

Utah State University

DigitalCommons@USU

---

All Graduate Plan B and other Reports

Graduate Studies

---

5-2011

## Counterterrorism in Afghanistan: Aligning Resources and Goals

Jeremy R. Willis  
*Utah State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/gradreports>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Willis, Jeremy R., "Counterterrorism in Afghanistan: Aligning Resources and Goals" (2011). *All Graduate Plan B and other Reports*. 167.

<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/gradreports/167>

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Plan B and other Reports by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@usu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@usu.edu).



“Counterterrorism in Afghanistan: Aligning Resources and Goals”

By

Jeremy R. Willis

A report submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Political Science

Approved:

---

Dr. Anthony A. Peacock  
Major Professor

---

Dr. Veronica Ward  
Committee Member

---

LTC. Paul J. Faletto, US Army  
Committee Member

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah

2011

Copyright © Jeremy R. Willis 2011

All Rights Reserved

## Abstract

### “Counterterrorism in Afghanistan: Aligning Resources and Goals”

After US Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] and Special Operations Forces [SOF] counterterrorism [CT] operations routed al Qaeda and the Taliban regime, planning for the next phase was underway. It was determined that security and stability operations or counterinsurgency [COIN] operations would be necessary to stabilize the country. Soon after transitioning from CT to COIN operations, COIN operations stalled. Several factors have played a part in the unsuccessful attempts at COIN. First, the Global War on Terror [GWOT] campaign was designed to address a narrow set of goals including destroying, dismantling, and disrupting al Qaeda and its affiliates. Second, US leaders have consistently undermanned the effort with a light military footprint. Next, the various forces continuing CT operations have remained uncoordinated from Joint Forces pursuing the COIN operation. Presently, US financial and political support for the conflict is rapidly declining. With US leaders already beginning troop withdrawals, it is imperative that the US adjust its strategy. Narrowing the focus back to a CT campaign will maximize the available resources and cut back on associated costs. Finally, a CT strategy will keep terror networks off balance, buying time to allow US forces to build Afghan security forces necessary for long-term stability.

## Acknowledgements

The support and ideas behind the work in this thesis came from several individuals. I would like to thank my advisors for providing their thoughtful discussion on this research. Without their direction and guidance, this thesis would not have been possible. I would like to thank Dr. Anthony Peacock for his insight into the US policy behind counterterrorism, which was significant to this work. Dr. Veronica Ward's extensive knowledge of unconventional warfare and terrorism proved invaluable while conducting my research. I would also like to extend my thanks to Lieutenant Colonel Paul J. Faletto, US Army, for taking the time to help me understand the men and the missions behind Special Operations Forces. I would also like to thank my mother Jeanette, and my family for keeping me focused on achieving my goals. A special thank you goes to Dr. Magathi Jayaram for her love and support throughout my graduate career.

Jeremy R. Willis

Contents	Page
Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
Section 1.	
1.1 Acronyms .....	6
1.2 Introduction .....	8
Section 2.	
2.1 Thesis Statement .....	13
2.2 Purpose .....	13
2.3 Methodology .....	14
2.4 Limitations .....	17
Section 3.	
3.1 Literature Review .....	18
3.2 Special Operations Forces .....	20
3.3 Department of Defense Reform .....	23
3.4 Special Operations Forces Reform .....	27
3.5 US Civil-Military Relations .....	29
3.6 US Terrorism Policy Prior to September 11, 2011.....	31
3.7 Global War on Terrorism Planning in Afghanistan .....	33
3.8 Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism Implementation.....	37
Section 4.	
4.1 Conclusions .....	42
4.2 Further Study .....	44
Appendix A. ....	46
Appendix B. ....	49
References .....	51

## Section 1.

### 1.1 Acronyms

AO	Area of Operations
AOR	Area of Responsibility
C2	Command and Control
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CINC	Commander in Chief (see GCC)
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
CJSOTF	Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CSAR	Combat Search and Rescue
CT	Counterterrorism
DA	Direct Action
DOD	Department of Defense
FOB	Forward Operating Base
GCC	Geographic Combatant Commander
GPF	General Purpose Forces
GWOT	Global War on Terror
HVT	High Value Target
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JP	Joint Publication
JSOA	Joint Special Operations Agency
JSOC	Joint Special Operations Command

JTF	Joint Task Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCA	National Command Authority
ODA	Operational Detachment Alpha
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
QDR	Quadrennial Defense Review
RC	Regional Command
SEAL	Sea, Air, and Land (Naval Special Operation Forces)
SECDEF	Secretary of Defense
SF	US Army Special Forces
SFOD-D	Special Forces Operational Detachment Delta
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOTF	Special Operations Task Force
SR	Special Reconnaissance
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UCP	Unified Command Plan
UN	United Nations
USC	United States Code
USCENTCOM	US Central Command
USSOCOM	US Special Operations Command
UW	Unconventional Warfare



## 1.2 Introduction

The terrorist attacks on 9/11 were the third in a series perpetrated by al Qaeda against the US. As far back as 1998, al Qaeda was linked to the US embassy truck bombings at Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. In 2000, the naval destroyer USS Cole was bombed while refueling off the coast of Yemen. During these attacks, the US national command authorities [NCA] were reviewing plans to counter al Qaeda. Certain plans involved classified SOF. These plans were, however, never put into action for several reasons. Initially the Pentagon was reluctant to participate citing the definitions of terrorism as criminal acts that did not warrant a military operation. Short of a declaration of war, a military CT response was unlikely.

After the al Qaeda attacks on 9/11, US leaders decided they must update the policy of reacting and dealing with acts of terrorism against the United States. The new US policy became known as the “Global War on Terror” [GWOT] and set out to preempt terrorist threats against US interests. The key feature of this policy advanced that acts of terrorism were no longer a criminal matter. Instead, acts of terror towards the US would be considered acts of war and would involve a military response. When asked to brief US leaders with the plan of attack in Afghanistan US military leaders had no immediate plans prepared. The CIA responded with a plan to introduce paramilitary forces and create a conduit through which US SOF could participate.

The CIA’s plan to launch attacks against the Taliban and al Qaeda was put into action with the assistance of US SOF. As knowledge about al Qaeda grew, US leaders determined that the campaign would focus on special operations designed to impact the unconventional enemy on his own terms. Unconventional warfare [UW] is one type of special operation involved in low

intensity or guerilla conflicts. Special operations typically involve sending small groups of (SOF) operators into enemy territory to engage in one of the following types of operations: direct action, strategic/special reconnaissance, unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, counterterrorism, psychological operations, civil affairs, and humanitarian assistance. In the case of Afghanistan, small groups of US CIA and SOF were the first to enter the country. These teams assembled groups of indigenous militia who were hostile to al Qaeda and the Taliban. The GWOT began in the fall of 2001, when US forces and their indigenous militias launched assaults on al Qaeda and the Taliban. The opening phase of the GWOT quickly saw the routing of al Qaeda and Taliban forces, however much of the leadership of both al Qaeda and Taliban were able to escape.

Later, a clearly upset Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld complained to US military leaders about their lack of preparedness. Secretary Rumsfeld then began to prepare for the next phase of the wider GWOT campaign. The Pentagon believed that in order to defeat al Qaeda, SOF would need to play a major role in upcoming operations. US Special Operations Command [USSOCOM] was instructed to begin preparations to become the lead organization in planning CT operations in the GWOT. Under the 2004 Unified Command Plan [UCP], USSOCOM was given new and increased authority to plan and synchronize SOF counterterrorism [CT] efforts globally. USSOCOM was now able to set protocol for all Geographic Combatant Commanders [GCC] including US Central Command [USCENTCOM], whose area of responsibility included Afghanistan.

By spring of 2002, the US offensive against the Taliban and al Qaeda were nearly complete. US and NATO officials began shifting operational strategy towards security and stability operations. The security and stability operations or counterinsurgency [COIN], were

directed at winning the population over to the Afghan national government. To facilitate the COIN mission, greater numbers of conventional troops were deployed to Afghanistan. The US COIN strategy as implemented in Afghanistan varies from traditional COIN doctrine. One example was the light military footprint which used a minimal number of US and coalition troops far below that specified for COIN doctrine.

During the Bush administration, special operations targeting members of al Qaeda and the Taliban were taking a toll on leaders and mid-level individuals. Approval of JSOC CT missions was only necessary from the USCENTCOM commander. These operations were often uncoordinated and in some instances, experienced questionable results. There were several times when these CT missions mistakenly killed or wounded civilians. These killings created friction between the US and NATO forces and the Afghans. It was quickly becoming clear that despite the successes, CT operations were having negative impacts on the COIN campaign.

The key part of the CT campaign, involved using highly classified units within USSOCOM known as Joint Special Operations Command [JSOC]. Members of JSOC are trained to conduct classified missions vital to national security and hostage rescue. Due to the high risk nature of these missions, JSOC units are considered to be the elite of SOF and include the Navy's SEAL Team 6, and the Army's Special Forces Delta squadrons or "Delta Force." Under the national command authorities [NCA], JSOC began to develop a CT strategy of targeting, tracking, then capturing or killing individual members of al Qaeda and the Taliban. Some of these operations have created problems for US and NATO International Security Assistance Forces [ISAF] as well as Afghan army forces. The problems arise due to JSOC's ability to operate outside the command and control of US-ISAF regional (battle space) commands [RC]. JSOC's secretive CT campaign poses several risks for coalition forces pursuing

COIN operations, and ultimately goes directly against established Joint Forces doctrine. In the end, JSOC is conducting its own operations essentially out of phase with coalition operations.

The concept for Joint Forces doctrine came after several highly controversial special operations experienced avoidable failures during the 1980's. As part of the 1987 Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reformation Act [Goldwater-Nichols] Joint Forces doctrine became the foundation of US military operations. Goldwater-Nichols was designed to break the insular perspective held by the US military services. The act attempted to provide a simplified chain of command the ability to utilize the full spectrum of US military assets effectively. The success of Goldwater-Nichols has, however, remained controversial over the past quarter-century.

In late 2009, US troops were drawing down in Iraq and preparing to redeploy to assist with operations in Afghanistan. The Pentagon initiated a change of command in Afghanistan and US Army Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal was appointed to command US forces in Afghanistan. LTG. McChrystal had established a reputation as the commander of JSOC during the Iraq war. LTG. McChrystal's CT operations were responsible for killing many members of al Qaeda in Iraq including Abu Musab al Zaraqawi in 2006. The Obama administration asked LTG. McChrystal to review the situation in Afghanistan and identify what was needed to succeed. LTG. McChrystal acknowledged that a revised COIN strategy would work but that additional troops would be necessary to carry it out.

Interestingly, despite the promotion of renewed COIN efforts, CT operations were in fact stepped up to some of their highest rates of the campaign. This scenario has left some scholars asking whether it is possible to wage simultaneous COIN and CT campaigns without the two

canceling the effects of the other. This research will address in detail the problems the US-NATO coalition has faced while attempting its COIN strategy. It is clear that the current US-ISAF coalition's COIN strategy has not succeeded. Pursuit of a CT strategy would better serve US interests in two forms. First, a CT strategy would specify a clear set of goals. Clarifying goals would improve coordination of Joint Forces and orient all resources towards these goals. Second, the US continues to under resource the COIN mission. A CT strategy would allow US leaders to capitalize on the resources available. Ultimately, the resources in Afghanistan must be aligned with a coherent military strategy that can succeed.

## Section 2.

### 2.1 Thesis Statement

It is the premise of this thesis that continuing the present COIN strategy will not succeed in stabilizing Afghanistan. The campaign in Afghanistan must return to a CT focused operation. It is proposed that the US scale back its state building COIN operations and accelerate the building of capable Afghan security forces. Though this is not the optimal long term strategy for Afghanistan, a CT policy would be more likely to solve several current problems. A CT policy would assist in orienting coalition forces around a clear goal, coordinate Joint Forces, and utilize the available resources. The initial design of the GWOT supported a concise set of goals: to dismantle, disrupt, and destroy the al Qaeda terror network and its affiliates in Afghanistan. The GWOT also sought to make Afghanistan inhospitable as a sanctuary to al Qaeda. The US later attempted to expand the campaign of state building and counterinsurgency [COIN]. In spite of this expanded venture, it was never fully resourced by US leaders who instead kept troop numbers to a minimum. US military leaders established a new version of COIN that supported the ongoing CT operations. This version of COIN has experienced several setbacks and is unlikely to succeed in its ambitions. Currently, the US has become focused on a poor economy and support for a costly war has declined. Continuing the present undermanned COIN operation offers little hope for a secure future for Afghanistan.

### 2.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to serve two purposes. First, this study will add to the debate campaign strategy in Afghanistan. Second, it hopes to add to the scholarly discussion of US

military policy in current and future conflicts. This study sets out to reassess the US strategy of implementing simultaneous COIN and CT operations. Joint warfare involving SOF and GPF in the past has experienced several problems. Recently, many scholars on military policy in Afghanistan have discussed matching the military ends and means. With the ongoing disconnect between military resources and goals in Afghanistan, the discussion of strategy in Afghanistan will likely continue.

### 2.3 Methodology

This thesis looks at the US GWOT strategy which began in Afghanistan following the September 11, 2001 attacks. Several factors have affected the war in Afghanistan during the past ten years. In 2009 President Obama reviewed and refocused on the military strategy in Afghanistan to determine what was necessary for success. The result of this assessment was a new campaign that was widely claimed to be COIN. This new campaign has, however, proven to diverge from traditional COIN doctrine and instead involved an increased emphasis on CT. The increased use of the classified Joint Special Operations Command [JSOC] in CT operations has sparked much debate. The fact that these specific SOF units are able to operate outside the authority of coalition forces in theater has created several problems. The largest problem is an uncoordinated CT strategy within the larger COIN campaign. This study will discuss the problems that arise when JSOC conducts uncoordinated operations in and around the confined battle spaces of Afghanistan.

This study will follow a qualitative methodology in order to thoroughly analyze and assess materials relating to the GWOT throughout its ten year development in Afghanistan. The

primary resources used include several published accounts of the war in Afghanistan. The publications will include quarterly political and military journals, texts, and scholarly research relative to the topic outlined above. Items of specific interest include resources describing the recent history of US military doctrine, special operations forces, unconventional warfare, and the GWOT. These resources will establish a full understanding of the development of US military doctrine as the threat of terrorism began to take shape. A great deal of material has been published since the 9/11 attacks. Among the publications, several have outlined the dramatic shift in US policy dealing with terrorism and the rise of the GWOT. The published resources are supplemented with interviews of three US Army Special Forces veterans of the GWOT.

The interviews with three veteran Army Special Forces members provide greater detail and insight into the military perspective from the battlefield. The three individuals interviewed are all members of US Army Special Forces having served tours of duty in Afghanistan and Iraq. These Special Forces soldiers bring firsthand knowledge of military strategy as it unfolded on the battlefield in Afghanistan. The ability to conduct interviews with experienced combat veterans brings another dimension and perspective difficult to gain solely from published materials. The secretive nature of ongoing JSOC special operations generally makes conducting research difficult. What little published material on special operations is available is typically greatly redacted. The ability to question members of SOF on their experience and perspective provides greater insight typically absent in published resources. The fact that the author was unable to interview a greater number of US SOF with experience in the GWOT is worth noting. Certain factors relating to these interviews however hold particular interest. First, the US Special Forces soldiers interviewed had conducted tours of duty at different times and under considerably different circumstances, such as command structures. Despite these differences, the answers



provided in the interviews produced responses with a similarity that may suggest more interviews could produce similar responses. Nevertheless, this study cannot produce conclusions of any quantitative value from the limited interviews obtained. Therefore these interviews will seek to add a professional perspective on the topic at hand only.

The questions asked during the interviews initially dealt with command and control [C2] of US SOF within Afghanistan and how they interacted with conventional forces commanders. The different types of SOF and their missions in Afghanistan can easily confuse many readers, and therefore the need to clearly delineate the two became apparent. The SOF in the JSOC units often carry out operations and actions which are unacknowledged by the US government. This clandestine activity has led to these SOF, and their operations, being frequently referred to as “black” SOF. Acknowledged SOF and operations are therefore often called “white” SOF, which are typically involved with more COIN related operations. As the differences between JSOC and white SOF became clear, the next set of interview questions were designed to probe further. The second interview looked into the relationships held between JSOC, white SOF, and the command elements present in the areas of operation within Afghanistan. This interview also addressed any conditions which were present that created friction between the various forces conducting mainly CT or COIN operations. The full question sets asked during each interview are available in appendix II of this study.

Considerable efforts have been implemented in an effort to reduce any perceived biases associated with those interviewed as well as those from the author. First, a wide ranging list of media outlets and publications have been used to provide a broad assessment of the topic. The examination of these accounts will allow the development of a “mosaic” to be presented. This

mosaic will then be compiled into a concise format suitable to address the research questions at hand.

## 2.4 Limitations

The greatest limitation on this study is the inaccessibility of materials that involve SOF and their activities due to secret classifications. Published materials about SOF operations in the media usually contain highly redacted or limited information regarding the event or activity. Timely information on SOF is difficult to come in contact with. When material is published in text, there is a lag time between the event and publication, whereby the information, tactics, or activities may be outdated. The standard of operational secrecy among SOF, maintains that very little information about many activities is ever published.

Another limit of this study is the assurance of unbiased opinions and sources. Attempting to overcome this particular bias is inherent in any qualitative study and should be addressed. Membership in the military creates a culture that can carry an insular perspective. This perspective may create an “us and them” point of view concerning non-military associates and researchers. It must also be taken into account that the perspectives from those who are in the military and published material may present a “pro-military” description of events.

Some citations in this study represent the views of members of the military and therefore may imply a narrowed or biased perspective. These views represent expertise in special operations and are imperative to an informed perspective on the topic and this study. Biases are ubiquitous in any media or resource and must be overcome through informed and credible research methods.

## Section 3.

### 3.1 Literature Review

The literature review will begin by providing background information on US SOF. The second section will address US defense reformation and the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act. The most notable attributes of the defense reformation include its impact on civil-military relations and modern Joint Forces doctrine. Next, the 1987 restructuring of US SOF under USSOCOM will be discussed. Fourth, the examination looks at the challenges faced by US leaders during previous attempts to use CT operations against terrorist networks. Finally, the GWOT strategic vision will be examined including, USSOCOM's greater authority and how it affected the campaign. The literature survey will be followed by a conclusions section.

The events on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 resulted in a shift in US policy with regard to how it would deal with terrorist organizations and regimes that supported them. However, what has transpired over the course of the GWOT leaves several questions about the strategy and end goals. The GWOT campaign in Afghanistan has experienced several setbacks some of which continue today. The campaign has been torn between the two strategies of counterterrorism [CT] and counterinsurgency [COIN]. CT relies mainly on kinetic or Direct Action [DA] operations. DA missions target members of al Qaeda, the Taliban, or other anti-coalition forces and then succeed in either capturing or killing them. COIN on the other hand is sets out to support the local population and establish support for the central Afghan government.

Due to the unconventional nature of the enemy the US faced, White House leaders developed a strategy focused on clandestine operations and unconventional warfare [UW]. To pursue this strategy, US leaders turned to the experts in unconventional warfare, the CIA and US

Special Operations Forces [SOF]. The GWOT began with the deployment of CIA paramilitaries supporting US SOF to destroy, dismantle, and disrupt the Al Qaeda terror network and its sponsors in Afghanistan.

Initial operations in the GWOT were CT focused and involved killing scores of al-Qaeda and Taliban members. As the GWOT continued to unfold, the National Command Authorities continued to develop the roles for the relevant geographic combatant commands [GCC] in Afghanistan. Primarily, this included US Central Command [USCENTCOM], whose area of responsibility [AOR] included Afghanistan and US Special Operations Command [USSOCOM]. USSOCOM would be in charge of the unconventional war against al Qaeda which included developing and synchronizing global CT operations. Synchronizing global CT operations included Afghanistan which encroached into USCENTCOM's AOR. USCENTCOM and coalition general purpose forces [GPF] were entering the theater of operations to conduct security and stability operations also referred to as COIN. The COIN mission was to decrease the insurgency and build support for the Afghan central government.

However, the GWOT campaign was never designed or equipped to conduct COIN operations and remains so today. Several factors both realized and unrealized, have negated a successful COIN campaign. First, placing USSOCOM in a supported role alongside USCENTCOM created several problems with Joint Forces coordination. Joint Forces doctrine goes back to the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols act, which gave the GCC commander ultimate command and control [C2] over all military forces within his AOR. However, a premiere CT unit within USSOCOM was able to operate outside of USCENTCOM's subordinate command structure, a relationship that continues today (See Appendix I, Figure 4.). Second, ongoing civil-military struggles have impacted strategy and how the US responds to unconventional threats.

Next, properly equipping the military to achieve policy goals has never been appropriately addressed during the GWOT. Despite a widely stated desire to rebuild a stable Afghan state, the means have never been provided to accomplish this mission. Despite a small degree of success, the long-term COIN GWOT policy has lost momentum and run out of time.

### 3.2 US Special Operations Forces

Early US Special Operations Forces [SOF] were organized during World War II as part of the Office of Strategic Services [OSS]. Following the lead of the British, the US assembled small groups of men to infiltrate behind German lines in Europe to engage in sabotage and unconventional warfare. Later these groups were deactivated because the US military saw no immediate or future need for clandestine operations (Marquis, 1997, pp. 9-11). The 1960s saw the Soviet Union establishing proxy forces around the globe to expand its political influence. The incidents in Cuba, including the Bay of Pigs and ballistic missile crisis, left President Kennedy concerned with the US military's capability to conduct low-intensity operations. President Kennedy began developing a new "flexible response doctrine" which focused on the US ability to engage in operations short of "all out war." (Marquis, 1997, p. 13) This new policy directed the US military to quickly expand its unconventional forces in order to engage the Soviet proxy nations and "liberate" them from communist influence (Ibid.).

In a 1961 defense budget proposal to Congress, President Kennedy called for expanding the US Army Special Forces [SF], and related COIN forces. US SOF saw their first large-scale usage during the Vietnam conflict. Early during the war US SOF were mainly used in advisory roles to guide the anti-communist South Vietnamese forces. Later, as America stepped up its

involvement, SOF took a greater offensive role leading indigenous forces in special reconnaissance [SR] and direct action [DA] missions. The overall concept was to expend a small amount of US resources, such as a twelve man SF Operational Detachment Alpha [ODA] team to train and enable a larger indigenous force. SF assistance allowed operations to occur by, through, and with indigenous forces, which limited US expenditures in resources and personnel.

Special Operations Forces [SOF] have remained a close-knit group of the US military that maintain a high level of operational secrecy. The label “SOF” is a broad term and is often confused with “Special Forces,” which are actually part of the US Army’s SOF component. USSOCOM is made up of approximately 55,900 personnel from the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps<sup>1</sup> (USSOCOM Fact Book, 2010). USSOCOM is a functional command which is tasked with the training, equipping, and providing SOF to the GCCs in support of GCC operations. What sets the SOF apart from the conventional or general purpose forces [GPF], are their abilities to solve problems through unconventional means. Ultimately, conventional forces simply cannot implement the same strategies or solutions offered by SOF (Machon & Kingston, 2011).

Some core SOF mission areas include unconventional warfare, direct action, counterterrorism, strategic reconnaissance, psychological operations, civil affairs, and foreign internal defense. The SOF’s unconventional nature has been a divisive force between them and the conventional GPF. The historical relationship between the SOF and GPF was often distrustful and strained (Marquis, 1997, p. 141). The SOF’s fixation on operational secrecy has continued to create distance between themselves and the modern military leadership. Due to the

---

<sup>1</sup> In 2006, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld ordered a Marine Corps Marine Special Operations Command [MARSOC], be activated and commanded by US Special Operations Command.

detached relationship, GPF commanders have failed to realize the potential of SOF capabilities in full spectrum operations (Machon & Kingston, 2011).

US SOF have played a major role in unconventional warfare operations in Afghanistan. US and coalition SOF formed a Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force [CJSOTF]. The CJSOTF makes up what are called the “white SOF” or acknowledged US forces that are commanded by GPF headquarters. The white SOF operate out of bases located near local villages. Unlike JSOC, white SOF fall under the command of ISAF and USCENTCOM commanders.

Within USSOCOM, there is a sub-unified command of approximately 4,000 SOF members and civilians comprising the Joint Special Operations Command [JSOC]. JSOC oversees the SOF special mission units often referred to as “black SOF,” or the unacknowledged US SOF (Ambinder, 2011). JSOC was formed in 1980 in the aftermath of the failed Iran hostage rescue in order to better coordinate multi-service special operations. JSOC adopted the role of a highly skilled CT and hostage rescue unit necessary in quick reaction operations (Marquis, 1997, pp. 63-64, 98). Included in this tier of SOF, are the US Army’s Special Forces Operational Detachment Delta or Delta Force, and the Navy’s SEAL Team 6 (Naylor S. D., Spec ops raids into Pakistan halted, 2008).

JSOC’s role in the GWOT has included assembling highly classified task forces pursuing objectives related to an aggressive CT national security policy. JSOC’s shadowy participation in the GWOT is due to operational secrecy and the need to constantly pursue new intelligence. JSOC’s mission has included hunting down, then killing or capturing many high value targets

[HVT] in al Qaeda and the Taliban around Afghanistan and even into Western Pakistan (Scahill, 2010).

There are two types of operations that SOF has engaged in during the GWOT, clandestine, and covert operations. The 1991 Intelligence Authorization Act stated that in order for covert operations to be conducted, a Presidential finding must be prepared. The Presidential finding must lay out the specifics of the mission and the relevance to national strategic or security objectives (Kibbe, 2004, p. 105). JSOC operations are normally run exclusive from other military operations under the direction of the NCAs.

### 3.3 Department of Defense Reform

The conventional US military has historically remained highly skeptical of anything referred to as “elite” within its organization, especially the SOF. Mutual distrust and contempt has been evident between the two groups. Beginning in the late 1970s however, the US became involved in a series of crisis situations requiring decisive military action and coordination. Each of these operations suffered varying degrees of failure. In 1979 the Islamic revolution in Iran resulted in several Americans at the US embassy being taken hostage. The decision was made to attempt an SOF led special operation, to rescue the hostages.

The US assembled members from the US Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines to support the SOF led rescue operation called “Eagle Claw.” Six months later the order was given to execute the operation. When two of the extraction helicopters experienced mechanical failures the mission was aborted. When one of the remaining helicopters attempted to depart the Iranian



desert, the pilot became disoriented and crashed into an Air Force C-130 fuel tanker which exploded. The operation resulted in eight US service members killed (Cogan, 2003, p. 214).

A special operations review group later noted several issues with the operation, which raised questions about the ability to conduct multi-service special operations. The review cited poorly defined command and control relationships as well as a lack of coordination among the services. The review also pointed out that a comprehensive training exercise would have uncovered several problems that surfaced later in the actual operation (Ibid.). This failed operation, known as “Desert One,” became a catalyst in the debate for DOD reformation.

Another such incident occurred during the 1983 invasion of the Caribbean island of Grenada. The ruling government in Grenada had been overthrown by Marxists in a military coup. Ongoing fighting between the Marxists and pro-government supporters created concern for the safety of 600 American students at a Grenadine medical school (Cole, 1998-1999, p. 57). The initial US plans involved extracting US citizens at risk in the country, but as support for ousting the Marxists grew among Caribbean leaders, the plans shifted to a large scale invasion. The US was soon planning its largest military operation since Vietnam (Marquis, 1997, p. 94). The operation included several units from the Navy SEALs, Army Delta Force, and Army Rangers.

In this case, time delays gave up the element of surprise and instead of landing under the cover of night, SOF troops landed at daylight, after the main invasion had begun (Marquis, 1997, p. 98). The Inter-service communication problems also became obvious. Difficulties began when US Army Rangers came under fire and were unable to call for naval fire support. This communication problem was due initially to the Rangers not knowing the proper procedure for requesting Naval strikes. Nevertheless, a lack of training to request naval support became a non-

issue, due to the Ranger's radios being incompatible with naval communications systems (Marquis, 1997, p. 101). In the end, unofficial reports of the incident in Grenada resulted in an estimated nineteen killed, and one hundred fifty-two wounded. While the primary objectives of the operation in Grenada were met, later accounts would critically describe the misuse of SOF in seizing unnecessary objectives and resulting in several deaths (Marquis, 1997, pp. 105-106).

One author later attributed these military failures to three common denominators including poor military advice to political leaders, a lack of unity of command, and the inability for the military to operate jointly. Further investigation concluded that there was "no capable joint organization to execute these missions," (Locher III, 2001, p. 100). The view from Congress was that joint air, ground, and naval operations were crucial in order to successfully capitalize on the capabilities of the US military. The failed special operations and a surge in international terrorist activity outlined clearly the inter-service deficiencies that existed throughout the military. Realizing that the US lacked the critical capabilities needed to address modern threats, members of the military and Congress began to call for reformation at the DOD. The Pentagon however, vehemently rejected all calls for reform, and fought to keep Congressional interference limited.

A Senate Armed Services Committee investigation found that disproportional powers were held by the individual services and were limiting the attention to "Joint Force" coordination. It appeared to Congress that the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines were too preoccupied with their individual roles to weigh measures necessary for mission success. In 1986 Congress finally passed the Department of Defense Reformation Act, also called the Goldwater-Nichols Act after its Senate sponsors. This new law unified the US military services under a

Joint Forces doctrine. Joint Forces doctrine refocused multi-service assets and combined their strengths under a single unified commander.

Over time the globe had been divided up geographically into areas of responsibility [AOR] with military assets based in each region. There are currently six geographic combatant commanders [GCCs], including US Africa Command [USAFRICOM], US Central Command [USCENTCOM], US Northern Command [USNORTHCOM], US Pacific Command [USPACOM], and US Southern Command [USSOUTHCOM] (DefenseLINK.gov, 2004). Prior to Goldwater-Nichols, the GCCs had been weak and could not request or control other services assets within his AOR.

Goldwater-Nichols broadened the authority of the unified GCCs<sup>2</sup>. The new authorities allowed GCCs to assemble and package “Joint Task Force” [JTF] to deal with battlefield conditions and resources (Locher III, 2001, p. 108). Empowering the GCC collapsed a previously complex chain of command between the policy makers and the battlefield. The GCC was now placed directly under the President and Secretary of Defense (Locher III, 1996, p. 12). The GCC was also in a better position to control his battle-space and all the military assets employed in any campaign. The act spelled out the services’ updated duties as “fully supportive” of the unified GCCs under the Joint Forces concept (Locher III, 2001, p. 108). The new Joint Forces reformation was changing the conventional military forces, but it had not addressed anything related to SOF. Original DOD reformers familiar with the SOF capabilities felt that Goldwater-Nichols needed SOF specifications, and pushed for further restructuring.

---

<sup>2</sup> Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld changed the title of the “commanders in chief” to combatant commanders, due to his idea that the “Commander in Chief” title belonged *solely* to the President.

### 3.4 Special Operations Forces Reform

During the drafting of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, additional legislation was sought to ensure specific reformation of the US SOF. Defense reformation leading up to Goldwater-Nichols, originated with solving problems with coordination of special operations. Yet, the legislation did not address anything that related to how special operations were planned, coordinated, or executed. Many advocates for SOF reform claimed that the US remained unprepared to fight the most likely wars it could face in the present or future (Marquis, 1997, p. 126). Furthermore, it was believed that the conventional military would never understand or implement the full capabilities offered by SOF.

The exact reasons for leaving SOF-specific measures out of the original legislation of 1986 remain unclear. Some believed that not including specific SOF reform in Goldwater-Nichols was due to the idea that SOF were already “inherently Joint” within the services (Ibid.). One “SOF Truth,” that supports the inherently joint concept states that “Most Special Operations require non-SOF support,” a fact that has remained true for all special operations. (USSOCOM Fact Book, 2010). Without specifics in Goldwater-Nichols, however, SOF could act as a distinct group outside the new “Joint” doctrine (Martin, 2009, p. 7). Others observed that the climate within the already reluctant DOD was simply not conducive to include any SOF reformation at that time. Nevertheless, Goldwater-Nichols was signed without any SOF reforms, although this fact was not lost on many familiar with the struggle to manage US special operations capabilities.

SOF reformists agreed that in order to effectively improve SOF capabilities, a separate special operations organization would need to exist outside the conventional military (Marquis,

1997, p. 122). Senators Sam Nunn and William Cohen initiated SOF reformation by calling for a separate civilian agency to control SOF. Some argued for a separate defense agency run by a civilian would be too similar to the Central Intelligence Agency. Others believed that SOF should remain under military command as a distinct “sixth service,” (Marquis, 1997, p. 122).

The argument to implement SOF as a “sixth service” was based on the conventional military’s inability to understand and implement SOF in the past. It was believed that as long as SOF were controlled by military leaders entrenched in conventional war fighting concepts; their capabilities would suffer (Ibid.). It was thought that without control over their own organization and budget, SOF would never gain the footing necessary to meet the developing security challenges. Arguments were made by members of the Office of the Secretary of Defense supporting establishment of a Joint Special Operations Agency [JSOA] which would be run by a civilian (Marquis, 1997, p. 85). The agency was established in 1984 with the intention that it could improve understanding of and planning for special operations. The JSOA was led by a two-star general (a three-star general was requested) that was under the Joint Staff’s Directorate of Operations (Marquis, 1997, p. 86). It was later clear that the JSOA was not having the desired effect and still lacked authority to direct special operations. The JSOA remained impeded and controlled by higher military leaders.

Amendments to Goldwater-Nichols were undertaken and sponsored by Senators Sam Nunn and William Cohen. These amendments specifically targeted SOF shortfalls and were referred to as the Nunn-Cohen amendment [Nunn-Cohen]. Nunn-Cohen contained three elements that permanently changed the SOF standing within the military. First, Nunn-Cohen created a separate unified command US Special Operations Command [USSOCOM]. USSOCOM was given a “four star” commander to establish parity with the other combatant

commanders. It also established the position of assistant secretary of defense in charge of special operations and low-intensity conflict. Next, for the first time in law, it prescribed the elements of “special operations”. These included:

“Direct action, strategic reconnaissance, unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, civil affairs, psychological operations, counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance, theater search and rescue, and such other activities as may be specified by the President or the Secretary of Defense.” (Marquis, 1997, p. 146)

Finally, the amendments provided USSOCOM with its own resources and budget through major force program 11. The ability for USSOCOM to retain control over its resources and acquisitions was considered crucial for its effectiveness, and removed it from the fight for DOD funding. However, coming up as a new peer beside the other combatant commands did little to ease tensions or establish trust between the SOF and the GPF forces.

### 3.5 Civil-Military Relations

Along with reforming how the military services coordinated with each other, Goldwater-Nichols established new civil-military relationships. First, the legislation acknowledged that the Secretary of Defense exercised ultimate control over the military. Power was taken away from the corporate Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS], and placed in the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff [CJCS]. The CJCS was able to assemble and confer with the Joint Staff for advice, but final advice given to the White House came from the CJCS. Some argue that shifting power away from the corporate style JCS to a single military advisor has had negative consequences.

One former US military officer, Major Christopher Bourne, writes that Goldwater-Nichols has actually decreased civilian control over the military. Bourne begins by pointing out that the US President's duties "demand a range of alternatives when confronted with matters of national security." Therefore according to Bourne, the President's duty to receive a wide range of military advice was damaged when the CJCS became the sole military advisor to the President (Bourne, 1998, p. 103). Bourne went on to write that this configuration also relegated the secretary of defense to formulating only general defense policy, while more important national security decisions went to the CJCS.

The decision to place power in the CJCS instead of the corporate JCS was due to efficiency. Bourne goes on to describe that allotting power to the CJCS was an attempt at a "one man solution," for military decisions (Bourne, 1998, p. 104). The decisions weighed before the Joint Staff often have had far reaching effects. Operational and tactical decisions are reached through the suppression of alternate actions, until a top commander approves a decision and acts. This method of decision making is useful for the battlefield but is unsuitable at higher levels. Bourne suggested that commanders can typically adjust and correct tactical and operational mistakes before they affect the outcome of a campaign. Strategic level errors such as force structure and national objectives on the other hand are typically "irreversible and often fatal," (Ibid.). Because national policy and military plans intersect at the Joint Chiefs, decisions affecting strategic national objectives should receive a range of alternatives.

While the President was still able to seek out military advice from the Joint Chiefs, voicing opinions contrary to the CJCS too often could be career ending. Pro-reformers on the other hand, believed that allowing the CJCS the last word was necessary due to the history of collective JCS advice being too ineffective. Prior to the reformation, advice coming from the JCS

was often debated and agreed upon when it reached the “lowest common denominator.” The results from this decision making process were watered down and often useless for formulating strategic solutions (Locher III, 2001, p. 103).

Another point outlined by Bourne explained that under the new law, defense policy formulation saw the military with the upper hand when making strategic decisions. Bourne quoted former Secretary of Defense Les Aspen’s view of bureaucratic decision making at the Pentagon: “the side capable of making the best arguments will normally prevail,” (Ibid.). Bourne then reasserted that on military related matters, the Joint Staff would always produce better arguments than their civilian counterparts. In Bourne’s opinion, the shifting of power to the CJCS and his control over the JCS created an office far more effective at exerting influence over defense decisions than the civilian leaders.

### 3.6 US Counterterrorism Policy Prior to September 11, 2001

In the past, when the US has been challenged by unconventional terrorist threats, the President has engaged the SOF to respond to the problem. However the military leadership was often quick to develop the “better argument” against military involvement. The Joint Staff responded negatively to White House requests for SOF led operations against terrorists on several occasions during the Clinton administration. In 1998 the al Qaeda terrorist network attacked two US embassies in Africa. Later in 2000, al Qaeda also attacked a US Naval destroyer, the USS Cole. Options to utilize SOF against terrorist networks were proposed several times to respond to these threats during the Clinton administration. Despite al Qaeda’s public declarations of war on the US, the Joint Staff remained unwilling to respond with military force.



Former National Security Council advisor Richard Clarke described several proposals to employ SOF to attack or disrupt al Qaeda. Despite Clarke's proposals being backed by President Clinton and top defense leaders, they were turned down by the Joint Chiefs at the Pentagon. Each time proposed SOF operations were approved by the White House and submitted to the military for review, they were rejected by the JCS.

Reasons cited by the JCS included:

- It would take a very large force;
- The operation was risky, and might fail, with U.S. forces captured or killed, embarrassing the President;
- Their "professional military opinion" was not to do it;
- But, of course, they could do it if they received orders to do so in writing from the President of the United States;
- And, by the way, military lawyers said it would be a violation of international law (Clarke, 2004, p. 145).

The fact that "terrorism" had been defined by the US as a criminal matter, relegated terrorists to the criminal justice system (Schultz Jr., 2004, p. 26). According to former USSOCOM leader General Peter Schoomaker, defining terrorism as a crime kept military and SOF operations off the table. This reasoning by military leaders allowed them to assume that terrorism should be dealt with by the FBI or CIA instead of military assets. Due to these conclusions, military special operations were never pursued in response to terrorist threats before 9/11 (Schultz Jr., 2004, p. 27). More recent actions taken against terrorists only continue to blur the line between legal and military policy in the ongoing struggle against terrorism. Two recent instances include the criminal prosecution of Umar Farouk Abdul Mutallab, the would-be Christmas day suicide terrorist, and the recent drone strike that killed American born al Qaeda linked terrorist Anwar al Awlaki in Yemen. These two cases illustrate often difficult decision making faced by US leaders and military leaders involved in unconventional conflict.

### 3.7 Global War on Terrorism Planning in Afghanistan

After the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, President Bush went looking for options to confront al Qaeda's terrorist network. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld approached USCENTCOM, whose AOR included Afghanistan, to go over military plans. The USCENTCOM commander, General Tommy Franks had no plans ready for immediate action in Afghanistan (Woodward, 2002, p. 43). The CIA however offered a plan which was ready to begin immediate operations. The CIA plan was given the green light from the President, which upset Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld.

As the US focused on Afghanistan, more became known about al Qaeda and the threats it posed to US security. The unconventional nature of terror networks like al Qaeda led the US to base its strategy on unconventional warfare [UW] (USSOCOM, 2007, p. 15). The early phases of the GWOT in Afghanistan involved sending in CIA special activities division [SAD] paramilitaries and SOF teams to simultaneously overthrow the Taliban and destroy al Qaeda (Berntsen & Pezzullo, 2005, pp. 74-75). The nature of the GWOT in and of itself was unique, specifically its declaration of war on terror networks. The "criminal" obstacle that had prevented the military from fighting terrorism was out of the way now that the US had a declaration of war against terrorists.

Covering events surrounding the GWOT, Seymour Hersh indicated that civil-military relations changed a great deal under the Bush administration. Hersh described Secretary Rumsfeld being adamant that terrorists had to be dealt with through unconventional means. Rumsfeld anticipated accomplishing this through clandestine military operations, which had

previously been left to the CIA (Hersh, Chain of Command, 2005, p. 272). In order to effectively pursue this strategy, it was necessary to advance changes in the military establishment, particularly at USSOCOM.

USSOCOM had traditionally been responsible for training, equipping, and providing SOF to the unified commands. USSOCOM also maintained the JSOC units responsible for classified missions pursuant to national security as directed by the White House. During the early phases of the GWOT in 2002, USSOCOM leader General Charles Holland was reportedly reluctant to plan aggressive operations proposed by Secretary Rumsfeld (Hersh, Chain of Command, 2005, pp. 271-272). Hersh goes on to describe what the Rumsfeld team at the Pentagon called a “Clintonized” peacetime military leadership that did not understand how to fight an unconventional enemy. Hersh described more incidents of military resistance to Pentagon proposals of targeting al Qaeda leaders. Questions of legalities surfaced again with proposed special operations missions and what the military leaders considered a criminal problem. An interview with one of Secretary Rumsfeld’s advisers summed up Rumsfeld’s thoughts on military unwillingness to deal with terrorism:

“I know you have been getting this from the Joint Staff... I’ve heard this—‘It’s not American’—from the military leadership. But it’s not because of legality. It’s because they don’t want to do it.” (Hersh, 2005, p. 271)

To adjust the capabilities of the SOF, Rumsfeld expanded the authority of USSOCOM to act as a global command and facilitate global offensive operations on al Qaeda’s terror network. Rumsfeld asked the USSOCOM leadership to “lean forward” and aggressively approach the new fight the US was engaged in (Ibid.). From 2002 through 2005, USSOCOM developed plans towards becoming the lead command for planning and synchronizing the GWOT (USSOCOM,

2007, p. 15). It was surmised that USSOCOM would be appropriate to lead the counterterrorism efforts due to its inherently global area of responsibility [AOR]. Al Qaeda had conducted missions which cut across several of the geographic combatant commanders [GCC] AORs including US European Command, US Central Command, and US Pacific Command. It was determined that a combatant command with global reach would best be suited to take charge of the campaign (Ibid.).

The 2004 unified command plan [UCP] granted USSOCOM greater roles and authority and put it in charge of synchronizing global CT strategy. This plan allowed USSOCOM to develop CT operations for the other GCCs and was immediately unpopular. The eight GCCs put together an alternate arrangement giving USSOCOM only coordinating abilities. Commander of USSOCOM General Doug Brown however asked vice CJCS General Peter Pace to forward both plans and allow Rumsfeld to decide which to use. In the end, the 2004 UCP signed by President Bush, directed USSOCOM to serve

“As the lead combatant commander for planning, synchronizing, and as directed, executing global operations against terrorist networks in coordination with other combatant commanders” (USSOCOM, 2007, p. 16)

The 2007 edition of USSOCOM History details the development of the GWOT campaign and outlines the command’s new roles and authorities given to the USSOCOM Command.

USSOCOM’s authority was now able to side-step responsibilities held by the unified GCCs (Ibid.) and outlined in the Goldwater-Nichols Act. The 2004 UCP also included two references outlining how the USSOCOM Commander would be the *supported* commander *when directed* for “operations in support of selected campaigns,” and for “selected special operations missions,” (Ibid.).

JSOC does not require coordination with regional battle-space owners for their operations (see Appendix I, Figure. 4). This has led to various complications on the side of US and ISAF forces in Afghanistan pursuing long-term COIN efforts (Machon & Kingston, 2011). One example of the difficulty experienced with JSOC operations was elaborated in an interview with a veteran Army Special Forces senior non-commissioned officer. Sergeant Major Bradley Kingston explained how JSOC often restricted an entire battle space and diverted all support assets to their specific mission. In some cases this involved redirecting critical close air support from coalition forces while under fire, to support a JSOC operation elsewhere. In the end, JSOC operations have frustrated many troops taking part in COIN operations (Machon & Kingston, 2011).

Nevertheless, the successes of JSOC operations have come into question, due to several negative consequences. The covert nature of JSOC operations has prevented them from coordinating with US and ISAF forces who are trying to build trust with the population. The CT operations have also stoked anti-Afghan government sentiments among the Afghan population. The negativity associated with JSOC CT raids has generated several questions regarding the US COIN-CT strategy. Interviews with one veteran Army Special Forces operator with extensive GWOT experience in both Afghanistan and Iraq revealed some of the difficulties presented by JSOC CT operations. Army Special Forces Lieutenant Colonel Harrison Gilliam commanded a Special Operations Task Force in Regional Command East and Regional Command North in Afghanistan during 2009. LTC. Gilliam stated that JSOC operations were un-nested and unsynchronized with operations conducted by the Regional Command battle space owners (Gilliam, 2011).

The ability for JSOC to conduct operations on its own with little to no coordination poses serious risks for the other forces operating in the area. The fact that these operations conflict greatly with well established joint doctrine found in Goldwater-Nichols further presents questions regarding ongoing support for these covert operations. The fact that JSOC will likely continue to operate unimpeded across the battle space should trouble those responsible for coordinating COIN operations there. According to LTC. Gilliam, the Regional Commanders' view of JSOC has been extended to "paint all SOF with the same brush and further the mistrust." (Gilliam, 2011). The battle space owners' mistrust has ultimately generated difficulty for many SOF to coordinate operations with the adjacent commanders.

### 3.8 Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism Implementation

Several strategic scholars continue to debate which strategy the US should proceed with and why. Obviously, this debate revolves around the two primary strategies discussed throughout this thesis, COIN and CT. Generally speaking, those in favor of COIN offer various modifications to the current COIN operation, while the CT focused group support a scaled back US-ISAF force with a narrower set of goals. The broader goal behind the COIN operation is creating a stable country which can support its own prolonged security. A stable and secure Afghanistan would ideally prevent terrorist networks from re-establishing themselves and threatening further transnational violence. Many have been pessimistic about the military's previous efforts at COIN operations for several reasons. Primarily, maintaining minimal troop numbers to support COIN operations has been frequently cited as a key problem.

During President Bush's two terms in office, his "light footprint" approach allowed a previously weakened Taliban to regroup with violent consequences (O'Hanlon & Riedel, 2011, p. 127). By 2009 the war in Iraq had a reduction in violence and improved stability which allowed US attention to return to Afghanistan. While reviewing the situation in Afghanistan, President Obama appointed Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal as commander of US and ISAF forces. President Obama asked LTG. McChrystal for a candid assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. LTG. McChrystal had recently commanded JSOC during the Iraq war and had shown considerable success in dismantling al Qaeda there, including killing its leader Abu Musab al Zarqawi. LTG. McChrystal later stated that a COIN strategy could succeed, but needed additional troops. Assessments given to President Obama by McChrystal ranged in numbers from a minimum 20,000 to an "unrealistic" 85,000 (Woodward, 2010, p. 273).

In an October 2009 speech, LTG. McChrystal stated that "the key to strategy is aligning resources with goals," (Long, 2010, p. 200). These and other public remarks left President Obama in a precarious political situation with the war. President Obama eventually approved a final surge of 30,000 American forces to conduct LTG. McChrystal's reinvigorated COIN strategy. This surge in troops brought the total troop numbers in Afghanistan to 270,000 or 170,000 Afghans, 64,000 Americans, and 35,000 NATO/ISAF troops (Boot, 2009, p. 5). Even with these new totals, it was still grossly disproportionate to what was needed in COIN doctrine or, one troop per fifty civilians. With 30 million Afghans, the COIN strategy would need closer to 600,000 total troops to theoretically pursue the goals (Ibid.). Notwithstanding the previous light footprint's failure at COIN, the Obama administration did little to adjust conditions.

Even so, many US military leaders continue to suggest that COIN operations can succeed. One military figure key to the strategy in Afghanistan is the commander of USSOCOM,

Admiral Erik Olsen. During a conference in May 2010, ADM. Olsen stated that “counterinsurgency should involve countering the insurgents,” and “[He] fears counterinsurgency had become a euphemism for non-kinetic operations.” (Bennett, 2010). Despite never providing adequate troop levels, President Obama has already said that he will begin withdrawing troops in 2011, and will have withdrawn 33,000 by 2012 (President Obama Speech, 2011). These numbers account for nearly all of the 40,000 troops provided for the troop surge from 2009. Due to the US not providing the necessary means to pursue a COIN strategy, it appears that the military adapted and developed a strategy based on the resources available and a loose definition of COIN.

In many reports, US military leaders have never been clear when describing frequently used terms like “irregular warfare” and COIN operations. Michael Boyle, in *Foreign Affairs*, outlined the conflation of COIN and CT doctrines that has become part of US strategy in Afghanistan (Boyle, 2010, p. 343). Boyle determined that in cases such as Afghanistan where CT and COIN are waged simultaneously, certain elements of each can be mutually reinforcing. Boyle also maintained however, that these benefits were outweighed by each strategy undermining the other, resulting in a stalemate. Boyle explained how both strategies rely on a calculated cost-benefit analysis. Boyle notes that kinetic CT operations are able to disrupt the Taliban and al Qaeda operatives; however they come at the cost of driving the population against US, ISAF, and Afghan national forces. Boyle is quick to note that there is measureable success through the covert CT programs. Yet when these operations inflicted civilian casualties, public anger towards coalition forces and Afghan government grew (Boyle, 2010, p. 346). Kinetic operations are not the only dividing force between insurgents and US-ISAF forces. The underlying fact that the Karzai government remains rife with corruption and weak in the outer



regions of Afghanistan creates difficulty in winning over locals to the central government. The fraudulent elections in 2010 left the US-ISAF coalition with no legitimate national partner (Boyle, 2010, p. 350). This is yet another force seriously undermining COIN operations that Boyle describes below:

“The ironic result of using democratic elections as a means to produce legitimacy is that the US, in its counterinsurgency effort, is now chained to a less cooperative government that actually validates Al-Qaeda’s narrative.” (Boyle, 2010, p. 351)

The ongoing corruption is yet another peripheral reality that must be weighed as the US plans its drawdown from the conflict.

Next, CT focused operations have been labeled by some as “oxymoronic” because they require ongoing intelligence collection, which can only be gained by access to the population (O'Hanlon & Riedel, 2011, p. 127). However what is overlooked in this statement is the fact that strikes into Pakistan and Yemen have succeeded against terrorist targets with no access to the population, and no US troops on the ground (Long, 2010, p. 211). The most recent example of this would be the Navy SEAL raid on Osama bin Laden in May of this year. Another concern is the inability of COIN operations to address the problems in Pakistan. COIN operations in Afghanistan can’t deal with problems posed by militant groups in Pakistan. Organizations including al Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban, and the Haqqani network reside across the border in western Pakistan and threaten Afghanistan’s long-term stability. As the US has demonstrated through its increased drone strikes into denied Pakistani territory, CT remains nearly the only option to address these threats.

Interestingly, during LTG. McChrystal’s command in Afghanistan, the campaign showed an escalation of CT operations (Woodward, 2010, p. 355). LTG. McChrystal had limited the CT raids conducted by GPF and white SOF and gave the bulk of these operations to JSOC.

JSOC's increased CT raids against high value targets [HVT] in al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan were having marked success. In "*Obama's Wars*," Bob Woodward referred to some intelligence gathered on the Taliban and al Qaeda who had retreated into Pakistan. These bits of enemy intelligence chatter led US leaders to believe that the enemy leadership was afraid to return to Afghanistan with the increased use of JSOC hunter-killer teams (Woodward, 2010, p. 356). Thus the US is again in a position similar to that prior to the GWOT; having al Qaeda and its affiliates operating from a relatively safe haven to plan attacks from.

One observation that can be agreed upon by those discussing Afghanistan is the necessity of building Afghan security forces. The Afghan police, security forces, and national Army forces must one day take over protecting their villages, districts, and cities. It is the opinion of this author that given a more focused set of goals, forces that were part of the COIN effort could redirect attention to training and forming the Afghan security force. Whichever strategy the US decides to pursue in Afghanistan, eventually security ultimately must come from the Afghans themselves. Many aspects of the campaign in Afghanistan will remain difficult in the coming years. It is important however for US forces to confront the strategic realities of the campaign to the best of their ability, with the resources they have.

## Section 4.

### 4.1 Conclusions

To summarize, the US COIN strategy in Afghanistan has clearly suffered several setbacks and if continued in its present form will likely fail to stabilize Afghanistan. First, the GWOT was planned with CT centric operations in mind. Second, after a strategic shift to stability and security operations (COIN) was announced, joint coordination was lost between forces pursuing CT and those pursuing COIN operations. Next, adequate means were never put into place to succeed with the COIN operation. Finally, COIN operations can do little to address the terrorist entities that have dispersed into Pakistan. Even if COIN operations succeeded in Afghanistan, it is likely that after western forces withdrew, terrorist elements from Pakistan would return and reestablish themselves.

Now in its tenth year of the conflict, America is growing tired of supporting an expensive and unpopular conflict. Issues such as the US economy and jobs have drawn the attention of US leaders away from Afghanistan. Conditions for continuing a COIN strategy have become increasingly difficult. Widespread corruption and the rigged 2009 elections within the Karzai government have further complicated the US-ISAF mission. With the drawdown of military forces in Afghanistan imminent, it is imperative that US leaders focus on what is achievable with the means available. Lacking the means to conduct real COIN operations, the focus should return to CT operations. An active CT driven strategy would make the most of US resources in theater and could create an environment which may even lead to negotiations ending the conflict. CT focused operations would further allow for the imminent decrease in US troops and lower the ongoing costs of military expenditure.

Kinetic CT operations and drone strikes will continue to be necessary in Afghanistan and at times, in Pakistan. Because Pakistan will play a considerable role in Afghanistan's long term stability, the US must maintain pressure on them. Pakistan's stated desires to remain an active partner of the US in ongoing CT operations must persist. Pakistan's responsibility in Afghanistan's stability must be made clear with the implication of altering future US support. For better or for worse, US and Pakistani leaders have similar interests in building and promoting a stable Afghanistan.

It must be noted that any option pursued by US leaders in Afghanistan will include risks to Afghanistan's long term stability. Presently, there is no optimal solution that can be reconciled with the facts on the ground. Perhaps the greatest drawback to a strategy focused solely on CT operations, involves a perpetuated cycle of finding and killing the next terrorist or target. The nature of a perpetuated war on terrorism is such that it will remain difficult to determine any clear point of victory or finality. There is however, one level of success which can be clearly measured. The buildup of Afghan police and military forces can be a clear indication for advancement towards a conclusion of the conflict. A CT strategy would allow a larger US effort to develop competent Afghan security forces. It is an imminent fact for all involved that the Afghan security forces will someday be responsible for stability in the Afghan state. Unfortunately there are no guarantees or optimal solutions to the problems with the conflict in Afghanistan. Isolating and reducing support for Islamic extremism can take generations to achieve. Ultimately, the realities facing American efforts in Afghanistan present the CT strategy as the best match with available resources for the conflict.

## 4.2 Further Study

An important issue related to this research deals with the relationships and coalitions formed in the global fight against terrorism. The first is the relationship forged clandestinely between the CIA and US SOF units conducting CT operations. In the course of this research it was discovered that there is little command and control doctrine relating to the relationship between CIA and military groups. Title 50 of the US Code specifies that the CIA is responsible for undertaking covert operations similar to what has transpired in Afghanistan. The GWOT has often blurred the lines between whether civilian or military assets should be used against terrorism. One example has been the CIA's extensive use of armed unmanned aerial vehicles [UAV] or drones to target specific individuals. The civil-military command and control relationship in the GWOT would be worth investigating further.

Another relationship that has generated difficulty in Afghanistan is the ISAF partnership. It has become clear that nearly all policies relying on military operations have attempted to first establish a multi-national coalition. With the support of a multi-national coalition came several problems. Many ISAF partners entered the theater of war with caveats and obtuse rules of engagement. NATO and the UN have primarily engaged in a limited capacity in the past when crisis or wars broke out. However, campaigns in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq and most recently Libya have all seen the efforts of several powerful states engaging in "international joint warfare." Despite ISAF having a supreme commander, each coalition member continues to dictate the caveats from which their forces will operate under and for how long. The varying degree of participation has created several problems for commanders in the field. Concerning the operational relationship between US forces and ISAF, the Goldwater-Nichols legislation affects only the actions of US forces and offers nothing relating to operating with international coalition

partners. And likewise, the US has wanted and received operational control [OPCON] over all SOF task forces in Afghanistan. Keeping all SOF under US command was most likely done in order to avoid any restrictions of operation in the event that a rapid reaction became necessary, such as the raid targeting Osama bin Laden in May this year.

Several incidents in the GWOT have illustrated the difficulty in employing coalition troops when each operates under different caveats. One such incident arose when German SOF were targeting a Taliban leader. The German SOF collected enough intelligence to launch a mission to capture the individual. When the raid occurred, the Taliban were alerted and because the German rules of engagement did not permit them to engage the enemy, the target was allowed to flee (Koelbl & Szandar, 2008). The diverse restrictions placed upon ISAF members have continued to obfuscate a truly unified effort throughout the coalition. Similar problems have surfaced between US SOF and other coalition members operating near one another commander's battle space. US CT raids upset one British commander whose COIN operations were supposedly disrupted by the US actions. The UK commander finally asked that the US leave the AO (Walsh & Norton-Taylor, 2007). Further study should be undertaken to better understand the intricacies of this model of "international joint warfare" and the associated difficulties of coalitions in modern conflict.

Appendix A.



Figure 1. Map of Afghanistan showing ISAF Regional Commands and major units as of June 2011 (Source: www.isaf.nato.int).

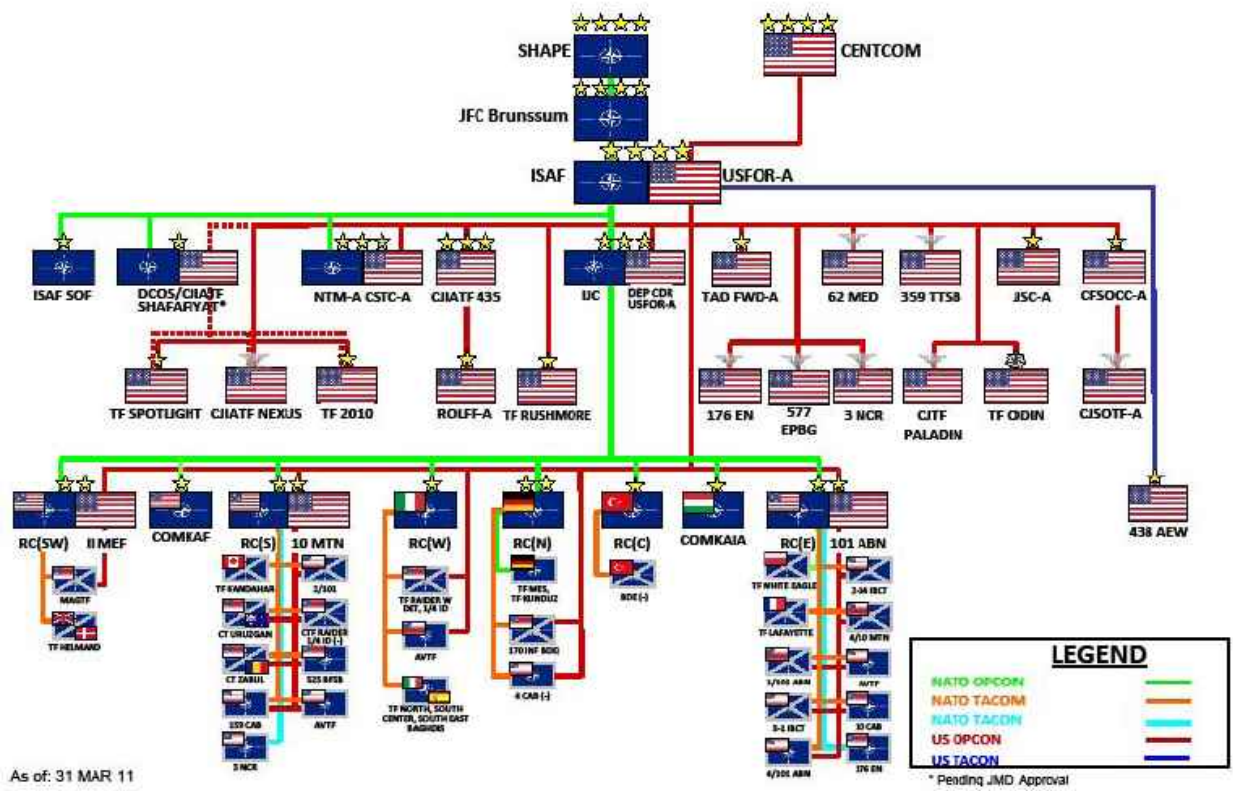


Figure 2. United States – NATO (ISAF) command structure as of March 31, 2011 (Source: [www.globalsecurity.org](http://www.globalsecurity.org)).



# US-ISAF Command Structure 2010

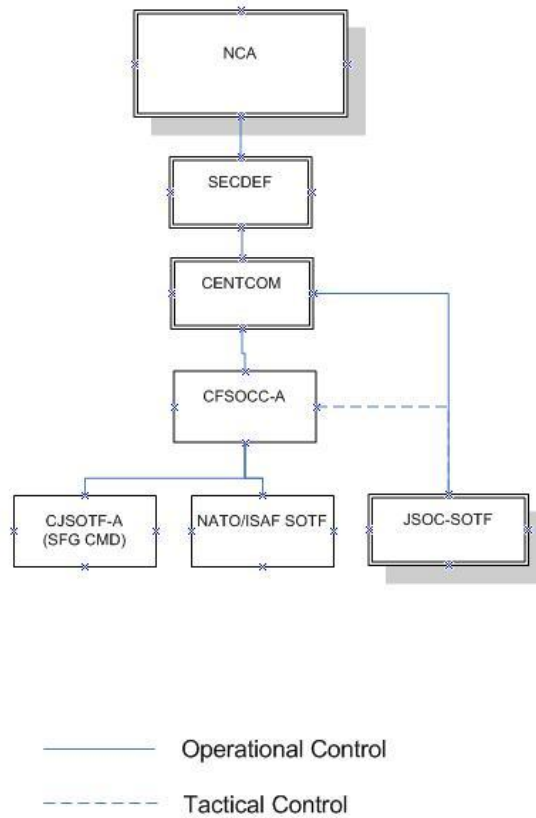


Figure 3. US-ISAF Special Operations Forces Command Structure 2010 (Created with reference to Naylor, S. D. 2009).

## Appendix B.

Interview conducted by the author and LTC. Matthew Machon, US Army SF, and SGM Bradley Kingston, US Army SF, at Camp Williams US Army National Guard, Draper UT on March 2, 2011.

1. What are some examples of OPCON and TACON situations that have created problems for SOF in Afghanistan?
2. What are the key differences between JSOC and USSOCOM?
3. Who exercised more control over operations in Afghanistan?
4. How has the various command structures evolved in Afghanistan?
5. What is the nature of the ISAF-CENTCOM relationship?
6. Who has ultimate command authority in Afghanistan?
7. In 2003, ISAF was stood up and has since taken over control of more areas in Afghanistan, how has the relationship between ISAF-CENTCOM changed over the last 10 years?
8. Has the use of US NCA's use of nationally strategic level (JSOC) SOF impacted the missions of ISAF, USCENTCOM, and/or other SOF in Afghanistan?
9. What are the key command and control challenges facing SOF in Afghanistan that you have experienced?
10. What could improve these C2 challenges?
11. What does an optimal C2 structure look like in Afghanistan?
12. What does an optimal strategy in Afghanistan look like?

Interview questions conducted with LTC. Harrison Gilliam, US Army SF, via email correspondence during March 2011.

1. What is your military background, command experience, number of deployments to Afghanistan and/or Iraq with dates, current command status?
2. What was the C2 structure over SOF forces in Afghanistan from 2009, or while you were there?
3. How has JSOC led operations impacted conventional and “white-SOF” missions in Afghanistan?
4. Has JSOC operations undermined the efforts by the other SOF forces in Afghanistan?
5. Is there still a need for JSOC to do these raid missions, or could (white) SOF already deployed in Afghanistan cover the job?
6. In your opinion, why is JSOC still being used for these raids and strikes?
7. If JSOC continues its presence and missions in Afghanistan, what would the optimal relationship be between JSOC and the other forces deployed in theater?

## References

- 3-05.1, J. P. (2001). *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Joint Special Operations*. Joint Chiefs of Staff. Washington D.C.: United States Government Washington, DC.
- Ambinder, M. (2011, March 11). *Elite U.S. Counterterror Forces Facing Cuts*. Retrieved March 23, 2011, from <http://nationaljournal.com/nationalsecurity/elite-u-s-counterterror-forces-facing-cuts-20110311?print=true>
- Bennett, J. T. (2010, May 26). *Olson: Counterinsurgency Ops Should 'Involve Countering the Insurgents'* - *Defense News*. Retrieved October 10, 2010, from <http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=4643956>
- Berntsen, G., & Pezzullo, R. (2005). *Jawbreaker*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Blehm, E. (2010). *The Only Thing Worth Dying For*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Boot, M. (2009, November). *How We Can Win in Afghanistan*. Retrieved Dec 10, 2010, from Commentary Magazine: <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/how-we-can-win-in-afghanistan/>
- Bourne, C. M. (1998). Unintended Consequences of the Goldwater-Nichols Act. *Joint Forces Quarterly (Spring)* , 99-108.
- Boyle, M. J. (2010). Do counterterrorism and counterinsurgency go together? *International Affairs, Vol 86 Issue 2* , 333-353.
- Briscoe, C. H., Kiper, R. L., Schroder, J. A., & Sepp, K. I. (2003). *Weapon of Choice: US Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan*. Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press.
- Clarke, R. A. (2004). *Against All Enemies*. London, UK: Free Press.
- Cogan, C. G. (2003). Desert One and Its Disorders. *Journal of Military History, Vol 67 No. 1 Jan*, 201-216.
- Cole, R. H. (1998-1999). Grenada, Panama, and Haiti: Joint Operational Reform. *Joint Forces Quarterly Autumn/Winter* , 57-64.
- Coll, S. (2004). *Ghost Wars*. New York: Penguin Books.

Davis, V. (1991). Defense Reorganization and National Security. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 517, New Direction in U.S. Defense Policy (Sep 1991)*, 157-173.

Defense, D. o. (n.d.). *Defense.gov - Quadrennial Defense Review*. Retrieved July 5, 2011, from [www.defense.gov](http://www.defense.gov): <http://www.defense.gov/qdr/>

DefenseLINK.gov. (2004, Nov 10). *DefenseLINK-Unified Command Plan*. Retrieved Feb 11, 2011, from <http://www.defense.gov/specials/unifiedcommand/>

Gilliam, H. (2011, March 03). JSOC in Afghanistan. (J. R. Willis, Interviewer)

GlobalSecurity.org. (2008, Dec 23). *Introduction - Unified Command*. Retrieved March 05, 2011, from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/dod/unified-com.htm>

Hastings, M. D. (2005, Jun 17). *The Integration of Conventional Forces and Special Operation Forces*. Retrieved Oct 10, 2010, from Defense Technical Information Center: <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA436637>

Hersh, S. M. (2005). *Chain of Command*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Hersh, S. M. (2008, July 07). *Preparing the Battlefield, The Bush Administration steps up its secret moves against Iran*. Retrieved October 10, 2010, from [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/07/07/080707fa\\_fact\\_hersh?printable=true](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/07/07/080707fa_fact_hersh?printable=true)

Kagan, F. W. (2007). *Finading The Target: The Transformation of American Military Policy*. New York, NY: Encounter Books.

Kaplan, R. D. (2005). *Imperial Grunts: the American military on the ground*. New York, NY: Random House.

Kibbe, J. D. (2004). Rise of the Shadow Warriors. *Foreign Affairs Vol 83 No.2* , 102-115.

Kitfield, J. A. (2006, October). A Better Way to Run a War. *AIR FORCE Magazine*, 36-40.

Koelbl, S., & Szandar, A. (2008, May 19). *Not Licensed to Kill, German Special Forces in Afghanistan Let Taliban Commander Escape*. Retrieved September 21, 2010, from <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,554033,00.html>

Locher III, J. R. (2001). Has It Worked? The Goldwater-Nichols Reorganization Act. *Naval War College Review; Autumn 2001, Vol. 54 Issue 4*, 22.

Locher III, J. R. (1996). Taking Stock of Goldwater-Nichols. *Joint Forces Quarterly (Autumn)*, 10-17.

Long, A. (2010). Small is Beautiful: The Counterterrorism Option in Afghanistan. *Orbis Volume 54, Issue 2, January*, 199-214.

Machon, M. L., & Kingston, B. C. (2011, March 02). SOF Experience in Afghanistan. (J. R. Willis, Interviewer)

Marquis, S. L. (1997). *Unconventional Warfare, Rebuilding U.S. Special Operations Forces*. Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution.

Martin, G. M. (2009, Dec 03). *Special Operations and Conventional Forces: How to Improve Unity of Effort Using Afghanistan as a Case Study*. Retrieved Oct 20, 2010, from Defense Technical Information Center: <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA513467&Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf>

Naylor, S. D. (2009). New Special Forces HQ Coming to Afghanistan. *SO/LIC News Vol. 20 No. 1*, 5-6.

Naylor, S. D. (2008, September 26). *Spec ops raids into Pakistan halted*. Retrieved October 01, 2010, from [http://www.armytimes.com/news/2008/09/Army\\_border\\_ops\\_092608w/](http://www.armytimes.com/news/2008/09/Army_border_ops_092608w/)

Naylor, S. (2005). *Not A Good Day To Die. The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda*. New York, NY: The Penguin Group.

O'Hanlon, M., & Riedel, B. (2011). Plan A-Minus for Afghanistan. *The Washington Quarterly (Winter)*, 123-132.

Owens Jr., M. T. (1996, December). Goldwater-Nichols: A Ten-Year Retrospective. *Marine Corps Gazette (Dec)*, 48-53.

President Obama Speech. (2011, June 22). *Remarks by the President on the Way Forward in Afghanistan*. Retrieved August 15, 2011, from [www.WhiteHouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov): <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/06/22/remarks-president-way-forward-afghanistan>

Rhyne, R. G. (2004, Jun 18). *Special Forces Command and Control in Afghanistan*. Retrieved Oct 20, 2010, from Defense Technical Information Center: <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA429053>

Rumsfeld, D. (2011). *Known and Unknown*. New York: Sentinel.

Scahill, J. (2010, August 25). *Shhhhhh! JSOC is Hiring Interrogators and Covert Operatives for 'Special Access Programs' | The Nation*. Retrieved January 01, 2011, from <http://www.thenation.com/blog/154133/shhhhhh-jsoc-hiring-interrogators-and-covert-operatives-special-access-programs>

- Schultz Jr., R. H. (2004, January 26). Showstoppers. *The Weekly Standard*, pp. 25-33.
- Ucko, D. H. (2009). *The new counterinsurgency era: transforming the US military for modern wars*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press.
- USSOCOM Fact Book*. (2010). Retrieved January 01, 2011, from [www.socom.mil](http://www.socom.mil):  
<http://www.socom.mil/SOCOMHome/newspub/pubs/Documents/FactBook.pdf>
- USSOCOM. (2007). *United States Special Operations Command History 1987-2007 (20th Anniversary Edition)*. MacDill AFB, FL: USSOCOM History and Research Office.
- Walsh, D., & Norton-Taylor, R. (2007, August 10). *UK officer calls for US special forces to quit Afghan hotspot*. Retrieved October 21, 2010, from  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/aug/10/military.politics>
- Woodward, B. (2002). *Bush at War*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Woodward, B. (2010). *Obama's Wars*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Woodward, B. (2006). *State of Denial*. New York: Simon & Schuster.