

SHAPING TOMORROW'S SOF

“A rapidly changing world deals ruthlessly with organizations that do not change — and USSOCOM is no exception. Guided by a comprehensive enduring vision and supporting goals, we must constantly reshape ourselves to remain relevant and useful members of the joint team.”

General Peter J. Schoomaker
Commander in Chief
U.S. Special Operations Command

Emerging Threats

As we approach the new millennium, the world will be faced with a number of sweeping changes. Accelerating political, economic, demographic and technological changes will shape the international environment in ways that cannot be entirely foreseen. These changes, taking place at different rates around the world, will exacerbate differences in the relative dispersion of economic and political power. In the future, societies will see wealth and technological sophistication coexisting with extreme poverty and ignorance. Without question, these disparities will be exploited by those seeking power—giving rise to a number of national security challenges for the United States.

Within this context, the United States will continue to pursue traditional goals, namely the security and well being of its citizens. Unfortunately, achieving this goal will be made all the more difficult by the increasing number of non-traditional actors on the international scene. Although the international environment will still be dominated by state-to-state relations, non-state actors such as

terrorists, transnational organizations, criminal organizations, and narco-traffickers, will play an increased role in world politics. Worldwide there will be a resurgence of militant nationalism, as well as ethnic and religious conflict. Violent extremists will threaten fragile peace processes, from the Middle East to South America. Although they may not pose a strategic threat to the United States, many will be able to threaten U.S. interests in a limited time and place.

Changing regional trends will also create a wide range of threats. One of the most significant observable global trends with operational implications is increasing global urbanization. The exploding populations of the developing world will exacerbate perennial problems such as starvation, poverty, disease and environmental degeneration. Large numbers of rural people will migrate to cities in search of a better life only to find worse conditions. Unable to afford urban dwellings, these migrants will settle in slums and shanty towns on the outskirts, creating a fervent ground for crises, conflict, terrorism, insurgency and other forms of political violence.



Civil affairs soldier hands out relief supplies in Haiti.

On the one hand, emerging regional states with expanding populations and strong economies may be tempted to exercise power in ways that threaten U.S. or allied interests. These states, working alone or in conjunction with other actors, may see an attack on the United States or its allies as a key step toward obtaining their long-term objectives. On the other hand, regional instability and failed states will make it more difficult for the United States to control transnational threats to its security. In sum, the United States will need to be prepared to respond to a number of diverse threats. Among these are: the proliferation and use of WMD, subversion, terrorism, global environmental degradation, drug trafficking and its associated violence, and information-based warfare.

Despite this wide range of threats, the most immediate threat for the United States will be posed by those actors that consider an attack on the United States, or its allies, as the best means of achieving their wider objectives. Actors set on attacking the United States or its allies will be likely to use tactics and technologies that exploit U.S. vulnerabilities while allowing them to avoid direct confrontation with U.S. or allied military forces.

The actions of these actors will be facilitated by the changing nature of international frontiers. Increasingly porous national borders will prove to be incapable of preventing the international transfer of people, money, information, weapons, and technology. In such an environment, U.S. and allied information systems will provide lucrative targets, as well as likely avenues of attack for insurgents, terrorists, criminals and other potential adversaries. In addition to the vulnerability of information systems, the United States and its allies will remain vulnerable to attacks from WMD, particularly biological and chemical agents. Since these weapons require relatively little sophistication to be employed effectively, they may become the weapons of choice for unprincipled actors with otherwise limited military capabilities.

An Evolving Force

In such a rapidly changing international environment, it may be difficult to clearly picture the role of SOF in support of U.S. national security requirements. In reality there is little if anything SOF can do to prevent national disasters or to eliminate the root causes of much of the world's suffering. Indeed, many international problems in the future will not be amenable to military solutions. However, it is inevitable some international problems will require a military response. In these situations, SOF, because of their unique skills, regional expertise, cultural sensitivity and operational experience, may be the force of choice for meeting the strategic requirements of the National Command Authorities (NCA) or regional decisionmakers.



Air Force special tactics search and rescue team conducts site recovery with an MH-53J Pave Low III.

In the future, SOF will perform three important roles in support of the National Security Strategy. First, they will be called upon to perform those special missions that can neither fail nor leave the perception of failure. These missions, ranging from rescuing hostages to preventing terrorist use of WMD, will be operations in which national decisionmakers rely upon SOF unique capabilities to do high-risk, high-payoff tasks no other force can accomplish. These missions will be the exigent priorities for SOF in support of national strategy—not because these missions will be frequent—but rather, because no other force at the NCA's disposal will be equipped

and trained to perform these missions within an acceptable level of risk.

Second, SOF will be called upon to perform critical missions that support the day-to-day campaign strategies of the geographic commanders in chief (CINCs). These missions, which include foreign internal defense, psychological operations, civil affairs, and humanitarian assistance, will provide a low-cost means of promoting the long-term strategic goals of the United States. At the same time, special operations forces, because of their regional expertise and exceptional training will be called upon to support regional contingencies including, responding to natural disasters, assisting in the evacuation of U.S. and allied nationals in the event of regional hostilities, and operating as a vanguard for other, more conventional, military forces. Although these tasks are not very different from what SOF do today, the utility of SOF to the geographic CINCs will be greatly enhanced by emerging transportation and communications capabilities. In the future, in-theater SOF will be able to respond to contingency requirements with real-time access to theater intelligence information while at the same time providing real-time on-scene video reporting of any situation. This information, combined with the professional military judgment of seasoned SOF operators, will greatly enhance the knowledge available to decisionmakers as they contemplate potential courses of action in response to particular contingency situations.



Tiltrotor aircraft in development testing.

Third, SOF will be called upon to perform its traditional wartime missions of direct action, special reconnaissance and unconventional

warfare. During wartime, one of the key missions of SOF has been to work with indigenous or coalition forces making it possible for these forces to work in concert with conventional U.S. forces. In the future, SOF will continue to perform this vital wartime mission. The most drastic wartime change for SOF will probably come in the areas of special reconnaissance and direct action. The main reason for this will be the development of technologies which obviate the need for “the man on the ground.” Military commanders will be extremely reluctant to employ SOF or other ground forces to perform these missions when they can be adequately performed by unmanned reconnaissance platforms. SOF will be used when the degree of sophistication, sensitivity or selectivity required to perform the operation cannot be achieved with an unmanned platform. Although the evolution of SOF capabilities in the areas of special reconnaissance and direct action is difficult to predict, it is clear the mission concepts associated with these operational tasks will see dynamic changes in the near future.

The SOF role will always be at the cutting edge—to maximize the psychological impact of military operations or to provide the razor’s edge to our nation’s military capabilities. Unlike more conventional forces, SOF will conduct operations independently and with minimal organic support. Their knowledge of and experience in conducting joint, combined, and inter-agency operations will make it possible for them to perform their operations anywhere in the world with minimal impact on the operational routines of in-theater forces.



USSOCOM is exploring the use of wave-piercing technology for improved sea-keeping ability.

Future Requirements

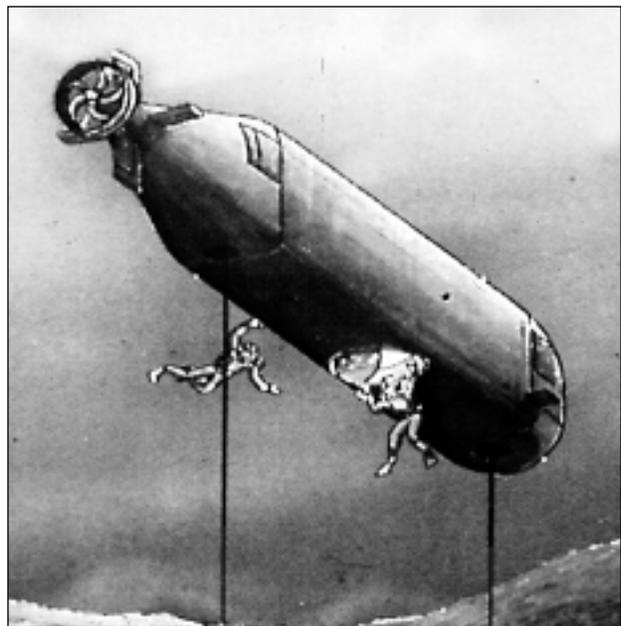
The importance of having the right people in SOF will grow in the future as they are employed against difficult problems in increasingly hostile and challenging environments. Operating independently, SOF personnel will need to have exceptional character and integrity. Operating in arduous environments, SOF personnel will need to maintain the highest levels of fitness. Since they will be called upon to make critical on-scene decisions, they will need to be knowledgeable and self-disciplined. In addition to all of this, SOF personnel will need to be highly intelligent, both to operate increasingly sophisticated equipment and to perform their operations in a technologically advanced threat environment.

“The biggest challenge I see is keeping the equipment up to date with modifications and improvements and life cycle sustainment costs under control so that we have funding available to develop truly revolutionary hardware solutions to counter our adversaries, make our missions less dangerous, and be more effective in the performance of our missions. . . .we need to look further into the future, beyond the 2010 time frame, to develop technology today that can go into engineering development in 2005 for fielding beyond 2010.”

General Peter J. Schoomaker
Commander in Chief
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More than ever SOF will depend on leading-edge technology to provide the critical advantage and to support participation in a growing number of technologically complex and challenging missions and operations. Although SOF will continue to rely on the service battle laboratories and research and development centers for much of their operational equipment, SOF will increasingly focus its research and development efforts on equipment

designed specifically to meet the unique requirements of special operations. SOF will look to emerging, leading-edge technologies in such areas as mobility, sensing and identification, miniaturization, secure communications, advanced munitions, stealth, human enhancements, and robotics to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of its operators and platforms. Options for SOF in the future may also include requirements to use nonlethal weaponry to contain riots, or multispectral sensors and imaging systems, including unmanned aerial vehicles, to locate and track refugee flows, illegal drug shipments or specific military targets.



Artist's conception of Advanced SEAL Delivery System.

Effective responses to humanitarian crises and disasters will require enhancements in medical treatment, intelligence, environmental science and logistics. SOF must also consider new and innovative techniques and technologies for more precise field medical treatment and disease control, automated field laboratories and advanced vaccines to protect SOF operators from indigenous diseases. To reduce the logistics train and increase sustainability, SOF must also explore adoption of hybrid fuel vehicles, compact energy sources and enhanced water purification systems.



Special Forces medic inoculates an Eritrean child during a medical capabilities exercise.

In addition to these enhancements in equipment, SOF will also experience a major evolution in their training methods. Training will remain the ultimate key to SOF operational capability. Without it, SOF forces will not be able to maintain the high state of readiness that is required if they are to be able to respond to unforeseen contingencies. SOF will employ a variety of training and simulation systems to assist SOF mission planners and to provide SOF commanders with a greater understanding of how to deal with operational exigencies. Eventually, these mission planning systems will be directly tied to intelligence systems that will assist mission planners in the identification of critical nodes and in the appropriate application of fire support. In addition to these systems, SOF will continue to rely on operational training that approximates anticipated battle conditions as closely as possible. This type of training will be required to retain a force capable of responding to any potential contingency.

SOF must maintain their traditional emphasis on high-quality, rigorous training and reinforce it with effective education that encourages creative, thoughtful solutions to sensitive and high-risk situations. Future training programs must link to operational plans, integrate advanced technologies, capture the savings of simulations, and respond to evolving missions. The foreign language base of SOF must also be responsive to the changing global environment and be enhanced by advanced training techniques

and technologies. Without doubt, training is, and will remain, a vital component to SOF capability.

Lastly, SOF cannot fully realize the benefits of technological change until they are incorporated into new organizational forms. Replacing technology without replacing old structures will not work. Therefore, SOF organizational innovation will remain as important as innovation in weapons, mobility, training, and other support systems and programs.

Conclusion

In the future, SOF must remain operationally unique and strategically relevant to retain their utility to national decisionmakers. To accomplish this, SOF must maintain their technological edge and continue to invest in the quality and skills of their operators. These two absolutes have served



Air Force MH-53J Pave Low III crew member prepares for a mission at Brindisi, Italy.

SOF well in the past and must remain fundamental commitments in order to meet the nation's security needs in the future.

The individual will remain the backbone and the key to the success of SOF. Quality, not quantity, and high standards in the selection process ensure accession of the right people for the demanding tasks that SOF perform. In addition to selecting the right people, SOF will, more than ever, be dependent upon cutting-edge technologies to provide the critical advantage and support the operational requirements of an increasingly sophisticated conventional force. People and equipment, however, are not sufficient to create a robust special operations capability. The right kind of training and organizational and force structures will be critical elements that underpin SOF development and readiness for the future.

In the future, SOF must be ready to deal equally with the demands of both its peacetime and warfighting roles. To prepare for this future, today's SOF are focusing on both traditional activities and emerging missions, while developing a strategy to build the integrated, combat-ready force necessary to face the challenges

that lie ahead. Appropriate personnel policies, training, and force structures will allow SOF to remain a mature, discrete, low profile, and uniquely capable force. As the nation seeks to promote and defend its interests in the future, it will continue to depend on SOF as a critical force multiplier and provider of unique solutions to challenging problems.

Strategic Vision for SOF

Tomorrow's special operations forces — building on today's successes with:

- Quality people who are experienced, self-reliant warrior-diplomats
- Versatile and responsive units that are regionally and culturally oriented
- Specialized state-of-the-art equipment and training
- Organizational innovation

Operating in a volatile and uncertain world while providing unique capabilities across the continuum of conflict.