeditionary) LIC environments, though they are less applicable to strike operations.

Civil Affairs and PSYOPs units are geared for high-intensity warfare, yet they have retained such close association with special warfare that they are considered to be SOF. Since both are oriented toward political, social, and psychological ends -- the characteristics most central to LIC -- PSYOPs and Civil Affairs should be at forefront of a SOF renewal. Yet, Reagan Administration interest in SOF has been so focused on counter-

24 Ibid., also pp. 130-133.
terrorism and strike operations that leadership perspectives on SOF are likely to become one-dimensional, that is, skewed toward a commando concept, if only from a lack of awareness of other possible SOF roles and missions. These non-combat units have probably not received attention commensurate to their potential LIC roles, and until that situation is addressed and reversed, particularly in an organizational sense, critically valuable SOF assets may be underdeveloped.

The reader should realize by now that there are some important distinctions which must be made in order to maximize U.S. SOF assets. Organizational confusion has certainly contributed to the circuitous development of special operations capabilities, but it is not the only reason for slow SOF growth and a lack of acceptance by conventional forces. Because few flag-rank officers have been exposed to SOF and most with SOF experience have been unable to retain associations with SOF units, a lack of effective special operations advocacy within U.S. military leadership has led to a "benign neglect" of SOF. 26

SOF has long been perceived within the military as a "career killer;" 27 as one author described the status of SF in the 1960's, "Special Forces were known to be a dead end for anyone


who aspired to a high rank.\textsuperscript{28} Despite a lack of professional incentive, many SOF soldiers have chosen to risk slow career development to remain with their units. Chapter III will discuss the individual traits which propel this tendency. For all the former difficulties, these forces have survived to the present to become the subject of intense interest by policy-makers, as in the early years of the 1960's. That period holds insight into the bureaucratic challenges of advocating and developing SOF.

In 1960, President John F. Kennedy took office and began a personal campaign to build a U.S. capacity for counteracting "wars of national liberation" or Soviet-supported insurgencies and guerrilla wars. In a speech to graduating West Point cadets in 1962, Kennedy said:

\begin{quote}
This is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origin — war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins, war by ambush instead of by combat; by infiltration, instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging them....It requires a whole new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of military training.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

Kennedy found military leadership reluctant to respond to his efforts to develop a doctrine for "counterinsurgency," for few military leaders shared his perception that a new and different kind of warfare had come into being. Even his Special Military Representative for counterinsurgency, General Maxwell Taylor, "... looked on the counterinsurgency business as a faddish distraction

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{29} Roger Hilsman, \textit{To Move a Nation}. Doubleday & Company, Inc.: Garden City, NY, 1967, p. 412.
\end{itemize}
from the main responsibility of training for conventional assault."  

Most military leaders viewed new capabilities as superfluous to those already in existence; General George H. Decker, Army Chief of Staff 1960-62, said, "Any good soldier can handle guerrillas." General Taylor made similar comments which reflected the military's confidence in its institutional preparation for conventional warfare and its occasional guerrilla facet. To their credit, those viewpoints are credible in the context of a total war, in which population security and political repercussions are not primary concerns. It seems, then, that President Kennedy and military leaders were not operating from the same conceptual base. 

Kennedy took a personal interest in the U.S. Army Special Forces (SF), the elite element of the U.S. military which was at that time oriented toward partisan organization in wartime Europe. He believed that these guerrilla warfare experts could shift to a counter-guerrilla role and thus offer a riposte to Khrushchev's challenge. The weak military underpinnings of modern U.S. unconventional warfare experiences have already been pointed out; yet, General Decker stated confidently in reference to SF preparation for counter-guerrilla warfare that "similar units were used considerably during WWII... This is not something new. It's something in

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30 Schlesinger, op. cit., p. 318.

which the Army has quite a bit of experience."\textsuperscript{32} Actually, the U.S. Army had little modern experience at that time in counter-guerrilla warfare and virtually none in coping with the highly-organized cadres of communist revolutionary movements.

The prevailing logic which drove Kennedy's promotion of SF was that "it takes a bandit to catch a bandit,"\textsuperscript{33} despite assurances from the conventional military that counterinsurgency was really a "hammer and anvil" concept best conducted by conventional forces as in the Indian wars of the American west.\textsuperscript{34} Again, General Taylor:

> It (counterinsurgency) is just a form of small war, a guerrilla operation in which we have a long record against the Indians. Any well-trained organization can shift the tempo to that which might be required in this kind of situation. All this cloud of dust that's coming out of the White House really isn't necessary.\textsuperscript{35}

In developing a Third World counter-guerrilla orientation, SF adopted a posture far apart from its original intent, and one which traditionalists considered to be unnecessary for the task of counterinsurgency. But Kennedy viewed the LIC problem as spanning arenas outside of the normal military purview, and he therefore "insisted that the Special Forces be schooled in sanitation,


\textsuperscript{33} Interview, Blackburn, op. cit.. See Chapter II section (5) for an explanation of the relevance of SOF-criminal associations.


\textsuperscript{35} Krepenevich, op. cit., p. 25.
teaching, bridge-building, medical care and the need for economic progress," all of which deviated considerably from the original SF mission. 36

Kennedy's conception of SF as a sort of "Peace Corps with guns" never caught on within the military mainstream, though SF were often utilized in that fashion during the early years (1960-64) of Vietnam, largely under CIA auspices. After the deaths of Kennedy and President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam, "Operation Switchback" reverted SF operations to military control. With the introduction of American combat units, SF roles were shifted to support conventional operations. 37 Other special warfare units which had blossomed during Kennedy's counterinsurgency campaign also withered in the face of an increasingly conventional approach to the conduct of the Vietnam war.

It seems that "topside" political fixes to SOF have been impermanent because of a lack of intra-military advocacy; even such a powerful SOF political benefactor as Kennedy could not foist revolutionary ideas on a DoD devoted to clearly-defined threats. Perhaps the advocacy problem does lie outside of the military, since the fundamental orientation of the American military is toward conventional and strategic warfare. In that sense, it is unfair to expect men whose full-time job is to prepare for conventional or strategic warfare to understand and


37 Interview # 2, Wilson, op. cit..
prepare for the intracacies of LIC. Viewed through conventional lenses, today's low-intensity conflicts may seem no different to U.S. military leaders than they did to General Earle Wheeler, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who declared authoritatively in 1962:

"It is fashionable in some quarters to say that the problems in Southeast Asia are primarily political and economic rather than military. I do not agree. The essence of the problem in Vietnam is military."

In sum, SOF development has been a tortuous process in which there has been little conceptual consistency. Moreover, most conventional leaders have viewed special operations as an adjunct to the conventional mission. These leaders did not consider SOF to be useful tools for counteracting new threats, probably because they were either unaware of low-intensity threats or did not believe that LIC was different enough from conventional warfare to warrant development of specialized forces. In addition to these issues, SOF characteristics seem so foreign to "regulars" that they promote resentment toward SOF by the mainstream.

What operating characteristics distinguish SOF from conventional forces? Are these forces so divergent from conventional norms that they do not belong in the military? Why have some observers suggested attaching SOF to the CIA, creating a sixth military service, forming a Unified Command, or placing SOF under the

38 Interview, Yarborough, op. cit.
39 Hilsman, op. cit., p. 426.
aegis of a separate DoD body, such as a Defense Special Operations Agency? It seems likely that the latter may occur soon; the advantages and limitations to each approach are now under debate in Congress.  

The second chapter, then, will review those factors which allow differentiation between SOF and conventional forces, and it will discuss the operational characteristics which make SOF applicable to LIC.

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Chapter II. SOF Characteristics

Why may it prove necessary to create a separate agency as a home for U.S. military SOF assets? Why did President Kennedy find advocacy of SF such a challenge and military leadership reluctant to comply with his wishes? Why did Colonel Beckwith's efforts with Delta Force in the 1970's meet resistance and disdain? In reviewing SOF origins, we can find some of the answers. By examining these eleven salient characteristics of SOF operations, all of which contrast sharply with conventional operations, the reasons may become even more apparent.

(1) SOF rely on speed, stealth, and surprise to achieve objectives. Operating in small units, they utilize low profiles to avoid being targeted by superior firepower. Surprise, given an imbalanced troop ratio, is essential to SOF success.

(2) Secrecy is of the essence for SOF. Without it, their greatest strengths are compromised. In other words, informed adversaries can be deadly to SOF.

(3) SOF operate symbiotically with intelligence assets for the above reasons, and they may fall under CIA operational control periodically, especially for clandestine missions.

(4) SOF operate primarily at night to accentuate their strengths.

(5) SOF depend upon individuals. NCO's and enlisted men, not colonels and generals, may make critical field-decisions. They are, conceptually, not unlike CIA operatives in that they implement U.S. policy in the field.

(6) SOF operate on the periphery of military norms, and they are often involved in unusual and secret activities. Therefore, they tend to develop something of a romantic "outlaw" image.
(7) Some SOF are attuned to a particular political-cultural milieu and may need specialized area-training and linguistic abilities because their activities may focus on political, social, and psychological goals rather than solely on military objectives.

(8) Many SOF activities have unusual requirements, often making special equipment and logistics necessary. The operators are likely to attempt something which has not been attempted before. In that sense, every special operation is unique.

(9) Peacetime SOF missions (the LIC environment) can take on a politically supercharged nature, especially hostage-rescue and other direct action missions. A conventional establishment rooted in the American polity would rather not take the discredit for failed operations (e.g., the Iran mission).

(10) Due to their small size, intense training, and the operations they conduct, SOF are military elites. They may drain off the best and most "warrior-oriented" men from line units.

(11) Most important, perhaps, is that SOF activities are a form of military martial art which might be more closely associated with the writings of Sun Tzu than those of Clausewitz.

It will be useful at this point to examine each of these characteristics in greater detail.

(1) SOF ground elements such as SF, Rangers, and SEALs emphasize small unit tactics and attempt to accomplish their objectives through clandestine infiltration/exfiltration and surprise. Because SOF are not generally mechanized units (perhaps with the exception of Delta Force, whose logistics may necessitate a semi-mechanized status), these soldiers are highly mobile. They usually work in small teams, often comprised of 16 or fewer men. All of these units emphasize self-reliance and coping with
unusual eventualities. In that regard, standard operating procedures (SOP) can inhibit the flexibility required for special operations and detract from preparations for specialized SOF tasks; many solutions to special operations problems could not appear in a manual designed for general digestion.¹ In the case of advisory support for a nation involved in counter-revolutionary or counter-insurgency activities (note: these are not synonyms because insurgents may not seek to disestablish the social and political order), SF might keep a low profile, perhaps by operating in civilian garb, but they would not necessarily depend upon stealth, except for organizing ambushes.² For Ranger, counter-terror, and wartime SF missions, surprise is an obvious requirement, one which is supported by clandestinity.³

(2) Because so many of their operations are secret, SOF tend to be clannish, like employees of the CIA. Clandestinity promotes suspicion within the mainstream, a situation exacerbated when cooperation between conventional and unconventional forces is

¹ Dr. Alan F. Farrell, Professor of French, Hampden-Sydney College, USAR, SF. Personal Interview, Hampden-Sydney, VA, December 1986. Self-reliance as a SOF trait or individual attribute will be discussed in Chapter III.

² With the recent assassination of SEAL Schaufelberger in El Salvador, obvious American presences may be drawn down to the point that stealth practically becomes an advisory characteristic.

³ Extraordinary secrecy surrounds SOF units (see # 2). In hostage situations, a decision to use force could imperil hostages if the captors were aware of an impending assault. For examples of operational security considerations, see the Holloway Report on the Iranian rescue mission or various accounts of the German rescue at Mogadishu.
necessary. Vietnam is replete with examples of conventional officers arriving in their operational areas to find SF soldiers who could not brief them because of operational security requirements. From a policy standpoint, secrecy may be necessary or desirable to permit a U.S. role-denial, especially when a host nation or revolutionary movement would rather not acknowledge outside assistance. While secrecy may help to promote low profiles, it may also stimulate a converse effect of enhanced public and press curiosity. Although largely left unsaid, there are also deep-seated fears in this country of secret, highly-trained, politically-astute military elites; the book Seven Days in May, a 1950's novel, considered the possibility of an American coup d' état by such forces. Congressional oversight and press leaks have seriously limited the viability of "covert" CIA operations and may eventually affect SOF in a similar fashion. It seems that a cultural aversion toward secrecy may have an impact on the utility of SOF in clandestine missions.

(3) In conventional combat operations, mistakes can be redressed by throwing in more troops, utilizing increased firepower, or changing tactics/maneuvers. In other words, these operations usually can be attempted again with a different approach. In the special

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4 Proponents of SOF have sought some of the publicity of the current build-up to enhance public awareness of the need for these forces and because of retrenched organizational resistance to SOF development.

5 Interview # 1, General Wilson, op. cit..
operations arena, particularly for direct action missions, there is rarely a chance to regroup for a second attempt. SOF, therefore, must have a timely and accurate intelligence flow. Without it, the chances for special operations successes are minimal. In the case of the Iran mission, DoD was forced to place its own agents in Tehran; the CIA strip-down during the 1970's contributed to that dilemma and raised questions about intelligence support for special operations.

For SF operations, information about the political climate may be critical. For SOF aviation, military and civilian intelligence resources must study hostile radars to discern the best in/exfiltration routes and landing sites; they may also evaluate targets and help to determine mission requirements through both human and technical means. Intelligence support for PSYOP and Civil Affairs efforts can be critical as well. PSYOP units must understand population targets, ethnic characteristics, and regional peculiarities. In Civil Affairs operations, restructuring of shattered areas and dislocated populations would not be effective without a thorough understanding of the people and milieus involved: where "hearts and minds" rather than military forces are the

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6 Ibid.
7 The Soviets would delight at revealing U.S. clandestine operations to their surrogates or to any state hostile to the U.S., hence, the need for recognition of Soviet ELINT and EW capabilities, as well as those within target states. For SOF aviation, then, coordination with NSA and all other intelligence resources is essential. The U.S. raid in 1970 on the Son Tay prison camp in North Vietnam is an excellent case study of this challenge.
center of gravity, civic action operations should not have to rebuild the chaos created by heavy firepower.  

Quality intelligence of a tactical and strategic nature is necessary for the effective use of SOF assets. Like SOF, American intelligence resources must coordinate with host intelligence services and help to improve their effectiveness in supporting indigenous forces and American SOF.  

Ironically, the abortive CIA Bay of Pigs operation, which raised questions about the CIA's ability to command large paramilitary operations, was a catalyst in the 1960's development of SOF. Despite National Security Action Memorandum's 54-57, which sought to clarify the respective domains of CIA and SOF, SOF and intelligence activities may coincide or overlap at points, requiring a "baton pass" for a transition from an intelligence to a military operation. For a successful "pass," an earlier relationship must exist.  

SOF personnel (usually SF) have been placed under CIA operational control from time to time, a situation which makes conventional forces nervous and dual command and control relationships uncertain.  

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10 Interview # 2, Wilson, op. cit.

11 A recent Washington Post article, entitled "Army's Covert Role Scrutinized" reflects the CIA-SOF association fears, November 29, 1985, p. A1,8,9. See also, Eliot Cohen, Commandos
For example, during the Vietnam conflict, the U.S. Army attempted to prosecute the commander of the Fifth Special Forces Group, Colonel Bob Rheault, and some of his men for the alleged murder of a suspected Viet Cong informant. Since Rheault and his men were under CIA auspices at the time and the Agency was reluctant to cooperate, the case was dropped, but not without some repercussions. Given Congressional dispositions and national attitudes of the 1970's toward CIA, press revelations of such relationships foster an unwarranted fear of "spooks" which can damage U.S. objectives. It may be that our cyclical affinity for CIA and SOF may be reaching a pinnacle, and for that reason, promote less mistrust of either.


12 See John S. Berry. Those Gallant Men: On Trial in Vietnam. Presidio Press: Novato, CA, 1984. As Berry notes, many in SF felt that General Creighton Abrams was venting his personal enmity for SF and attempting to discredit them through the case. The case could also be considered an example of why conventional forces are inapplicable to unconventional conflicts, because certain activities in LIC which may be practical to its successful prosecution may defy democratic norms.


14 Frank Klingberg has pointed out the cyclical nature of U.S. approaches to foreign policy by identifying introvertish and extrovertish phases. On a related note, Harry Howe Ransome has discussed CIA in terms of cultural reactions to perceptions that U.S. interests are being impinged upon abroad. In that sense, he asserts that Americans assent periodically to "letting the Agency loose" like a watchdog, a thought which could also be applied to SOF. See Harry Howe Ransome, "Strategic Intelligence and Intermestic Politics," Charles W. Kegley, Jr. and Eugene R. Wittkopf. Perspectives on American Foreign Policy. St. Martin's Press: New York, 1983, pp. 299-319.
Most SOF units conduct nighttime operations to utilize their main strengths — stealth and surprise. Conventional units may operate at night, but only rarely. It is interesting to note that night operations, like amphibious and arctic operations, were referred to as special operations in 1951; the term "special operations" was then supplanted by "special forces operations" which in turn became "unconventional warfare." Despite confusion over definitions, there is general agreement among students of this subject that SOF activities are usually conducted at night.

In revolutionary guerrilla wars or insurgencies, the night is usually the province of the guerrilla; to meet him on his ground, SOF must train in that environment and learn to think like the guerrilla (the rationale for developing SF for the counter-guerrilla mission). Only highly motivated units will operate at night, so in order for SF to train indigenous forces, locals must have a stake in the success of operations and in the solvency of their government — South Vietnamese Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRUs), comprised of local elements, were such forces. Likewise, strike units such as SEALs, Rangers, and Delta Force usually operate at night to enhance their effective-

15 Paddock, op. cit., p. 139. The 1983 conference which led to the publication of Special Operations in U.S. Strategy was an assembly of the foremost thinkers in this area, yet no conceptual and definitional synthesis came out of it. The papers published in that work reveal varying ideas about the nature of Special Operations.

16 Interview #1, Wilson, op. cit..
SOF aviation, with their low-level flights and tricky maneuvering, can be especially hazardous at night; Army SOF aviation (known as the "Nightstalkers") goes by the motto, "Death Waits in the Dark." An unforeseen enemy can strike fear into the hearts of adversaries. SOF capitalize on human fears about the unknown, as do terrorists and guerrillas.

(5) Another element of American society besides military SOF prefers operating at night — criminals. Chapter I briefly discussed the symbiosis between a clandestine criminal infrastructure and SOF attempting to penetrate a closed or hostile society. SOF association with black marketeers and other criminals may be useful though undesirable linkages for operations in a totalitarian environment. On the other side of the LIC coin, Reagan Administration officials have argued that the Soviets and their surrogates make use of organized crime in the form of drug-dealing to support and conceal their operations. Some LIC problems certainly emanate from those relationships (e.g., narco-terrorism in Colombia and Bolivia).

Guerrillas or insurgents, terrorists, and subversives are themselves likely to be considered illegal, at least as far as

17 The Grenada operation holds numerous examples of problems which may ensue when SOF attempt to coordinate with conventional forces which have little sensitivity to SOF requirements in this area.


19 Interview, Yarborough, op. cit...
threatened governments are concerned; for example, Chiang Kai-Shek's efforts to rid China of Mao Tse-Tung and his communist movement were known as "Bandit Suppression" campaigns. SF of the early 1960's were frequently referred to as "bandits," at least in the context of catching guerrilla "bandits." Perhaps such associations have encouraged American cultural reservations about SOF (especially the terminology applied to them) and the nature of LIC — that is, that both are unfair, unsavory, immoral, and somehow illegal.20

In a legalistic society with a strong sense of moral propriety, such perceptions reduce the viability of SOF and the effectiveness of U.S. LIC approaches. Legal principles, of course, set norms for behavior within society and tend to reflect mainstream societal viewpoints. When those norms are ignored or violated, the law is invoked. Because special operations may violate cultural norms, they may activate a cultural perception that special operations are inherently "illegal." Those same legal and moral parameters can be so confining, though, that SOF may appeal to a romantic "outlaw" image in American society. In his book Military Elites, Roger Beaumont identified the propensity on the part of elite forces to develop an outlaw self-image.21 Nonetheless, SOF operations fall outside the realm of military normalcy and the society it reflects, so SOF unconventionality may tend to be equated with outlaws.


(6) When SOF deploy, particularly in LIC situations, enlisted men, not officers, are the focal point. For that reason, many conventional commanders cringe at the thought of an SF sergeant making critical field decisions, especially since NCO's and enlistees are not traditionally recognized for their decision-making. The command, control, and communications (C3) aspect, then, of SOF operations is important to consider. Conventionally-oriented military leaders who know little about the nature of SOF and their unique capabilities may misuse these forces. As noted previously, few military leaders would want to shoulder the responsibility for the failure of special operations, especially when they must delegate considerable authority to the field. Structural changes which would allow SOF officers greater control of their operations would seem logical. Again, however, flag-rank SOF officers are few in number.

Individuals are critical to special operations success, not numbers as is often the case with conventional operations. Too many operators could be counterproductive to a special operation due to the low-profile nature of the operations. SF operations in particular depend on the individual and his creativity. SOF promotion of self-reliance will be discussed in Chapter III. It may be that U.S. problems with LIC stem from a limited understanding of the necessity of effective individuals, both our own soldiers and the foreign nationals with whom they might work.

A national penchant for quantifying problems sidesteps the
individual human element and the often subjective nature of LIC.
That tendency may challenge the development of the understanding
needed for the U.S. to succeed in the microcosmic arenas in which
it might use SOF. A statement on Vietnam in 1962 by then-Secretary
of Defense Robert S. McNamara is indicative of that perspective:
"Every quantitative measurement we have shows we're winning this
war." While empirical data may be of use for studying LIC
phenomena, LIC seems to have a subjective nature which can frustrate
a technologically-developed and quantitatively-oriented nation.
Like intelligence assets, SOF can provide an unquantifiable
on-scene interpretation of events which cannot be supplied by national
technical means.

(7) Of course, any military undertaking, to follow Clausewitzian
logic, has political underpinnings and an essentially political
objective. In LIC, however, political and psychological goals
surge to the forefront and military operations may take the
backseat, emerging only to complement or punctuate other goals.
SOF are well-suited to that environment. Political awareness is
especially pertinent to those SOF operations requiring cooperation
with indigenous peoples. Since the U.S. military is traditionally

22 Major Thomas Custer, USA, JSOA, 7th SF Group, Personal
his point by explaining that in SF demolition operations, the
"P" factor (for our purposes, "P" for plenty) may get the job
done when it is difficult to determine how much explosive to use.
For example, Colonel "Bull" Simons doubled the charges his demo-
litions men thought to be enough for the Son Tay raid.

23 p. 412, Hilsman.
circumscribed in American politics and is considered an apolitical servant to the state, conventional forces may not be attuned to or interested in the political nature of LIC activities or of the significant roles often played by military forces in Third World politics.

To be effective in interacting with foreigners and in attempting to assimilate foreign cultures, SF, PSYOP, and Civil Affairs units have special needs for language training and area-orientation. As noted, strike and protracted operations are fundamentally different, so that Rangers and other strike operators have less need for languages and area skills. There are, however, instances in which those skills could be useful to strike forces, such as for cross-training and instructive purposes and for counter-terror operations dependent upon foreign assistance.24

(8) SOF may need unusual equipment, often inaccessible through ordinary procurement channels. For example, during preparations for the Son Tay raid into North Vietnam, planners encountered numerous problems attempting to obtain suitable equipment, such as night sights for their rifles.25 Colonel Beckwith experienced

24 Considering that Delta Force has advised foreign forces in several publicized instances, language capabilities may be useful for them as well. The refined nature of hostage rescue and other direct action special operations demands literally that nothing be lost in translation.

many of the same obstacles in attempting to outfit Delta Force. SF, by contrast, "probably relies less on equipment than other troops. They are trained to improvise and scrounge. . . . They don't need sophisticated weapons." Because technology is such an American strong suit, technological solutions to misunderstood problems are alluring.

SOF equipment may have to be tailored to the unique requirements of the situation, sometimes because their needs are too primitive for up-to-date military acquisitions. As Arthur Schlesinger noted in A Thousand Days:

The professionals, infatuated with the newest technology and eager to strike major blows, deeply disliked the thought of reversion to the rude weapons, amateur tactics, hard life and marginal effects of guerrilla warfare.

Though SOF needs for certain specialized missions may be more exotic than those generally required by SF, neither has a potential equipment pool which is likely to be of standard issue and which may be requisitioned through normal channels. Therefore, a flexible procurement program and developmental process which extends beyond or bypasses bureaucratic processes would be practical for SOF. Unusual requirements and non-standard (and sometimes secretive) methods inevitably work against the grain of bureaucratic procedures, and they may raise questions about the propriety and legality of SOF acquisitions. For example, a number of recent

26 See Beckwith, op. cit.
27 Blaufarb, op. cit. (quoting General Yarborough), p. 79.
28 Schlesinger, op. cit., p. 318.
cases brought by the Army have accused SOF of accounting improprieties. 29

(9) Because foes may not be clearly defined, there is a pervasive ambiguity to LIC. When SOF are used in these situations, there is no guarantee of success or of popular sentiments in support of U.S. involvement. A democratically-based Army such as ours reflects those feelings; military leadership, then, has little desire to engage forces in what may be politically "loaded" events. Within the military, there is acute awareness of this issue for no one wants association with a botched operation which embarrasses our country.

High-profile special operations can make or break careers, within and without the military. For instance, it is not hard to imagine how the 1980 Presidential election could have been affected by a successful rescue of the U.S. hostages held in Iran. It takes courage to take the risks of special operations; they are high-risk, high-gain affairs. 30 Though SOF units are willing to take the risks in the field, our political and military leaders must develop a better understanding of SOF limitations and capabilities to be able to use them with wisdom. 31

29 See Washington Post, op. cit.


31 In retrospective looks at Vietnam, some military leaders have criticized what they saw as excessive civilian control of a military problem. On the other hand, few civilian leaders of consequence had developed an understanding of the nature of the
making for today's special operations missions may be quite time-compressed, so it is imperative that political leaders be informed and prepared for SOF contingencies.\(^\text{32}\)

(10) Elites run counter to the precepts of a democratic society, so they create special assimilation problems within the military. Elitism, to some observers, can damage overall troop morale by focusing attention on a few and spiriting away the best talent and most "warrior-oriented" men from line units. For the types of operations SOF conduct, however, exceptional training and high morale is essential, because SOF must feel that they are capable of incredible feats. When exceptional men are pooled and trained together, elitist attitudes are difficult to avoid.\(^\text{33}\) Conventional commanders would rather not allow their best soldiers to follow the siren song and attraction of SF, Rangers, or Delta -- it is in their parochial interest, then, to reduce elites to a common denominator. SF, for example, takes only Sargeants (E-6's) and above; these quality NCO's could fill manpower slots in the mainstream. Yet, conventional leadership can be incredulous that

conflict comprehensive enough to offer something different. As U.S. military commitments stepped-up, the special warfare community, which probably could have offered alternative approaches to the conflict, became even more circumscribed by the bureaucracy.

\(^\text{32}\) For example, Britain's Margaret Thatcher is involved in some SAS training operations. By contrast, American President Jimmy Carter did not make his first visit to Delta Force's Fort Bragg headquarters until after the failure of the Iran mission.

\(^\text{33}\) See Cohen's *Commandos and Politicians* and Roger Beaumont's *Military Elites* for further analysis of the elite factor.
SOF acceptance standards are too high for many men within the military mainstream. As Donald Duncan pointed out about the low acceptance rates into SF during the early 1960's:

Regular Brass refused to believe that such a large percentage of men in the Regular Army were academically unqualified and decided that the fault lay with inferior instruction.34

In the 1970's, Colonel Charlie Beckwith even encountered resistance within the special warfare community in his efforts to recruit for Delta Force, apparently because of fears that the new unit might drain other special operations units. Such fears, then, are not endemic only to conventional forces.35

Symbols of elitism, however, have always been anathema to the mainstream. President John F. Kennedy's sanction of the wearing of the green beret by SF was an official, albeit civilian, legitimation of an elite symbol abolished during the 1950's, ironically by Kennedy's Special Group (Counterinsurgency) Chairman, General Maxwell Taylor.36 Since most military leaders were unreceptive to Kennedy's counterinsurgency overtures anyway, his sanction of the beret must have further irritated traditionalists. Considering Colonel Darby's eschewment of a Ranger beret during WWII and longstanding Army proscriptions against special headgear and other elite symbols, distinctive berets probably provoked resentment for SF by conventional forces, some of whom lampooned

34 Duncan, op. cit., p. 191.
36 Blaufarb, op. cit., pp. 79-80.
the SF "green beanies." As a way of watering down an exclusive symbol, military leaders later allowed other military SOF and even airborne units to wear various types of berets. Such symbols undoubtedly have created assimilation problems for SOF.

(11) It seems that the foundations of modern warfare rest upon traditional or European thought, that is, upon the reading of Clausewitz. Although Clausewitz's intentions could be debated, the modern applications have been clear. From an American perspective, his adage about war as a continuation of politics by other means has probably been considered an aberration, because we seem to consider warfare to be an abhorrent state. Perhaps Clausewitz did not see the total application of national resources as the final extension of politics. Whatever the case, SOF operations seem to devolve from a different perspective, one which places more emphasis on the individual, the shrewdness of leaders, the psychological strength of adversaries, and an indirect approach to warfare. The writings of Chinese author Sun Tzu on warfare seem closely aligned with SOF activities. Mao Tse-Tung drew heavily on Sun Tzu for his principles of guerrilla warfare and People's War, as did Ho Chi Minh and General Giap in Vietnam. Perhaps,

37 David Stirling, founder of the British Special Air Service, discovered that a distinguishing beret promoted resentment by regular soldiers (and started many a bar fight to boot). See Cohen, op. cit., p. 55.

then, Asian thought is more applicable to SOF than is Western.

Special operations have been described as "a form of military judo," an apt description in light of the previous assertions. It seems that martial arts, and perhaps martial qualities, which reflect and deflect tensions between humans at the personal conflict level, become tempered in American society. SOF operations demand an understanding of individual and group motivations, and they are likely to involve personal combat. Not surprisingly, many SOF personnel are not only trained extensively in hand-to-hand combat but also seem to operate with a philosophy similar to Asian martial artists.

As an impetus to Asia's martial traditions, Sun Tzu's The Art of War could be considered the philosophical stimulus to special warfare. To quote Sun Tzu:

All warfare is based on deception. Therefore, when capable, feign incapacity; when active, inactivity. When near, make it appear that you are far away; when far away, that you are near.

For Sun Tzu, weapons were less important than deception and attacking the enemy's strategy and mind: "weapons are ominous tools to be used only when there is no alternative." Sun Tzu could be considered the first written proponent of psychological

39 Interview # 1, Wilson, op. cit.

40 The second part of this assertion must be considered speculation drawn from personal experiences and reflections from interviews with SOF soldiers.

41 Sun Tzu, op. cit., p. 66.

42 Sun Tzu, p. 40.
warfare. He suggested that one should "anger his general and confuse him. Pretend inferiority and encourage his arrogance." Considering longstanding American military successes and general battlefield superiority in Vietnam, it should be apparent that the National Liberation Front, General Giap, and the North Vietnamese Politburo understood Sun Tzu and the political and psychological dimensions of the Vietnam conflict.

Long before American SOF or modern commandos emerged, Sun Tzu's philosophy had given rise to an unusual breed of adherents in Japan known as "ninja." Their art of ninjitsu, also known as "the art of invisibility," emphasized stealth and surprise, deception and diversion, patience and mental strength, and physical prowess. Ninja were utilized frequently by warlords during the internecine conflicts which shattered Japan between 1300-1700 A.D. They played roles as intelligence and counter-intelligence agents, assassins, terrorists, guerrillas, spearheads for conventional attacks, unconventional (behind-the-lines) forces, and psychological warriors.

Ninja, who were masters of a dizzying array of weaponry and a plethora of disguises, accomplished their wide variety of missions because they were supremely flexible and adaptable

43 Sun Tzu, p. 67. Samuel Griffith's commentary on p. 53-54 gave me the clues.

44 Though scholars have debated their origins, most believe that ninja found their principles through reading Sun Tzu. See chapter 1 of Andrew Adams, Ninja: The Invisible Assassins. Ohara Publications, Inc.: Los Angeles, CA, 1970.

45 Ibid.
warriors. One day a ninja might appear as a priest, another as an itinerant farmer -- consider the similarity of the Viet Cong, farmer by day, guerrilla by night. Unlike revolutionaries, ninja were not absorbed by ideological and philosophical concerns, and they generally operated as direct action elements at the behest of the warlord who had their allegiance.

Reviewing ninja roles and missions, it would seem that SOF have much more in common with these ancient shadow warriors than with modern conventional soldiers. Unlike the ninja, American SOF have adopted advisory roles in which nation-building efforts may require civic action and training missions. Nonetheless, Sun Tzu's aphorisms are as easily applied to SOF as to feudal Japanese ninja -- they certainly have not been lost on today's terrorists and guerrillas. A pertinent quote from Sun Tzu can be found for almost every SOF operating characteristic or individual trait discussed in this and the following chapter.

While these characteristics are not representative of all those which distinguish SOF and conventional forces, they seem to be the most critical. Since SOF are dependent upon individuals and units which are characteristically small and elite, the third chapter will take a look at the type of individual involved in special operations. In the process, it will develop the traits and attributes which make the SOF soldier adaptable to changing requirements and new environments.
Chapter III. The SOF Individual

In special operations, the individual is the essence of the operational art. Therefore, this chapter will attempt to outline the unusual traits which may best describe the SOF soldier and which seem to distinguish him from the conventional soldier. It will also examine distinctions within SOF which may provide a useful framework for analysis for determining how SOF assets are best applied to LIC.

What attracts men to special operations forces? Is it the rugged training, the esprit de corps and elite nature, the challenges and built-in dangers of their missions, or a fierce warrior orientation? Or are they comfortable with an outlaw image as discussed in Chapter II, situated on the fringe of military norms? The answer lies probably in some combination of these factors coupled with a desire to exceed or to avoid what they may see as the limitations of modern conventional soldiering.

SOF often attract the daring, the adventurous, the innovative, and the physically tough: a macho image, some would say self-image, surrounds these elite forces. The SOF mystique has captured the imagination of practitioners, proponents, and, periodically, the American public, just as it did for SF benefactor John F. Kennedy.\(^1\) To the detriment of SOF, this image can exceed reality and fuel misconceptions which are, in turn, perpetuated in the public mind.

\(^1\) Blaufarb's Counterinsurgency Era, Hilsman's To Move a Nation, Schlesinger's A Thousand Days, and Halberstam's The Best and the Brightest all discuss Kennedy's fascination (and the public's) with Special Forces.
and the military mainstream by films such as those of the Rambo ("First Blood") series.

Although SF has tried to lose the "killer" image, the brutal commando skills and the violent aspects of their operations portrayed in films of this genre seem imbedded in our national consciousness. The image has not been lost on conventional forces, either, who have often viewed SOF as "... good killers but bad officer candidates." Movies in which commandos eliminate guerrilla and terrorist "punks" (as would Dirty Harry with criminals) may serve as a societal catharsis for cultural frustrations over LIC, but they tend to reduce complex problems to a simplistic "good-guy, bad-guy" equation. An American "Manichean outlook," as one SOF proponent called it, may frustrate American efforts with LIC, because LIC cannot be reduced to such simplistic terms.

David Halberstam wryly described SF as "...the extraordinary physical specimens and intellectual PhD's swinging from trees, speaking Russian and Chinese, eating snake meat and other fauna at night, springing counter-ambushes on unwary Asian ambushers who had read Mao and Giap but not Hilsman and Rostow." Certainly fanciful and somewhat tongue-in-cheek, his words, nonetheless, probably mirrored an American public perception in the 1960's that SF were a sort of modern-day Daniel Boone. In that sense,

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3 Jannarone, op. cit., p. 10.
4 Halberstam, op. cit., p. 154.
SF may have appealed to an American "frontier mentality" and a national self-image of an adaptable, resolute, and solution-oriented people. In their heyday, SF developed a cult status -- a popular song and a movie starring John Wayne extolled their skills. Even G.I. Joe joined Special Forces. Despite the absence of a public relations campaign as accompanied SF in the 1960's and the extraordinary secrecy surrounding counter-terrorist units, it is intriguing that today's children thrill to a G.I. Joe doll who is a member of Delta Force.

The modern "men of the Green Beret" are not much different from their 1960's predecessors, but today's SF have received far less publicity than they did during Kennedy's counterinsurgency era. The special warfare community has filled out and become more diverse since the first build-up, and it now encompasses a wide array of talented men. Why are these men, among our national military assets, most apt to discern important distinctions and function well in LIC situations?

(1) SOF operate at the most personal levels of warfare. The SOF soldier's mindset and approach to problems is similar to the feudal Japanese ninja's. Like the ninja, the SOF soldier's training can be exceptionally demanding and harsh, so it promotes an attitude which can overcome the seeming insurmountable nature of some of his tasks.

(2) Individuals and closely-knit teams comprise SOF. Self-reliance is their trademark, individualism a byproduct.

5 Cohen, op. cit., p. 51.

6 Duncan's New Legions, op. cit., stirred these personal recollections.
Some SOF soldiers are attuned to a political, psychological, and social "feel" for their missions, a concept uncharacteristic of conventional forces.

Creativity and innovativeness are SOF hallmarks which may lead to friction with conventional forces by working against standard procedures and traditional viewpoints.

Operational and individual flexibility is endemic to SOF. They are unbound by tradition and adaptable to changing mission requirements and new tasks.

Each of these traits will be reviewed carefully.

In describing the type of individual best suited to SF, Douglas Blaufarb noted that "... sought men ...(who had) a liking for personal combat." In that sense, the conventional soldier may no longer be considered a true "warrior," since he is likely to be far removed from killing the enemy. Although he may be the arbiter of his own fate through manipulation of machinery, the conventional soldier is more dependent upon weapons technology than on human capabilities. Modern conventional warfare, it seems, has become so depersonalized that there is no need to "know the enemy," only to know his technical capabilities.

As modern warfare goes, then, SOF would seem to be an anachronism, albeit with a modern twist. Although the SOF soldier may

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7 Blaufarb, op. cit., p. 79.

8 See Gwynne Dyer's War, Dorsey Press: Homewood, IL, 1985, pp. 156-172, which offers an interesting assessment of the changing roles of the soldier and the nature of the "military ethic" produced by the impact of modern technology on warfare.
engage in close-quarters combat, expectations placed on SOF (at least as applied to commando and counter-terror forces) have raised them, ironically, to a level of automaton-like efficiency which is quite impersonal. Before the advent of counter-terrorist units, however, Roger Beaumont discussed SF and other elites in the context of this cybernetic trend in his book, Military Elites. In an age of revolution, terrorism, and subversion, the need for discrete applications of force, represented by the deadly efficiency of commando units such as Delta Force, British SAS, and German GSG9, may be said to be indicative of the conditions of our time. Nonetheless, SF and the non-combat SOF units need such exceptional interpersonal skills and penetrating insight that a cybernetic label seems inappropriate to them.

Chapter II drew parallels between special operations, the philosophy of Sun Tzu, and ninjitsu, asserting that ninja practitioners are the historical antecedents to modern SOF. An aura of secrecy which surrounded the ninja warrior promoted misconceptions and elevated him to an almost mythological stature -- which held that the ninja was capable of flight, invisibility, and other superhuman feats. The ninja also exploited their knowledge of deception and diversion to contribute to their surreal image and effectiveness. For example, ninja frequently wore disguises and spread rumors and propaganda; they even played on popular Japanese

fears about demons by occasionally wearing devil masks. Like modern counter-terrorist units and CIA operatives, ninja also relied heavily upon anonymity and secrecy.

Germane to the conditions of civil war enveloping Japan at the time, ninja were incredibly well-rounded troops developed from Sun Tzu's emphasis on the utility of secret agents, what might be considered the original "Fifth Columnists." The ninja's incessant physical training and incredible variety of skills made him a combination of modern-day CIA case officer, SF soldier, and Ranger, a multi-talented individual who believed nothing to be impossible. SOF origins and institutional development have organized SOF around certain specialties (despite the confusion discussed in Chapter I), just as ninja clans specialized in different aspects of ninjitsu. Nonetheless, a cross-section of SOF skills bears a remarkable resemblance in toto to the more holistic art of ninjitsu.

(2) SOF are made up of closely-knit, highly-integrated teams which require soldiers to have a refined sense of teamwork and an ability to complement others' special skills. Coordinated effort is the essence of strike and counter-terror operations performed

10 See Adams, op. cit.. Similarly, General Blackburn's WWII guerrillas in Luzon stirred up local fears about vampires by puncturing the necks of dead Japanese soldiers. From interview, Blackburn, op. cit..

11 Sun Tzu, op. cit., pp. 146-149.

12 Adams, op. cit., p. 106.
by Rangers, SEALs, or Delta Force. SF is organized around the nucleus of a twelve-man A-Team. Since SF cross-train in another specialty and may require wide latitude in the field, a self-reliant individual may be even more important to SF than to strike forces. According to a British SAS soldier, the SAS considers self-reliance critical to special operations success because soldiers exhibiting this trait usually work equally well individually or in groups.\textsuperscript{13} In special operations, operators may be distanced from the command and control mechanism, wield great field authority, and lack an outside support network, so for all SOF endeavors, self-reliance is a singularly important individual attribute.

This SOF trait, however, can lead to a feeling of independence or individualism uncommon to conventional forces. SOF soldiers have been known to refuse orders on occasion; they may ask for such refined operational details that SOF may seem to be "splitting hairs," but the nature of their operations demands precision and precise detail.\textsuperscript{14} Some of these instances undoubtedly have resulted from a conventional misunderstanding of SOF capabilities, but, to be sure, uncooperative and super-inquisitive SOF soldiers have probably aroused conventional antipathy toward SOF.

Besides an independent orientation, SOF soldiers may retain an individualism which runs counter to a conventional training process that strips individual civilian identities and encourages


\textsuperscript{14} Interview, Farrell, op. cit. Also, interview, Custer, op. cit.
identification with the group and the greater whole of the service. Elite forces seem to provide outlets for individualists who might see themselves encumbered by a ponderous and stratified bureaucracy. This attraction leads SOF soldiers to eschew what they would consider to be some of the more mundane tasks of modern conventional soldiering such as management and finance. An overwhelming mission orientation, a common trait among SOF soldiers, drives SOF to associate with like-minded thinkers and paradoxically propels them away from the very skills they need to promote their acceptance by the mainstream.

(3) Because special operations requirements continually evolve, the special operator tends to be an innovator who sometimes circumnavigates bureaucratic impediments to secure his needs. For example, Air Force SOF at the "skunk works" of Hurlburt Field have developed much of the specialized radio equipment used by SOF airmen. Likewise, for the Son Tay raid and the Iran rescue operation, SOF soldiers modified existing equipment such as M-79 grenade vests and ordered other special gear, relying heavily on the Sears and Roebuck catalogue and other outside sources.

15 See Duncan, op. cit.. His description of the dehumanizing induction and training process is interesting -- but he omits discussion of the distinguishing character of the SF soldier. See also Dyer, Chapter 5, op. cit..

16 "Skunk Works" Armed Forces Journal International, June 1986, pp. 76-77. Similarly, an Army SOF aviator pointed out a strut which he had modified for the UH-60 Blackhawk used for SOF missions and informed me that Army SOF aviators often have developed features for SOF missions which the aircraft manufacturers overlooked.
As suggested in Chapter II, against a relatively inflexible bureaucratic backdrop, SOF creativity can prove irksome to soldiers accustomed to going "by-the-book."

SOF operators are also known for their creative and intelligent approaches to field mission requirements. One well-publicized example is that of the Ranger officer during the Grenada operation who, unable to communicate through his radio equipment, called in fire support by dialing Fort Bragg on AT&T telephone lines. In the conventional military, soldiers are taught to follow the manual, not to arrive at their own conclusions or to develop their own solutions; SOF self-reliance encourages individual initiative. As one SOF soldier put it, "the U.S. Army does not recognize brilliance or individuals... it does not teach its soldiers to think." His assertion was not meant to be harsh or immodest, merely to indicate that a significant difference between SOF and conventional forces is that SOF allow far more room for individual creativity and thought. As pointed out in Chapter II, SOF rely on NCO's and enlisted men for their operations. Therefore, these individuals must be intellectually capable of analyzing complex problems and attempting to find solutions for them, sometimes in the field.

(4) Because SOF soldiers in SF, PSYOPS, and Civil Affairs tend

17 For examples, see Schemmer, op. cit., and Beckwith, op. cit..
18 Non-attributable interview.
to be adept at assimilating foreign cultures, they may be asked to promote harmony between host governments, military forces, and indigenous populations. SOF individuals often develop a feel for the political, social, and psychological nuances of their operational areas. SF and Civil Affairs troops may adopt local customs or participate in local rituals periodically to improve interaction with indigenous peoples. For instance, SF soldiers working with the Montagnards of South Vietnam often wore jewelry which was given to them as a gift to symbolize the friendship between the tribe and the Americans. Such adornments often met with scorn from conventional forces in Vietnam. 19

SOF sometimes delve into subject areas not normally associated with the military domain. For example, the author once listened to two SF NCO's carrying on a highly-articulate discussion about religion in the Third World. In dealing with foreign nationals, conventional soldiers would be less likely than SOF to take non-military factors such as religion into account. Sensitivity to tribal idiosyncrasies and what may seem to be minor local considerations could be essential to the success of SF, PSYOPs, and Civil Affairs missions.

Patience is an important trait for SOF in advisory roles, one more common to SF and Civil Affairs soldiers than to strike

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19 Interview, Lunger, op. cit. During Vietnam, many conventional officers were also frustrated by the unkempt and "unmilitary" appearances of SF troops, referring to them disparagingly as "long hairs." Perhaps they meant to equate SF with the counter-culture hippies, who tended to be anti-establishment and anti-military.
forces; a cultural perception that American "know-how" is preeminent stimulates a dilemma as to whether Americans should take the lead and dominate host approaches or allow an indigenous solution to problem areas. Long-term cross-cultural contact, particularly in a hostile environment, requires a special breed of soldier who reflects and thinks carefully before he acts. Patience, then, should be sought as a distinctive individual trait in selecting men for advisory roles in protracted conflicts, mobile training teams, and civic action projects.20

(5) In special operations, each operation is likely to be a completely new enterprise, a unique experience which may make irrelevant preparations based on previous operations. Without a flexibility of mind and doctrine, SOF may be locked into essentially bureaucratic approaches, a formula which could lead to disaster in special operations. Among SOF traits, flexibility and adaptability are the most important to this study.

In their advisory role, SOF are the "eyes and ears" of an American presence, functioning, as suggested in Chapter II, like CIA-field operatives. When SOF are assigned to CIA operational control, flexibility is needed for a dual allegiance and adaptability for interaction with civilian professionals. Even when that situation does not exist, SOF must breach traditional reconnaissance concepts to act symbiotically with intelligence assets in discerning and reporting field developments. Adapting to

intelligence roles in a foreign environment can be difficult, but SOF soldiers have accomplished the transition many times.\(^2\)\

SOF have usually adapted to new missions successfully, even those far apart from their conceptual basis. For example, SF elements were specially trained for the Son Tay raid in 1970; more recently, an SF contingent under the command of Colonel Robert Mountel was organized for counter-terror missions during the interim development of Delta Force. As Chapter I emphasized, Ranger concepts have been so intermingled with those of SF that commando operations are often assumed to be an integral part of the SF mission. But as other authors have pointed out, alternative forces were unavailable at those junctures where specialized missions were needed, so SF seemed to be the logical choice for the operations.

The nature of Ranger and other strike operations seems to encourage an aggressive approach among these forces, but we should not assume that they may adopt the "let's get on with it" attitude, for Rangers have proven to be patient, reflective, and adaptable as well. For example, at least one Ranger battalion now trains in guerrilla and counter-guerrilla tactics (though not organization and training of such forces as conducted by SF).\(^2\)

Moreover, some Rangers have cross-trained with SF, earning both

\(^2\) \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 187-190.
\(^2\) \textit{Gung-Ho}, op. cit., pp. 82-83.
the Ranger tab and the SF beret. 23

On the whole, however, SF soldiers tend to be older, wiser, more reflective, and more aware of the political nature of special operations than are Rangers. 24 That is not to say that SF are better soldiers, just that there are often age and experience differences between these forces which suit SF for advisory roles in protracted conflicts. In contrast, direct action missions in most cases would best be conducted by Rangers and other strike forces.

Although there are organizational and operational differences between SF and Rangers, their talents are not mutually exclusive. Individual cases support this notion. For example, Colonel Charlie Beckwith commanded line (conventional) units, was commandant of the Ranger school, worked in SF, and oversaw the development of Delta Force. 25 To fill such a variety of roles, he must have been quite adaptable. Lt. Colonel Arthur "Bull" Simons, who had a Ranger background and led some Asian theater commando operations in WWII, ran the clandestine White Star program in Laos in 1959-60 and later led the raid on Son Tay prison in 1970. After his military retirement, Colonel Simons would lead a group of civilians into Iran on a celebrated mission to free two illegally detained employees of an American corporation. If the portrayal of Colonel Simons in a popular book is accurate, he was an extremely adaptable


24 Interview # 2, Wilson, op. cit..

25 See Beckwith, op. cit..
individual, especially considering that his role in Iran was not military in orientation.26

The incredible operational detail needed for raids and other SOF missions demands flexibility, for special operations requirements are difficult to forecast. Indeed, a miscalculation during the Son Tay mission landed part of the assault force in the wrong compound, but both assault teams reacted calmly and carried on with their missions.27 American approaches to special operations have been noted for their ad hoc nature, that is, capabilities and coordination have been developed from a standing start, especially for the hostage rescue/counter-terror mission. It may be that American culture contributes to ad hoc approaches to special operations, for we seem to be an impatient people who would rather not tackle the fine operational detail needed for direct action missions and the frustrations which may ensue from advisory missions in foreign lands.

The flexibility of SOF individuals and units dovetails nicely with adaptability and improves the prospects for success in special operations missions. Until recently, however, the lack of a joint training and command structure for SOF units has failed to maximize SOF flexibility and adaptability. Such an organization now exists (JSOC), but it is oriented primarily toward direct action counterterrorist missions, which are only


27 See Schemmer, op. cit.
one facet of the LIC challenge.

The SOF attributes or traits discussed in this chapter could have served as the basis for the entire thesis, but alone they explain only part of a complex issue. As the introduction and earlier chapters have suggested, LIC and special operations are closely tied to the efforts of individuals, so it is imperative that we understand personal traits which tend to distinguish SOF from other DoD forces and which make SOF suitable for LIC. For the SOF selection process, certain attributes are more desirable than others and should be the subject of careful analysis.
Conclusion and Policy Implications

Since Chapter III addressed SOF traits, it is appropriate to begin this final section with an examination of the SOF selection process. In an historical sense, the 1980's military build-up presents similarities to that of the 1960's, because both relied on solid backing by political proponents, including White House supporters, and have been characterized by a relatively quick expansionary process (the current expansion is ongoing). Some SOF advocates feel that the recruitment of large numbers of new troops may detract from the quality of soldier selected for SOF, and they argue that special operations is a sophisticated, professional enterprise ill-suited to amateurs. SF probably suffered this overexpansionary fate in the 1960's, as it ballooned from 1500 to 9000 soldiers in one year.1 One author has suggested that many SF soldiers of the 1960's "deplored the fast build-up, the lowering of standards, the end of exclusivity, the publicity, the destruction of eliteness except in name."2

Some observers have suggested that elites by their nature cannot be so large anyway, arguing that at some point quality suffers and effectiveness declines.3 It seems that the talents needed to fulfill SOF expansionary goals exist in our society, but the qualities which SOF seek are not those ordinarily found in conventional forces. Even when desirable SOF traits are found

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2 Duncan, op. cit., p. 195.
3 Interviews, Farrell, Wilson # 2, op. cit..
in line unit soldiers, they may be camouflaged by the requirements of conventional and strategic warfare, or those individuals may be inaccessible to SOF recruiters. For example, when the Iran mission requirements dictated that Delta Force acquire a soldier fluent in Farsi who could serve as a DoD penetration agent, an Air Force sergeant was discovered who fit their needs.4 The search for such an individual, however, was expedited because the hostage matter was considered one of national urgency. During non-crisis periods, the military recruitment pool is unlikely to be so open.

SOF should seek particularly needed skills from a broader cross-section of the population outside of the military, including from government bureaucracies. Useful linguistic capabilities and applicable ethnic backgrounds should be sought (e.g., Hispanic community for Latin America orientation), especially for PSYOPs, Civil Affairs, and SF. Perhaps even women should be recruited for some roles in which there is little likelihood of combat. In that sense, Donald Duncan's assertion that SF recruitment in the 1960's was deliberately discriminatory against blacks is alarming — such a bias would eliminate an important recruiting base and it would obviously violate civil rights legislation.5 Though bureaucratic and institutional impediments might stifle creative recruiting approaches, SOF proponents should consider any novel

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4 Beckwith, op. cit., p. 212. As Beckwith noted, this individual demonstrated great courage (and adaptability as well), for he had no prior SOF or intelligence experience.

5 Duncan, op. cit., pp. 195-197.
and feasible recruiting efforts to expand their potential manpower base while avoiding a high-profile recruiting effort (as in the 1960's) which might seem to compete with the mainstream.

Since these elite forces are likely to be utilized and may be depleted in conflict situations, they can suffer from what Roger Beaumont called the "selection-destruction cycle." An example of Beaumont's cycle would be the use of SF in Vietnam on high-risk combat missions and in village defense operations against numerically superior NLF/NVA forces. These missions killed off many highly-skilled SF soldiers. As Bernard Fall concluded, "A dead Special Forces sergeant is not spontaneously replaced by his own social environment. A dead revolutionary usually is." To avoid unnecessary attrition of SOF talent and to employ them with wisdom, political and military leadership must be aware of the unique qualities and capabilities which characterize SOF.

As Colonel Beckwith demonstrated with Delta Force recruitment, the SOF selection process can be improved by the formulation of a psychological profile and a list of desirable attributes sought for the various SOF units. Such a profile might be enhanced by the study of common philosophical ground shared by the Japanese ninja and SOF. Although all three chapters of this thesis have


pointed out distinctions within the U.S. special warfare community and identified peculiarities of SOF units, it may also be that many SOF skills could be consolidated and integrated, as with the British SAS and SBS (Special Boat Service), which perform operations similar to those of the Delta Force, Rangers, and SEALs. Like SAS, American SOF could move through training rotations, for example, six months in counter-terrorism (shooting house drills, etc.) and another six months in reconnaissance and intelligence collection.8 Despite some concerns that certain missions may require great specialization (e.g., counter-terror), this tendency may actually detract from American SOF capabilities, because it pools too many talented individuals who conceivably could take on other missions. In that sense, the development of a more holistic approach to SOF skills may be beneficial.

Obviously, the difficult skills required for SOF aviation would not be easily transferable nor would those of PSYOPs and Civil Affairs forces. The latter two groups are too lean already considering the vastness of LIC, and they must be brought into the mainstream of the current SOF renaissance -- even though they do not fit traditional conceptions of special operations and may develop as entities distinct from other SOF. Although integration might serve as a long-range boost to U.S. special operations capabilities, parochialism, institutional longevity, and pride might preclude such an effort. On the other hand, LIC challenges probably can be handled effectively by the current array of

8 Interview, Lunger, op. cit.
forces, assuming a completion of Secretary Weinberger's mandated expansion, organizational improvements, and a conceptual synthesis at the National Security Council level.

The above requirements will be difficult to achieve, primarily because the DoD under which SOF are subsumed places strategic and conventional warfare at the top of its list of priorities. Due to a highly capable Soviet strategic and conventional threat to U.S. national security, DoD concerns are realistically skewed toward high-intensity missions. In that context, SOF are assigned important tactical and strategic roles, but "dual-hatting" SOF units with LIC and high-intensity missions may detract from preparations for either. Perhaps certain special warfare units could be designated and trained specifically for conventional conflicts, and, if necessary, provide support for SOF units in low-intensity activities. As General Yarborough put it, "Training for the conventional mission is a full-time job." The same logic could be applied to SOF preparations for LIC.

SOF may not even be the only military forces required for effective U.S. approaches to LIC; as the conflict scale moves upward, conventional forces such as Marines, airborne units, Army light infantry divisions, or forces attached to the USCENTCOM (formerly the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force), may prove useful for situations in which low-profile special operations cannot defend U.S. strategic interests. Just as SOF would support conventional combat operations in wartime, conventional forces

9 Interview, Yarborough, op. cit.
may be needed to support SOF or even to resolve certain problems, such as the Navy's satisfactory role in ending the Achille Lauro episode. On the lower end of the spectrum, SOF are only the military part of a synergistic approach which requires a close coordination between SOF, intelligence assets, and other U.S. government agencies which may play roles abroad. At all conflict levels, there must be pre-existing relationships and thorough interaction between government agencies, SOF, and conventional forces so that smooth transitions from one emphasis to another can be effected.

As with the relationship between conventional warfare and tactical nuclear war, no line of demarcation clearly separates LIC from either peace or conventional warfare. Since Americans seem to be obsessed by categories and classification, we would like to "pigeonhole" each challenge. Our chief adversary, the Soviets, sees no such distinctions, preferring to view warfare in its totality. Leninist political warfare, then, reflects the state of "peace," a Byzantine concept which is totally alien to Americans who tend to view warfare as a black and white dichotomy. In American minds, the nation is either at war or at peace. It is time to shed this simplistic perspective in favor of a realistic appraisal of the changes which have occurred since World War II. As Colonel Dallas Cox put it, "We are at war now."10

Director of Central Intelligence William Casey has argued

that the Soviets are utilizing a resource war strategy in which surrogate entities wage covert warfare against the United States.\textsuperscript{11}

Likewise, former Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Lt. General Samuel V. Wilson, USA (ret'd), has argued to the effect that Soviet strategy is maritime in orientation and aimed at critical chokepoints on world sealanes which could deny resources to the United States.\textsuperscript{12} What these men are saying is that the Soviets have adapted to world changes and are employing a complex strategy which has a definite LIC component. The Soviets probably have little desire or reason to engage us directly, where we are strong. Sun Tzu said, "When he concentrates, prepare against him; where he is strong, avoid him."\textsuperscript{13} Our deterrence strategy, in its conventional and strategic sense, has worked, and we have avoided "war" as we understand it. But Sun Tzu also said:

\begin{quote}
To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill...Thus, those skilled in war subdue the enemy's army without battle.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

This seems to be the essence of Soviet strategy toward the United States.

To our detriment, no single organization currently has responsibility for studying and preparing for the new reality of

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\item \textsuperscript{11} "Casey Speaks on Intelligence Role in Countering Terrorism," \textit{Foreign Intelligence Literary Scene}. National Intelligence Study Center, Publisher. Washington, D.C.: January 1986.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Interview # 1, Wilson, op. cit.. See also Barnett, op. cit., pp. 191-194.
\item \textsuperscript{13} p. 67, Sun Tzu, op. cit..
\item \textsuperscript{14} Sun Tzu, pp. 77, 79.
\end{itemize}
LIC, because it is a still-evolving phenomenon full of ambiguity and tied closely to political change. Dr. Sam Sarkesian has suggested a number of organizational changes which could vastly improve U.S. capabilities for coordinating its assets for LIC.15 Yet, without strategic vision, an organizational "fix" may prove to be ineffective. The American people, its leaders, and the pluralist system do not seem well-suited to seeking long-term goals. A centralized system such as that of the Soviet Union probably finds the task far less foreboding. Moreover, our own preconceptions make it difficult to accept that other nations may have strategic aims, long-term plans, or visions of the future. To affect these built-in limitations, only effective American leadership can clearly convey the national security ramifications of LIC to the American public and stimulate the development of a successful approach.

In the 1960's, the Army's Special Forces probably appealed to another American peculiarity, a problem-solving mentality which drives a cultural perception that our national resources (human and technical) can reduce any problem to its essentials and solve it.16 LIC may prove to be insoluble, so we should not look on SOF as a panacea for or solution to LIC challenges. American culture also seems to yearn for distinct endings, a tendency especially evident when its military forces are committed to conflicts. A "win v. lose" notion eschewing any middle ground

15 See the several publications of Sarkesian, all op. cit.
will frustrate American approaches to LIC, which may not have a distinct ending or allow the emergence of clear winners or losers. The deterrence concept, usually discussed in the strategic warfare context, may be difficult to apply to LIC because cost-benefit ratios cannot be weighed easily at the lower end of the conflict spectrum. Yet, sophisticated skills for LIC could preclude the breakout of higher-intensity conflicts, so "deterrence" need not disappear from the lexicon at low conflict levels. LIC could be described as a problem of "conflict management," as international relationists have put it, in which we strive to keep conflict problems at or below a simmering point.

SOF have been at the forefront of U.S. efforts to cope with newly perceived threats, an unsurprising situation given their adaptability. Yet, no employment strategy has accompanied SOF expansions toward those threats. It is possible that the SOF adaptability trait has reduced the likelihood of the development of an employment strategy since SOF seem to fill preparedness gaps somewhat amorphously. The underlying reason for a lack of strategy is probably that despite a SOF "feel" for the political and psychological aspects of LIC, these forces cannot develop a strategy on their own. The U.S. Department of State, the Central Intelligence Agency, and all relevant government agencies must be brought to bear on this problem with some form of coordinated effort.

As with the British SAS, American SOF go through a continuous process of justifying their existence, because they seem to need
a raison d'être. As suggested earlier, this process might be tied to the cyclical developments of SOF and perhaps to periodically aggressive U.S. foreign policies. Both the current and 1960's periods have been marked by an overwhelmingly singular focus -- at the expense of viewing the totality of the problem. For SF in the 1960's, revolution and counter-insurgency were the watchwords; in the 1980's, terrorism has impelled the development of Delta Force, a counter-terror SEAL team, and a joint command for strike assets.

This myopic approach seems to appeal to the American public, which apparently needs to perceive a concrete threat (i.e., the terrorists are out to get us). Even during Vietnam, government reports emphasized the terror aspect of VC operations, often ignoring their political and civic action efforts as though the NLF could have had no appeal without the effective use of terrorism. If we maintain this limited perspective, we will continue to have serious problems with future conflicts, especially when we attempt to support counter-revolutionary systems fighting communist cadres.

The argument of this paper is not that a conventionally and strategically oriented DoD is incapable of successfully integrating its assets for LIC. Nor does it contend that the skills required for LIC cannot be found among or developed by conventional soldiers. But the American military reflects the mainstream of the society that spawns it, so cultural notions support traditional conventional military outlooks and discourage an understanding of unclear
threats.

SOF defy the unknown and risk the unattempted, and they have found themselves on the cutting edge of approaches to new challenges. LIC is that new challenge. It is complex; it is difficult; it demands sophistication. Sun Tzu would have understood it instinctively. Some analysts feel that LIC is an abominable term, more likely to confuse than to clarify. But the phrase at least gives us a starting point and some frame of reference, a simple one which the American public might grasp. Special Operations Forces are a foundation upon which to build many of the skills needed to cope with low-intensity conflict, and they already represent our best military assets for dealing with this present and future danger.

Soviet LIC strategy is ominous. The U.S. would do well to heed Sun Tzu's counsel that "what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy." In the final analysis, however, our fate lies in our hands, not theirs. Pericles, the Athenian hero of Thucydide's Peloponnesian Wars, once addressed the Spartan maritime strategy by saying that "it is not the enemy's devices but our own blunders that we should fear most."
BIBLIOGRAPHY

The bibliography is divided into sections to facilitate faster research by others studying this area. Clear distinctions are not possible for categorizing all works, so sources are placed in sections most applicable to the purposes of the thesis. Particularly salient sources will be annotated in the notes.

I. Background Reading


I. (continued)


II. Low-Intensity Conflict

A. Vietnam and the Counterinsurgency Era


II. A. (continued)


B. American Culture, Intelligence, and Way of War

II. B. (continued)


II  C. The Evolution of Conflict


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II. C. (continued)


III. Military Special Operations Forces (SOF)

A. American SOF


III. A. (continued)


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III. A. (continued)


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III. A. (continued)


III. A. (continued)


B. Foreign Special Operations Forces and SOF-Related Subjects


Biography

Stephen L. Robinson was born 10 September 1961 in Kinston, North Carolina. The son of a Presbyterian minister and an elementary school teacher, he was raised in Charleston, West Virginia and in Richmond, Virginia. He attended Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia, studied abroad in Vienna, Austria, and worked as an intern at the United Nations-Vienna. He was graduated from Hampden-Sydney in May of 1983 with a B.A. in Political Science and History. During college summer breaks, he worked as a tennis professional in Abingdon, Virginia and in Richmond. After graduating from Hampden-Sydney, he taught tennis in Florida and Virginia until August of 1984. He then enrolled full-time at the University of Richmond, where he assisted Dr. William E. Walker with the Men's Tennis Program during 1984-85. He travelled to Europe during the summer of 1985 to play professional tennis in Holland, Switzerland, and France. He researched the thesis during the fall of 1985 and then returned to Florida in the spring to teach tennis at South Seas Plantation Resort on Captiva Island. His academic interests include foreign affairs, Asian studies, and national security. Other interests are athletics, physical fitness, martial arts, reading, music and travel.