



Special Forces
in Baghdad.

U.S. Air Force (Jeremy T. Lock)

Linking Conventional and Special Operations Forces

By RONALD S. MANGUM

The Armed Forces have consistently demonstrated their skill in conducting joint operations. However, their capability exists almost exclusively on the operational level. To cope with nonstate enemies in the global war on terrorism, jointness must extend down to the tactical level. Small and agile joint units, self-sustaining or with reachback logistics, executing missions independently but

based on national source real-time intelligence, are the wave of the future.

The interface between special operations and conventional forces on the division and corps level is a critical seam in joint doctrine. Likewise, the Special Operations Forces (SOF) community must examine its doctrinal interface at the seam between joint and combined operations. Examples from the Korean peninsula are useful because joint and combined forces operate there every day in a standing theater of war. But the same concepts are relevant for future conflicts in which

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special operations and conventional forces will work together.

Doctrinal Synchronization

Special Operations Forces typically function on the operational and strategic levels but in reality are tactical assets with a strategic impact. As such they interface with conventional forces on several levels. A joint special operations component command (JFSOCC) is a headquarters that provides liaison with other components. It has planners, operators, and intelligence personnel at multiple points within a theater. Coordination and synchronization between special operations and conventional forces is key, not only to multiply the effects of friendly engagement but to prevent fratricide among friendly units. Both tasks are more difficult in combined warfare.

One doctrinal connection in the area of responsibility of a corps or division on the operational and tactical levels is the special operations command and control element (SOCCE). As an Army element, Special

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Forces have traditionally been concerned only with other Army SOF units. In joint and combined warfare, however, it must coordinate all SOF—Army, Navy, Air Force, and allied forces operating within the area of responsibility of its supported unit.

Within a corps or division area, Special Operations Forces come under SOF command and control, although in some situations they may be placed under the operational control of supported commanders. Field Manual 3-05.2 stipulates that while Special Operations Forces are not usually integrated into conventional forces, it is necessary for the “simultaneous or sequenced execution of separate actions in time and space to achieve a synergistic effect.” A special operations command and control element is the doctrinal synchronization organization with operational or tactical control of Special Operations Forces in the area of responsibility of supported units and is also equipped to provide communications with either JFSOCC or Special Forces group headquarters.

Special operations command and control elements are formed around an existing table of organization and equipment, such as a Special Forces company headquarters. In some situations they may be organized around battalion headquarters. The element arrives at the supported headquarters with personnel and equipment for a minimum of 30 days. Traditionally this mission provides connectivity only with Special Forces in their role as “the primary and often the only direct link from the conventional forces to the SOF

command and control structure.” In the joint warfighting environment, however, it can operate with allied corps or division headquarters and be composed of both U.S. and allied forces. Current doctrine recognizes that augmentation may be needed, but it does not flesh out such augmentation well, nor are there routine opportunities to train as a joint and combined force operating in a joint and combined environment.

For example, each field army in Korea is augmented by a special operations command and control element organized around a Special Forces operational detachment in its headquarters. The reality is that each field army is on the coast, so ROK and U.S. Army Special Forces and Navy SEALs, as well as Air Force aircrews and special tactical squadron personnel, can be expected to operate in the area in front of the field army. Currently a special operations command and control element is composed exclusively of Army personnel and has little visibility outside its own area of responsibility. In Korea, Special Operations Command Korea combines with ROK Special Warfare Command to form the combined unconventional warfare task force during wartime.

A special operations command and control element may be augmented by Korean personnel to provide language capability because the task force has a combined forward operating base with the field army headquarters, which has a Korean element that commands operational detachments within the area of responsibility. Duplicating control mechanisms does not provide redundancy because the command and control element and operating base do not coordinate their efforts. Thus only Army personnel synchronize the effects of Army-only teams (sometimes with Korean forces) within the area of responsibility of the field army. Not only is the expertise of SOCCE personnel limited to Army functions, but the communications package that accompanies this element is set up to meet only the needs of the Army mission. Doctrine, training, and equipping need to emphasize the joint special operations part of the SOCCE title, so the element is staffed and trained to control all Special Operations Forces in the field army area of responsibility.

In addition to staffing and equipping a command and control element to accomplish the full range of SOF control, a fully manned element must train routinely as a unit to perform its mission. A one-time deployment to Korea for an exercise, anticipating that an element will garner the requisite knowledge, is unrealistic. And to expect it to grasp the complexities of the Korean theater of operations during wartime courts disaster. The joint mission essential task list for each Special Forces operational headquarters needs to

Special operations
boats, Iraqi Freedom.



U.S. Navy (Alic Abrahamson)

contain specific tasks for operating as a joint command and control element in a coalition environment, and these headquarters need the opportunity to train in that environment.

Although a special operations command and control element may be rotated to the National Training Center, it is not situated at corps headquarters, which has units in the training box, since the corps is a player control element in the control center. And collocating a command and control element turns it into a white cell element, making it part of the exercise control center and privy to all aspects of the exercise, both friendly and enemy, which eliminates any gain from participating as a player unit. This is a typical exercise problem when the main units are conventional brigades or divisions. For an element to participate in its full mission profile, the exercise must have player units from the tactical to strategic level—for example, from battalion to theater army. Since that is costly, the SOF portion of the exercise often gets short shrift.

The Task at Hand

Perhaps the most critical task for a command and control element in synchronizing special operations and conventional forces is preventing fratricide among SOF units from close air support

and artillery. Without closely monitoring the fire support coordination line as it moves forward, fratricide is likely. The element needs access to the tactical operations center of the supported unit as well as real-time vision of the common operating picture. While there is no established answer to locating an element, it may be advisable to place it with the supported unit center. This provides access to a supported unit command structure. Separation from the special operations coordination detachment, which is a staff element at corps level or other supported unit, may be advisable. The detachment performs staff functions, not command and control, and collocation will confuse roles and may deflect critical command issues. Moreover, the element must provide intelligence up and down the chain. Operational detachments in front of the corps or army have eyes-on-target and can provide relevant intelligence to supported units. On the other hand, a special operations command and control element must ensure that intelligence reaches the detachments to assure their survival and mission success. Intelligence may simply be intelligence, but critical intelligence requirements are different at various locations on the battlefield.

What conventional force commanders must understand to fight a counterfire battle is not the same as what operational detachment commanders need to know to survive in the deep battle area. A special operations command and control

element must be able to access not only conventional force intelligence, but also JFSOCC intelligence products to ensure that feeds to deployed Special Operations Forces are relevant. Naval Special Warfare Command maintains a mission support center in San Diego to provide real-time intelligence to SEAL teams worldwide. The center does not eliminate the need for teams to get intelligence feeds from the theater joint intelligence center through JFSOCC, but it is another source of specific intelligence. Command and control elements, however, must be able to access every source that provides intelligence to its components to ensure that both levels have the same picture of the battlefield. Thus these elements, or at least JFSOCC, must be connected to national, theater, and center intelligence feeds.

A special operations command and control element must also provide guidance to deployed forces as the situation changes. It must transmit fragmentary orders to detachments to re-mission or modify missions. As conventional forces approach SOF team locations, the element must plan to implement the linkup. This is perhaps the most dangerous phase of the SOF mission as well as the phase that receives the least training and rehearsal. When the deployed forces include elements of Special Forces units as well as SEALs, implementing the linkup is delicate and critical. Hence the need for routine joint and combined augmentation and training.

Finally, according to Field Manual 3-05.2, while a special operations command and control element is not responsible for planning or executing civil affairs (CA) or psychological operations (PSYOP) activities except as incidental to its mission, both are performed by Special Operations Forces and may be integral to the mission. Often overlooked as a force multiplier, PSYOP proved valuable in Desert Storm by encouraging Iraqi soldiers to surrender and in Afghanistan by gaining the support of the civilian population. As soon as a semipermissive environment is established, CA units can assist in restoring governmental control by helping rebuild infrastructure. Deployed Special Forces teams are usually the first units in hostile areas and, if augmented by CA or PSYOP personnel, can assess the needs for civil affairs support and determine the impact of psychological operations on enemy forces as well as civilian populations. Consequently, augmenting an element with CA and PSYOP personnel assists in effectively using a range of SOF capabilities.

Requirements

In a coalition environment, a special operations command and control element needs routine joint augmentation. Foremost is a package that can establish secure communication with the theater special operations command, allied forces, and theater command system, including connectivity for the SEAL mission support center and other intelligence feeds, either directly or through JFSOCC. Communications with theater includes the ability to obtain the common relevant operating picture. In Korea this means connectivity to the Global Command and Control System-Korea.

A special operations command and control element must have qualified linguists in a coalition environment. Interpretation must not be left simply to contract or military personnel who are native speakers. Not every bilingual person can think in two languages. In addition, knowledge of military terminology in both languages is critical. Doctrine may be difficult to translate without detailed explanation.

Elements that will be expected to operate as special operations command and control resources in wartime need a habitual training and working relationship. Expecting an element to deploy to a theater as complicated as Korea and function effectively on arrival is unrealistic. Korea operates under three major command structures—the combined ROK/U.S. Forces Command, United Nations Command, and U.S. Forces Korea. Even after fifty years the two militaries are continually refining these multiple command and control structures. Where will ammunition, intelligence, and air support come from? Such questions should not wait until combat is under way. Consequently, besides defining a basic joint SOCCE structure, we must assure that the structure routinely operates in its host nation environment. Even if only some members have had that opportunity, there may be enough situational awareness and personal relationships with the host military to overcome cultural differences.

Personnel

To conduct joint and combined warfare, a special operations command and control element must be configured for success. Personnel will be chosen based on the mission and circumstances but would include—and each operational detachment should train with—certain common elements. Augmentation by Army and Air Force SOF aviation facilitates coordinated infiltration, exfiltration, and resupply missions by fixed and rotary wing air assets, with the joint special operations liaison element collocated with the air component command. If a command and control element has SEALs operating within its area

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MH-53 over firing range.

16th Special Operations Wing (Greg L. Davis)

of responsibility, it should have SEAL augmentation as connectivity with the naval special warfare command mission support center and the naval special operations liaison element collocated with the naval component command headquarters. This latter element would be part of a communications package for secure communications with higher and lower headquarters as well as with theater and allied headquarters.

Within a coalition, a special operations command and control element should be augmented with appropriate counterpart organizations from allied militaries as well as host nations. This will require interpreters from every contributing nation. In order to pass intelligence to allied forces, the element must have a trained foreign disclosure officer. Allies cannot access critical intelligence without this augmentation.

Moreover, a command and control element is not doctrinally responsible for either planning or conducting CA or PSYOP activities. That expertise will be required as the battle unfolds, and the activities must be planned in advance. After the victory over the Taliban, coalition forces looked to civil affairs units to provide humanitarian relief before winter and rebuild the infrastructure before the population soured on the national government and created conditions for a Taliban resurgence. When the U.S. military succeeds in crushing enemy forces, PSYOP and CA assets are needed to consolidate the victory and avoid slipping back into hostile conditions.

The Way Ahead

Current doctrine must be reviewed in light of the demand for special operations command and control elements in a joint and combined environment. Tasks must be developed and missions anticipated so forces are prepared to assume



Fleet Combat Camera Group, Pacific (Kathrina Beeler)

joint planning challenges first hand. The Joint Special Operations University should develop a program of instruction and exercise on joint manning. Joint Readiness Training Center and National Training Center rotations should include a joint special operations command and control element, but the exercise must be scripted to portray group interaction on the division, corps, and theater levels.

Simulation exercises are a cost-effective way of training headquarters and staffs without the expense of deploying troops to the field, but they do not portray Special Operations Forces well. They concentrate on the main battle area, which is usually focused in time and terrain. Because Special Operations Forces normally operate deep in the battlespace, it becomes difficult to model the large terrain areas necessary to accommodate special operations and conventional forces in the same exercise. Without combining these two warfighting elements, however, realistic training for special operations command and control elements is lost. Consequently, the best full mission profile training is probably in conjunction with major joint exercises such as Ulchi Focus Lens. Yet because Korean units are practicing defending their territory while Special Operations Forces train to deploy in enemy territory, there is an artificiality that must be bridged by careful scripting.

Getting the interface right between special operations and conventional forces on the tactical level is critical to the conduct of joint and combined warfare. Although Special Operations Forces are working jointly on the operational and strategic levels, they must be able to extend jointness to the tactical level by effectively staffing and training special operations command and control elements.

JFQ

Conducting search and rescue.

this responsibility. Beyond simply identifying the mission and tasks in doctrinal publications, forces must train to appropriate mission standards to accomplish their assignments. This consideration, along with habitual training relationships, is important to the transition to warfare in areas in which Special Operations Forces deploy.

One way to increase the abilities of a special operations command and control element is including basics such as the Special Forces qualification course exercise to enable students to learn