

INTRODUCTION

Special Operations

Special operations have been a part of our military history since the colonial era. In every conflict since the Revolutionary War, the United States has employed special operations tactics and strategies to exploit an enemy's vulnerabilities. These operations have always been carried out by specially trained people with a remarkable inventory of skills.

More recent history has caused the United States to maintain specialized forces capable of performing extremely difficult, complex, and politically sensitive missions on short notice, in peace and war, anywhere in the world. In 1987, Congress mandated the creation of the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) with the responsibility to prepare and maintain combat-ready special operations forces (SOF) to successfully conduct special operations, including civil affairs (CA) and psychological operations (PSYOP).

Characteristics and Capabilities

U.S. SOF provide unique capabilities not found in other elements of the U.S. armed forces or those of other nations. While other U.S. military units can conduct special operations, and some other nations have special operations capabilities, no other force in the world has our range of capabilities, which include land, air, and maritime forces that can be employed either as joint- or single-service units.

Today's SOF are the product of an evolutionary process. The lessons learned from past operations and events, as well as the requirements of current



Courtesy: Robert Genat, Zone Five & NAVSPECWARCOM

SEALs operate in the most unforgiving environment, water.

missions and operations, have brought about a unique force with distinctive characteristics, capabilities, and limitations.

The characteristics of SOF personnel are shaped by the requirements of their missions and include foreign language capabilities; regional orientation; specialized equipment, training, and tactics; flexible force structure; and an understanding of the political context of their mission. These characteristics make SOF unique in the U.S. military

SOF Characteristics

- Mature professionals with leadership abilities
- Specialized skills, equipment, and tactics
- Regional focus
- Language skills
- Political and cultural sensitivity
- Small, flexible, joint-force structure



Members of the U.S. 22nd Special Tactics squadron and members of the United Kingdom Combat Control team perform a high altitude, low opening (HALO) jump.

and enable SOF personnel to work as effectively with civilian populations as they do with other military forces to influence situations favorably toward U.S. national interests. Because of these characteristics, SOF can be formed into small, versatile, self-contained units that have a number of important capabilities. They can:

- organize quickly and deploy rapidly to provide tailored responses to many different situations
- gain entry to and operate in hostile or denied areas
- provide limited security and medical support for themselves and those they support
- communicate worldwide with unit equipment
- live in austere, harsh environments without extensive support
- survey and assess local situations and report these assessments rapidly
- work closely with host nation military and civilian authorities and populations
- organize indigenous people into working teams to help solve local problems
- deploy at relatively low cost, with a low profile and less intrusive presence than larger conventional forces

Across the Spectrum of Conflict

Based on these capabilities, SOF provide the nation with rapidly deployable and flexible joint task forces for both war and peacetime activities. In peacetime, SOF can assist a nation in creating the conditions for stable development — thereby reducing the risk of or precluding armed conflict. By training indigenous forces to provide their own security, and using integrated CA and PSYOP programs to strengthen government infrastructures, small teams can help prevent local problems from developing into threats to internal and international stability. SOF work closely with the host nation government, military forces, and population to assist them in resolving their own problems. Their efforts to resolve or contain regional conflicts or respond to natural disasters may preclude, in some cases, the need to deploy large conventional forces.



301st PSYOP Company soldier passes out flyers to citizens of Brcko, Bosnia.

These same SOF teams often forge strong links with the military establishment and civilian groups with whom they come in contact. This can be of inestimable value to U.S. forces if they have to work later with these same organizations, either as coalition partners, or in localized combat operations. SOF contact with foreign military hierarchies is also an effective, low-cost means of cultivating respect for human rights and democratic values.

In war, SOF conduct operational and strategic missions that directly or indirectly support the joint force commander's (JFC's) campaign plan. SOF missions originate with the JFC – often with the advice of the joint force special operations component commander (JFSOCC) – and are directed toward exactly the same ends as the operations of conventional forces. It is as an integrated part of a joint or combined force that SOF prove of greatest assistance to the conventional commander.

SOF can help the JFC seize the initiative, reduce risk, facilitate maneuver, and achieve decisive results by attacking operational and strategic targets. SOF also can carry out PSYOP to deceive and demoralize the enemy. As force multipliers, SOF work with indigenous forces to increase their contribution to the campaign plan, and conduct coalition support to help integrate multinational forces into a cohesive, combined task force to carry out coalition goals. Additionally, CA and PSYOP can contribute directly to the commander's maneuverability by reducing the number of civilians on or near battlefield areas.

Additionally, SOF play a vital role in post-conflict operations. Many of the talents used in pre-conflict situations are applicable after fighting has ceased, and are directed toward establishing (or re-establishing) the infrastructure required for a peaceful, prosperous society. SOF training skills, coupled with CA and PSYOP expertise, help speed the return to normal conditions, thereby allowing conventional forces to quickly re-deploy.

SOF also can conduct stand-alone operations in situations where a small, discreet force provides the nation's leaders with options that fall somewhere between diplomatic efforts and the use of high-profile conventional forces. Moreover, the relatively small size and the capabilities of highly trained, joint SOF units enable them to react rapidly and provide the United States with options that limit the risk of escalation, which otherwise might accompany the commitment of larger conventional forces. Unconventional

warfare, direct action, and special reconnaissance missions, such as insurgency, counterterrorism, counterdrug activities, surgical counterproliferation, and counterinsurgency, may be handled best by such a force.



A Ranger from the 75th Ranger Regiment leads other Rangers in small-unit movement drills.

Counterproliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is USSOCOM's highest operational priority. SOF can enhance the effectiveness of U.S. military, other government agencies, and international organizations in deterring proliferation of WMD and reacting appropriately should deterrence measures fail.

Against a growing security challenge, SOF also offer a wide variety of skills to combat terrorism. One area of focus includes defensive antiterrorism measures, such as training and advising of security techniques, procedures, and systems that reduce vulnerability. The other major element of SOF operational capabilities centers on offensive counterterrorism measures directed at preventing, deterring, and vigorously responding to terrorist acts against U.S. interests, wherever they occur.

Limitations

As with any highly specialized capability, it is equally important to understand the limitations of SOF. Some points to bear in mind are:

- SOF operators require extensive training, often years in duration. They cannot be replaced quickly and their capabilities can not be expanded rapidly. Squandering scarce SOF resources on inappropriate missions or inordinately dangerous tasks, runs the risk of depleting the SOF inventory early in a conflict.
- SOF are not a substitute for conventional forces; they provide different capabilities that expand the options of the employing commander. SOF should not be used for operations whenever conventional forces can accomplish the mission.



Courtesy: Robert Genat, Zone Five & NAVSPECWARCOM

SOF operators require specialized equipment and extensive training.

- SOF are not the solution to peacetime operations. SOF have a role to play in peacetime operations, just as they have a role to play in war. Peacetime operations almost always require an integrated, interagency approach to solve the problems encountered. SOF alone cannot do this.

- SOF logistics support is austere. A large number of SOF units generally cannot maintain themselves for extended periods of time without significant support from the conventional support structure.

Missions and Activities

Special operations are characterized by the use of small units in direct and indirect military actions focused on strategic and operational objectives. These actions require units with combinations of specialized personnel, equipment, training, and tactics that go beyond the routine capabilities of conventional military forces. The enduring, overarching purposes of SOF are derived from historical experience, congressional legislation, and the evolving security environment. In support of the national military strategy, SOF are currently organized and trained in nine principal mission areas. Based on their unique capabilities, SOF are also frequently tasked to participate in other activities that are not principal SOF missions. These collateral activities tend to shift in response to the changing international environment. The principal missions and collateral activities of SOF are listed in the following charts and are further described in Appendix A.

Principal Missions

- Counterproliferation (CP)
- Combating terrorism (CBT)
- Foreign internal defense (FID)
- Special reconnaissance (SR)
- Direct action (DA)
- Psychological operations (PSYOP)
- Civil affairs (CA)
- Unconventional warfare (UW)
- Information operations (IO)

Collateral Activities

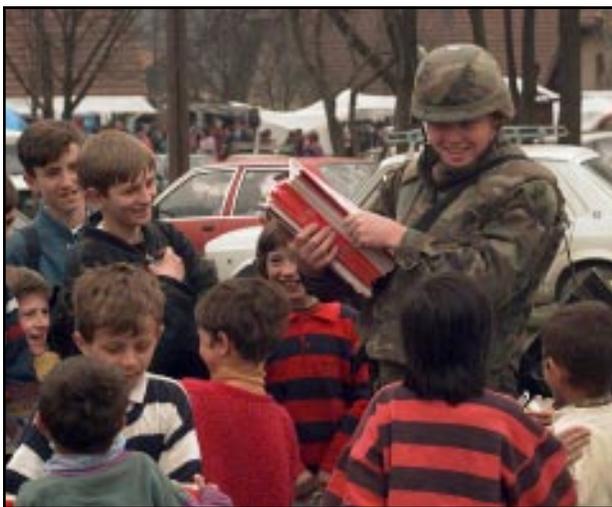
- Coalition support
- Combat search and rescue (CSAR)
- Counterdrug (CD) activities
- Humanitarian demining (HD) activities
- Humanitarian assistance (HA)
- Security assistance (SA)
- Special activities

The Role of SOF in National Defense

“The mere absence of war is not peace.”

John F. Kennedy
1963 State of the Union Address

In the largest sense, this is a period of strategic opportunity for the United States. The threat of global war has receded and the core U.S. values of representative democracy and market economics are embraced in many parts of the world, creating



304th PSYOP Company soldier hands out DC Superman comics outlining mine awareness to children at a refugee camp in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

new opportunities to promote peace, prosperity, and enhanced cooperation among nations.

While the United States is taking full advantage of this period of strategic opportunity and positive change, the world remains a complex, dynamic, and dangerous place. The United States likely will continue to face several significant security challenges including regional coercion or aggression, proliferation of potentially dangerous weapons and technologies, terrorism and international crime, threats to the homeland, failed states and humanitarian disasters, asymmetric challenges, and “wild card” or unpredictable scenarios.

A Posture of Global Engagement

Globalization – the process of accelerating economic, technological, cultural, and political integration – means that, more and more, we as a nation are affected by events beyond our borders. Our strategic approach to the increasing interdependence brought about by globalization recognizes that we must be involved in a leading role abroad in order to influence security at home.

The president’s *National Security Strategy for a New Century* stresses the “imperative of engagement” and enhancing our security through integrated approaches that allow the nation to **Shape** the international environment; **Respond** to the full spectrum of crises; and **Prepare Now** for an uncertain future. Our strategic approach uses all appropriate instruments of national power to influence the actions of other states and non-state actors, exert global leadership, and remain the preferred security partner for the community of states that share our interests.

The Military Challenge

Our national military strategy is based on the concept that the United States will continue to deploy its armed forces globally and will remain engaged to influence the shaping of the global environment, creating favorable conditions for



An MH-53J Pave Low helicopter is winched toward a C-5B Galaxy cargo plane at RAF Mildenhall, England.

U.S. interests and global security. It emphasizes that our armed forces must respond to the full spectrum of crises in order to protect our national interests. It further states that as we pursue shaping and responding activities, our armed forces must also take steps to prepare now for an uncertain future.

Today our armed forces prepare for and conduct operations in environments ranging from peacetime to global war. Moreover, both peacetime operations and war could take place either in high-technology industrial states or in lesser-developed parts of the world. The military challenge is to field forces that can fight and win against threats ranging from the modern high-technology nation-state, with its complex infrastructure, to such non-state entities as terrorists, ethnic factions, religious radicals, and criminal cartels.



Visit of U.S. Civil Affairs soldiers to Turkish refugee camp in Albania brings a smile to young refugee.

These diverse and contradictory environments require flexible and versatile forces that can function effectively, with speed and precision, across the full range of military operations anywhere in the world. These forces must have a keen sense of the political implications of their actions, and must be able to adapt quickly to changing rules of engagement, with decisive and appropriate action.

Relevance of SOF

SOF have an important and growing role in addressing challenges to U.S. interests and global security. First, SOF provide significant capabilities in support of the core national objectives through a combination of each of their nine principal missions. Second, SOF have the unique capability to provide additional support through application of their collateral activities.

But to remain effective, SOF must also be prepared to adapt to changing missions, technology, and security environments. To these ends, and in support of the national “shape, respond, and prepare now” strategy, USSOCOM provides an array of unique SOF flagship capabilities. Chief among these are:

- **Ubiquitous Presence.** Combat-ready SOF units are routinely deployed around the world to support peacetime engagement and to prevent conflict. Should conflict arise, these “global scouts” can quickly transition to combat operations and spearhead a decisive victory.
- **Strategic Agility.** SOF will provide greater strategic and operational agility through the development of a more flexible and responsive force structure. The key elements to this structure are maintaining an unparalleled national mission capability and developing more robust theater special operations commands (SOCs).
- **Global Access.** Although theater engagement provides SOF access to most parts of the world, SOF must retain the capability to go where U.S. forces are unwelcome. The capability to conduct

clandestine operations anywhere in the world in support of the National Command Authorities (NCA) or theater CINCs is one of the defining attributes of SOF.

- **Information Dominance.** The information age has opened up a wide range of new opportunities, seemingly endless possibilities, and significant vulnerabilities for all military forces, SOF included. Accordingly, USSOCOM is examining new ways to enhance SOF capabilities to ensure uninterrupted information exchange, reduce an adversary's ability to use information, and influence situations to support mission accomplishment.

In sum, USSOCOM's mission is to provide full spectrum SOF that are ready and capable of successfully conducting global special operations throughout the strategic operational continuum in support of the NCA, geographic CINCs, U.S. ambassadors, and other government agencies. Indeed, SOF are ready for today's mission, relevant for tomorrow's challenges — continuously evolving to meet the needs of the nation and seize the opportunities brought about by change.

Personnel and Readiness

Force readiness is the SOF top priority and crucial to mission success. USSOCOM's FY 2001 president's budget request is predicated on maintaining and sustaining readiness as the top priority.



A Ranger negotiates the horizontal rope slide during jungle operations training.

SOF must maintain a consistently high state of readiness. People and training are key factors that help to determine SOF current readiness posture.

People — The Most Important Resource

SOF are made up of some of America's most dedicated men and women from the Army, Navy, and Air Force — from active, national guard, and reserve units. These men and women are mature, high-caliber professionals with intelligence, stamina, problem-solving skills, mental toughness, flexibility, determination, integrity, and extraordinary strength of character and will.

Assessment and Selection

A vigorous and extensive selection process ensures that only mature, dependable, and self-reliant individuals join SOF. The selection and retention of high-quality, motivated, and dedicated personnel are most important because SOF operate in circumstances where the reputation of the United States may rest on the successful completion of the mission.

Given the unique nature of special operations and the often isolated environments, it takes a discriminating selection and assessment process and hard work to find the right person. But it is important to learn up front whether a person has the qualities and the will necessary to perform to highly demanding standards.

SOF Development

After selection, personnel are trained extensively in the individual combat skills, foreign languages, and technical specialties required for their profession. Next, they join a SOF aircrew, team, or squad and participate in extensive unit training. Finally, they are cross trained in essential, special skills, and advanced techniques. SOF training places great emphasis on individual and team professional



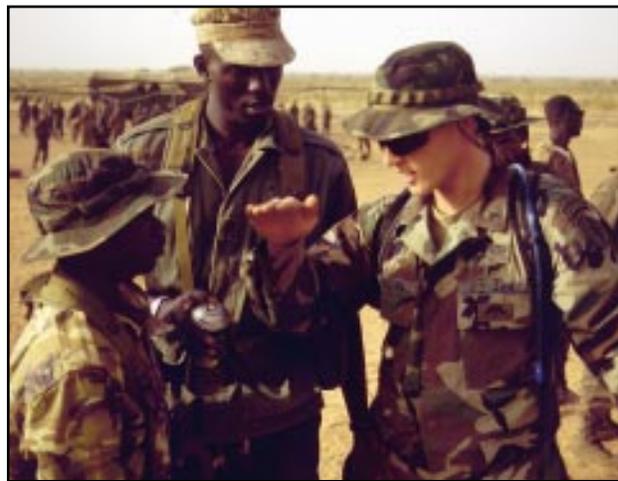
Physical conditioning is emphasized for potential SEAL candidates.

development. An essential part of all training and education is the building of teams who work well together; who know the strengths, capabilities, and weaknesses of each member of the team; and who share a common doctrine that allows precise communication with minimal ambiguity.

Physical Fitness. Special operations are often extremely physically demanding. The body and mind are the fundamental operating system, and their capability to withstand stress is enhanced by high levels of physical fitness. Special operators require a high level of physical fitness because missions often take place in harsh climates, over extended periods of time, far from conventional support, and frequently with little time to adjust to climatic changes. A unit that stresses top physical condition for its members — all of the time — can count on them being ready for any contingency.

Regional Orientation. Regional orientation has grown in importance over the past few years and requires SOF to maintain proficiency in a number of languages. Regional orientation, however, is much more than language training. It is not enough to speak the language. To communicate effectively, one must know the culture and customs, to include the subtleties of non-verbal communications. For example, foreign internal defense and unconventional warfare operations have as their focus preparing foreign forces, either military or paramilitary, to conduct operations

on a wide range of tasks from combat to internal development, in peace as well as in war. Successful conduct of these operations relies on the ability of SOF teams to establish rapport with and positively influence those they train. As such, these operations place a high premium on not only knowing the language of the people being taught, but in having a thorough understanding of the culture and the area where these operations take place. Units that conduct these operations invest a great deal of time and energy in language proficiency, cultural awareness, regional orientation, cross-cultural communications, and negotiation within the context of culture.



SF soldier discusses how to obtain a tight shoot group to Malian soldiers during African Crisis Response Initiative training.

Training

SOF require a combination of basic military training and specialized skills training to achieve operational proficiency. Training and education are the twin pillars of special operations professional development. Training is designed to produce individuals and units that have mastered the tactics, techniques, and procedures through which units accomplish their missions. Through education, individuals learn the art and science of war and peacetime operations, and develop military judgment necessary to apply initiative and creativity to the solution of problems and challenges. Training and education can be



A SEAL team member fast ropes from a helicopter to an awaiting Zodiac inflatable boat during insertion training in the frigid waters of Tokyo Bay.

effective only in an environment that encourages innovation and allows — in fact, demands — subordinates to exercise independent judgment, and builds trust and confidence among all leaders in a unit. The SOF training system encompasses three processes: institutional training, component training, and joint training.

Institutional Training. There are two types of institutional training: joint and common institutional training and service special operations training. USSOCOM has oversight of joint and common institutional training; ensuring programs of instruction adhere to joint doctrine and reflect current tactics, techniques, and procedures. Institutional special operations training, conducted by USSOCOM's service component schools, develops SOF-unique abilities through intensive training at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; the Naval Special Warfare Center at Coronado, California; and the Air Force Special Operations School at Hurlburt Field, Florida. Courses cover a broad range of topics and scenarios from doctrine and foreign policy to mission-specific skills to cross-cultural communications skills and language training.

Component Training. The focus of this training is to ensure units are capable of performing assigned wartime missions through the accomplishment of individual and collective tasks. Component training, managed by the USSOCOM service component commands, is governed by the doctrine of the military departments and primarily driven by mission requirements identified in the various geographic regions by the theater SOCs.



U.S. SF soldier works with Thai Special Forces soldiers during exercise Cobra Gold conducted in Thailand.

Joint Training. Although each of these processes is important, SOF places great emphasis on joint training with conventional forces. SOF joint training is primarily accomplished through participation in exercises sponsored by the chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS)/CINC and USSOCOM's joint/combined exchange training (JCET) events. Through SOF participation in over 60 CJCS exercises annually, geographic CINC needs are met. Additionally, SOF are able to train to meet the regional, cultural, and language demands of each theater. Furthermore, SOF participation in JCETs has averaged 200 events annually. These events are conducted overseas with host nation forces. JCETs focus on SOF tasks that are essential for mission accomplishment and also provide valuable forward presence in support of the geographic CINC's strategic

objectives. JCETs provide SOF access to areas that may not typically be open to larger conventional forces. In this respect, JCETs open doors — politically, diplomatically, and militarily — for U.S. forces to train with foreign military forces. Joint training provides Army, Navy, and Air Force special operators the opportunity to train as a joint team, performing tasks and activities that span the entire range of military operations.

As SOF prepare to execute missions and conduct activities in the international security environment of the future, training priorities will reflect shifting emphasis among missions. The future environment, characterized by regional instability and transnational dangers, will mandate increasing attention to training in non-lethal techniques and support of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations. SOF conduct joint/combined, no-notice deployments ensuring that the training is vigorous, realistic, and focused on preparing SOF to meet the entire spectrum of future demands.

SOF must remain combat ready to meet the challenges of the international security environment. SOF personnel, who have been properly selected, trained, and professionally developed throughout their careers, will be instrumental in meeting future challenges. The return on the SOF human resource investment is a high-quality force ready to serve the nation.



Pride and Professionalism: Special tactics team members stand in inspection during a change-of-command ceremony.

Quality of Life

The term “quality of life” is used to encompass the entire package of compensation, benefits, and work and living environments for military personnel. Because SOF rely on the military departments for most aspects of quality of life, the SOF community continues to work closely with the military departments to provide for the basic needs of SOF personnel and their families. Quality-of-life improvements are needed to sustain healthy levels of recruitment, retention, and morale that are necessary to maintain a ready, high-quality fighting force. The overall objective is to protect the commitment to service members through quality-of-life enhancements and to maintain currently provided benefits. To this end, the SOF community and the military departments share the following quality of life concerns:

- adequate pay and allowances
- adequate access to quality and timely medical care
- adequate retirement benefits
- adequate housing and quarters for military families and single personnel
- adequate community support facilities

Retention and Morale

In general, retention rates for SOF personnel outpace their service counterparts with few exceptions. Increasing requirements, personnel loss, management dynamics, and high training-pipeline attrition contribute to low inventories in some SOF-specific skills; however, USSOCOM, in coordination with components and the services, is undertaking a number of initiatives to address these issues. Realistic training and deployments on significant missions are positive contributors to SOF retention rates. SOF are proud of their contributions to the nation, and this sense of pride bolsters morale that is reflected in the overall retention of quality SOF personnel.