
Increased Prospects For Low-Intensity Conflict

By

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. . . The changing nature of the Warsaw Pact will dominate political and military thought in the coming decade. The bipolar world of the USSR vs. the United States is quickly being replaced with a new array of emerging national and regional power groupings.

Terrorism, insurgency, instability, and subversion have grown in the face of rising nationalism and religious fanaticism. We are facing increasing prospects for low-intensity conflict involving U.S. interests abroad. Distribution of powerful conventional and chemical weapons of great lethality is growing. We find them in the arsenals of Third World countries and in the hands of radical factions around the world. The U.S. must focus on the early detection of potential crises, seek peaceful solutions and yet maintain a capability to respond if peaceful solutions fail.

Special operations, psychological operations, and civil affairs activities may be conducted independently or in coordination with conventional operations during peace or hostilities. Objectives assigned to special operations, psyop (psychological operations), and civil affairs forces are often as political, economic, or psychological as they are military. These forces may be assigned objectives that lead directly to the accomplishment of national or theater-level political, economic, or psychological objectives. To achieve this capability requires a properly organized, trained, equipped, and sized USSOCOM (U.S. Special Operations Command) force structure.

In the 1990s, the principal role for the armed forces will be the maintenance of a credible deterrent force capable of reacting rapidly and effectively to worldwide crises or contingencies and other threats to our national interest, to include the monitoring and detection of illicit drug smuggling into the United States.

As the threat of a direct confrontation with the Soviets diminishes, it is being replaced by those elements capable of generating low-intensity conflict. No one military capability or type of force can be singled out as the answer to resolving these conflicts. Conventional U.S. military capabilities can often be tailored to accomplish specific tasks in a low-intensity conflict. The goal is to improve both conventional and special operations capabilities to counter the threat posed in low-intensity conflict and ensure this force mix is mutually supportive. The most cost-effective and appropriate means of achieving national goals in low-intensity conflicts will likely be indirect rather than direct application of military power.

The DOD program to combat terrorism is divided into two principal components: anti-terrorism and counterterrorism. Anti-terrorism is the defensive measures used to reduce the vulnerability of individuals and property to terrorism. SOF (special operations forces) support the DOD anti-terrorism program through facility assessment and risk evaluation. Counterterrorism is offensive measures taken to prevent, deter, or respond to terrorism. SOF must be an integral part of the counterterrorism program. This will permit the special operations forces to provide the best

military response, continue to support the interagency program to combat terrorism, and continue to reinforce international cooperation as the key to the national program to combat terrorism.

USSOCOM supports the national counternarcotics effort through programs to assist and train DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) personnel and host-nation military and police forces. This training includes small unit tactics, river patrol, monitoring and detection, and intelligence collection and analysis, as well as a variety of specialized courses of instruction.

OBJECTIVES-CAPABILITIES LINK

First, we must complete revitalization begun in the 1980s and modernize for the 21st century. In the past, SOF have, for the most part, been required to use equipment originally designed for the conventional forces but later modified to support SOF. We were late comers and low-priority players in the DOD revitalization efforts of the early and mid-1980s. Now, as we are poised to improve our capabilities with planned joint and interoperable systems, we are faced with a shrinking DOD budget.

SOF need the resources to push the technical community to design equipment that meets our validated needs, while continuing to upgrade present systems. The most important modernization concern for the 1990s is for improved SOF mobility systems. SOF must have the capability to infiltrate and exfiltrate forces into and out of denied areas. Of almost equal importance is the requirement to enhance our communications capability. Additionally, resources must be adequate to provide SOF with state-of-the-art capabilities for intelligence collection, processing, dissemination, and automated mission planning and rehearsal.

It is also essential to provide SOF the most modern weaponry possible. And it is critical that capabilities to carry out psychological operations and civil affairs operations be modernized.

Second, USSOCOM must complement the modernization effort with proper force structure. The number of existing units is not sufficient to support all theater requirements without dual-tasking some forces. For example, the recent Operation Just Cause [in Panama] emphasized the need to free the 7th Special Forces Group [SFG] from other commitments for full focus on Latin America. Consequently, as an interim measure, a battalion of the 5th SFG, which supports the U.S. Central Command, will pick up the responsibilities left vacant by the redirection of the 7th SFG.

Until the 3rd SFG is activated, dual tasking of organizations will dilute the focus on area orientation and concentrated theater commitment. With the addition of the 3rd SFG, with its African orientation, SOF will be capable of fully supporting the three most likely areas for low-intensity conflict—Latin America, Pacific Rim and Africa—as well as supporting European and Southwest Asia commitments.

Our third priority is force readiness. We must ensure that our special operators and units have the operations and maintenance funds to train and exercise to the highest levels of mission-essential standards. Our forces rapidly succumb to a serious readiness deficiency when there is a shortage of qualified personnel to bring units to full strength. SOF missions, to include psyop and civil affairs, are complex and require fully manned units. SOF personnel must be dedicated to their career specialties. These specialties entail long-term career development to include knowledge of culture, language, and customs of foreign countries.

As we enter a decade of global uncertainty in the 1990s, it is essential to maintain and strengthen U.S. special operations forces. Successful peacetime engagement and conventional deterrence will require forces we can use to support U.S. global interests: training friends and allies to meet anti-democratic threats; conducting counterterrorist operations; countering illegal drug

trafficking; executing other missions required to defend U.S. lives, interests, and security; and supporting a credible deterrent that is effective across the spectrum of conflict. This requires highly trained, motivated, and well-equipped mobile forces with the facilities and logistics to train and sustain operations in both present and future environments. To meet these requirements, the United States must continue to give high priority to special operations forces.

OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

. . . Since April 1987, USSOCOM forces have made 500 deployments to 59 countries.

Army Special Forces and Navy SEALs have been key providers of security assistance training to friendly nations. These forces have conducted more than 40 mobile training team deployments to more than 20 countries to train host-nation military forces as part of the foreign military sales and military assistance efforts in nation building. Additionally, some 66 bilateral exchange training events and special operations deployments for training have provided a significant presence in areas where no U.S. military forces are stationed.

Humanitarian assistance operations have had high impact in Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. There are three notable examples of the kind of work USSOCOM forces are asked to perform in this important area. First, the search and recovery operation conducted in Ethiopia to find Congressman (Mickey) Leland. Second, we deployed civil affairs advisers and psychological operations loudspeaker teams to St. Croix (U.S. Virgin Islands) in the aftermath of Hurricane Hugo last September to assist in disaster relief and to provide emergency information to the local population. A final example was the involvement of U.S. special forces personnel in the multinational U.N. effort to train Afghan refugees in Pakistan in land-mine awareness and clearing techniques.

In the important area of counterdrug operations, USSOCOM provided communications support to the U.S. Coast Guard, trained DEA personnel in riverine and jungle operations, and provided training in military-related skills to counterdrug personnel of other nations. Special operations force training skills have been applied to stemming the flow of illegal drugs at the source.

In Operation Just Cause, USSOCOM forces demonstrated their capability and commitment to respond militarily during a crisis. Our forces were involved in the Panama situation from the beginning. Further, Army Special Forces, civil affairs and psychological operations forces are likely to remain committed to the nation-building effort long after the assault forces redeploy.

USSOCOM special operations forces led the way in the seizure of key assault objectives to neutralize Panamanian Defense Forces. U.S. Army Rangers conducted night parachute assaults to seize Rio Hato airfield and the Torrijos/Tocumen International airfield to deny their use and to block the movement of key PDF forces. One U.S. Navy SEAL element conducted a night swim to successfully disable PDF patrol boats, while another attacked over the beach to seize Paitilla airfield to prevent its use by the PDF. At the same time, Army Special Forces elements established surveillance on key PDF military installations and seized the Pacora River bridge to deny its use by the PDF.

These operations were covered by SOF active and Reserve AC-130 gunships and supplemented by Army and Air Force SOF helicopters. Our efforts, combined with the conventional forces, succeeded in preventing the PDF from mounting effective resistance and contributed to the overall success of the combat operations. Our psychological operations and civil affairs forces also played a key role in the tactical effort.

CRITICAL OPERATIONAL DEFICIENCIES

Forces assigned to USCINCSOC are prepared to execute missions assigned in global/regional oplans (operations plans); however, lingering deficiencies limit current capability to execute all tasked and emergent missions.

Force Structure

Shortage of long-range exfiltration aircraft remains a serious problem; we are currently assessing how to develop and procure a suitable airframe. Funding and acquisition initiatives for Navy SEAL tactical insertion craft and the advanced SEAL delivery systems are required to build an effective maritime infiltration/exfiltration capability. Additionally, Persian Gulf operations and events leading up to Operation Just Cause surfaced the need to accelerate the coastal patrol boat initiative and upgrade the Navy small boat SOF support program.

Modernization

All theaters have urgent modernization requirements for SOF. Highest priority is for a long-range aircraft designed to carry SOF troops into and out of unfriendly territory. Second priority is development of more effective man-portable radios. In these same areas of mobility and communication, the Rangers have recently identified shortfalls in land-mobility, noting the need to accelerate replacement for the M-151 modified jeep, and the need to pursue down-sized communications gear to replace antiquated, bulky sets.

Additionally, insufficient dual dry-deck, shelter-configured submarines impair SEAL platoon capability to penetrate hostile or politically denied waters.

Readiness

The most serious readiness deficiency is the shortage of qualified personnel in some military disciplines. Particularly, qualified linguists in Special Forces, CA (civil affairs) and psyop units continue to be a problem; however, our language instruction capabilities are improving.

Sustainability

Theater SOF support plans are not fully integrated into theater combat support and service support systems. This problem is particularly acute in our Air Force components. Additionally, the events leading up to Just Cause validate the need for a maritime operations facility to conduct riverine and/or off-shore maritime operations to support SOF in areas that may be or may become politically denied.

IMPROVING THE SITUATION

In light of the previously mentioned deficiencies, it is appropriate to say that we in the SOF community, as a result of your significant efforts on our behalf, have the capability to begin correcting our most critical deficiencies. Our FY91-97 funding program, which we are currently building, will give greater emphasis to modernization and force structure, yet provide a balanced readiness and sustainment program.

In the past, we have too often accepted equipment originally designed for conventional forces that was later modified to support our forces. Now we can push the technical community to design equipment from the ground up that meets our unique requirements. We will ensure that the growth plans for the SEALs and Special Forces are properly funded. . . .

Of a more immediate nature, the FY91 budget supports the continuing revitalization of our special operations forces. Indeed, SOF budget levels have remained intact, which shows the

priority that DOD has put on improving our SOF capabilities. The activation of an Army Special Forces group and the increase from 50 to 60 Navy SEAL platoons are included in the FY91 budget. Overall, the operation and maintenance funds projected for FY91 will keep our forces ready to meet our worldwide requirements, and the investment appropriations will continue our much needed modernization efforts.

. . . The FY91 budget request marks the first time that SOF funds will be moved out of service appropriations into defense agency appropriations. This is a significant milestone and provides us with a degree of budget control that no commander of joint forces has ever had before. As we mature in the management of funds not limited by service boundaries, we will greatly improve our capability to develop and sustain interoperable special operations forces.

LEGISLATION AND USSOCOM

This command was created after enactment of the DOD reorganization act and has always operated under its provisions. Our experience indicates that the act has resulted in a number of improvements, some of which were apparent in recent operations. Two of the most important provisions were those which enhanced and clarified the authority of the chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and those which increased the authority of the CinCs (commanders in chief) and strengthened the operational chains of command.

Special operations legislation was instrumental in focusing attention on one of our most important military capabilities. Recent events have demonstrated the soundness of this legislation and revealed the substantial effort made throughout DOD to implement it. Consequently, great progress has been made in the past two-and-one-half years in realizing the full potential of our special operations, civil affairs, and psychological operations forces.

Service leaders are supporting the organization of USSOCOM and its assumption of responsibility for special operations forces and activities. The transition is largely complete, and most issues have been resolved. Those issues which remain involve, for the most part, deciding where to divide responsibilities which are shared by the command and the services. Progress continues, and we are confident we shall be able to arrive at mutually acceptable resolutions of the remaining issues.

SUMMARY

Our national strategy and international alliances have succeeded in deterring the threat of an East-West confrontation. We now face a changing world. The likelihood of large-scale military conflicts is diminishing, and the potential for crises in the Third World and Eastern Europe is increasing.

While special operations, psychological operations, and civil affairs forces have unique capabilities which have application across the spectrum of conflict from low to high, they are especially well-suited to deal with our rapidly changing world environment. Recent events in Latin America highlight our ability to apply indirect military power through such programs as security assistance, foreign internal defense, and counternarcotics operations (analogous to preventive medicine).

At the same time, Operation Just Cause highlighted the fact we have the finest direct-action surgical strike force in the world. In the same vein, our current rebuilding efforts in Panama have brought out the unique ability of our Special Forces, psyops, and civil affairs units to lead the rebuilding effort (post-surgical recovery). These forces provide our nation a truly diverse mix of military capabilities to deal with the challenges we will face as we enter the 21st century.