

U.S. Army Civil Affairs Team 621 member provides security near medical clinic in Iraq

U.S. Air Force (Mike Meares)



Countering Irregular Threats

The Army Special Operations Contribution

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The joint Services and interagency communities predict a future of persistent conflict consisting of irregular or hybrid threats within an irregular warfare (IW) environment requiring forces to operate across the spectrum of military operations. The U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) embraces the joint, U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), and Army vision of this future threat and, as the designated Army component to USSOCOM, is responsible for recruiting, educating, organizing, training, manning, equipping, and deploying Army special operations forces (ARSOF) to accomplish special operations

missions in support of combatant commanders and chiefs of mission.

ARSOF, which is composed of Civil Affairs, Rangers, Special Forces, Psychological Operations, Special Operations Aviation, and Sustainment, has long been involved in countering irregular threats across the full spectrum of operations. These forces routinely operate in small elements throughout complex, uncertain environments and are uniquely suited for conducting operations within the IW environment. Four of the five mission areas defining IW in the Department of Defense Directive 3000.07, "Irregular Warfare," are designated by USSOCOM (and Title 10) as special operations core

activities: foreign internal defense (FID),¹ unconventional warfare, counterterrorism, and counterinsurgency.² The fifth IW activity, stability operations, requires extensive support of two primary core SOF capabilities, Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations, which are the proponent responsibility of the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School.³ To continue to improve the Army's ability to conduct operations in an IW environment against irregular and hybrid threats, USASOC has established three lines of action aimed at preparing for, preventing, and countering these likely future threats that will persist in the 21st century.

The three ARSOF lines of action, which can overlap in execution, are investment, persistent engagement, and operations. Army special operations roles in these lines of action include *preparatory activities* to inform decisionmakers and build relationships with key indigenous and U.S. mission leaders abroad and organizations through the conduct of persistent presence. They are *preventive in nature* by contributing to capability- and capacity-building and development efforts through enduring engagement with friends, partners, and allies, and they are *initiatives-based* to deter, disrupt, and defeat discrete threats and hostile forces in the application of direct operations, which can include the full range of special operations core activities.

The relevance of these three lines of action spans the full spectrum of operations as each action is complementary and contributes to education and training the force, information-gathering, analysis of current or probable security challenges, and the ability to seize the initiative. The focus of the Army special operations lines of action is to support a whole-of-government approach to current and emerging security challenges. In effect, what is common across these three actions is that ARSOF provides a strategic "bridging" force of specially assessed and selected, highly trained, intelligent Soldiers possessing high initiative and creativity who, by natural inclination, seek solutions to complex problems. This bridging force consistently looks to link or bridge other U.S. Government capabilities, often seemingly disparate ones, inherent in the joint Services and interagency community while working to develop or enable indigenous security solutions.

However, challenges confronting Army special operations within these lines of action construct are twofold. First, personnel policies inhibit supporting long-term investment in overseas locations. Secondly, the necessary enabler, sustainment, and support (ESS) capabilities and capacity are not entirely resident within ARSOF.

Ultimately, the purpose of this article is to advance an understanding of the ARSOF

IW capabilities and lines of action as part of their contribution to full-spectrum operations and whole-of-government/-nation solutions to complex political-military problems in the era of 21st-century persistent conflict.

Investment

The ARSOF contribution within the investment line of action is designed to provide focused, full-time military expertise in assessment, planning, coordination, and advice and assistance on behalf of combatant commanders at the request of Ambassadors. The foundation of the investment line of action lies in the USASOC Title 10

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responsibilities to educate and train ARSOF to develop Soldiers with regional expertise capable of providing information to U.S. civilian decisionmakers. Global ARSOF presence is a key supporting effort to the Department of State and combatant commanders' strategies in semipermissive and unstable areas of the world. The ARSOF investment line of action is primarily realized by small teams of Civil Affairs, Special Forces, and Psychological Operations personnel studying, living, and working for extended periods of time in overseas locations to gain understanding, acquire expertise, and develop relationships. These ARSOF elements provide a complementary capability in further developing U.S. interagency efforts to increase available human and technical information in select foreign countries against irregular threats. Additionally, the investment line of action allows for the development and sustainment of long-term relationships with indigenous personnel and enables/allows for a cadre of language-capable and culturally relevant Soldiers who provide Ambassadors, combatant commanders, and follow-on forces with critical capabilities should emergencies arise or contingencies develop.

ARSOF has had a long history of investing in personnel to develop the necessary regional expertise, and USASOC continues to be committed to this approach by currently



Key: IA = Interagency; GCC = Geographic Combatant Commanders

providing more than 180 highly trained, experienced Soldiers to over 30 Embassies ranging from the Republic of the Philippines to Pakistan. Historical ARSOF personnel investment overseas is best represented by, but not limited to, such organizations as Special Forces Detachment A in Berlin, Special Forces Detachment K in Korea, and 46th Special Forces Company in Thailand, as well as long-term presence in Central and South America working for chiefs of mission. The advantages of an investment line of action in IW are the opportunity to develop cultural and environmental skills as well as to build and sustain relationships and access and mutual understanding of challenges in the region.

From its inception, ARSOF has focused on developing regional, cultural, and language skills through consistent regional alignment of USASOC components. However, in line with the USSOCOM commander's vision for increasing language and cultural expertise, it is recognized that select ARSOF Soldiers have what the USSOCOM commander labels the "T.E. Lawrence" aptitude and desire to become regional experts. This requires a career-long assignment methodology to acquire the necessary expertise. For ARSOF, investment is envisioned as maturing to a career-long commitment of specially selected members maintaining the proficiency necessary to optimally contribute to our country's foreign policy, specifically in the areas of selected partner nation-specific and regional strategies. USSOCOM and the Army have authorized the establishment of dedicated Regional Support Detachments in each Special Forces Group in order to develop these capabilities.

Finally, ARSOF investment in personnel capital alongside a partner nation's military leadership assists in the development of the combatant commander's strategy for the U.S. military engagement plan in a partner nation.

Persistent Engagement

Persistent engagement can be characterized as a line of action by using all elements of national power and defense, development, and diplomacy to prevent conflicts and enable friends, partners, and allies to defend their sovereignty and eliminate ungoverned and undergoverned spaces where irregular threats can find sanctuary. Characterized by FID (activities that ARSOF has been part of for more than 50 years), one of ARSOF's primary contributions in the IW environment is sup-

porting combatant commanders' partner nations' security-building capacity efforts through enduring engagement. In support of combatant commanders' Theater Security Cooperation Programs, ARSOF employs a range of FID capabilities focused on training and population-based infrastructure programs designed to improve foreign security forces' capacity and capability to deter or defeat irregular threats through the conduct of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency. Training and programs include, but are not limited to, Special Forces imparting counterterrorism or counterinsurgency skills to selected partner nation military units or Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations assisting partner nations to deter irregular threats from gaining sanctuary and countering extremist ideologies.

Highlighting the importance that the special operations community places on persistent engagement, despite the predominant commitment to Operations *Iraqi Freedom* and *Enduring Freedom*, in 2009 ARSOF conducted more than 100 partner nation capacity-building training and program events in more than 50 countries. In many instances, gaining access in unstable and politically sensitive locations requires a small footprint in the conduct of operations. Coordinating capacity-building efforts is complemented in these sensitive locations by the planning and relationships developed through ARSOF persistent presence activities. ARSOF components'

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U.S. Army Rangers participate in mass tactical airborne operation, Fort Benning, Georgia

U.S. Army (Jason B. Baker)

regional orientation, cultural understanding and agility, foreign military relationships, and language capability are instrumental to the successful conduct of FID missions.

Operations

ARSOF operations are characterized by small, mature, politically astute, and lethal forces that capitalize on access and enhanced aviation mobility to quickly and decisively neutralize high-value targets. Whether Rangers, Special Forces, special operations aviation, or the ground component of the National Mission Force, ARSOF will continue to provide a strategic direct approach option for our nation, underscoring a high-end capability in support of operations in an IW environment against irregular threats and in major combat operations. An important distinction is that the *operations line of action* is not synonymous with direct action, but is defined by the application of the full range of special operations missions undertaken in named operations to defeat threats to U.S.

national interests. The operations line of action can be unilateral U.S. direct action as well as combined operations with ARSOF working through and with indigenous forces.

The operations line of action also includes Special Forces conducting unconventional warfare operations alongside friendly Afghan resistance forces in the early stages of the war in Afghanistan. FID operations currently ongoing by special operations in support of *Iraqi Freedom* and *Enduring Freedom*, as well as select partner nations in each of the overseas combatant commands, are also representative of operations. The contribution of ARSOF conducting investment and persistent engagement lines of action can result in the development of information networks and personal relationships, which ultimately supports the find-and-fix phases of the operational targeting cycle. The finish phase of the operational targeting cycle can be conducted by ARSOF operating unilaterally or by ARSOF-enabled indigenous forces. Countering irregular threats globally across nation-state boundaries will

continue to require ARSOF to maintain skills enabled and honed through premier training and technology.

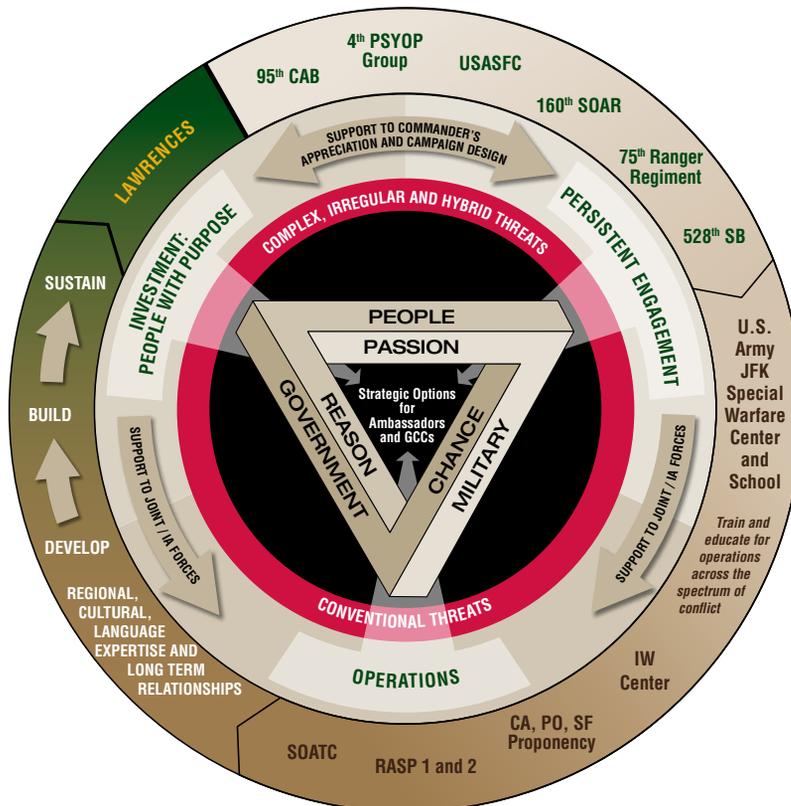
ARSOF provides unique capabilities that can be force multipliers in all forms of combat and enablers for other operations and activities in an IW environment against irregular and hybrid threats. The ability of ARSOF to provide situational understanding, conduct development and information activities, train the forces of friends, partners, and allies, and support the operations of U.S. combat forces provides a strategic bridging capability that assists in preventing, preparing for, and, when necessary, conducting operations to meet U.S. national objectives.

Challenges

The significant challenges faced by ARSOF in executing these lines of action include adapting personnel policies to allow development of expertise by broadening the traditional paths for career advancement and satisfying the requirements for ARSOF ESS capabilities and capacity. USSOCOM, the Department of the Army, and USASOC are committed to addressing these challenges. Analysis and development of recommended courses of action to address the ESS concerns were included in the DOD Program Objective Memorandum (POM) for Fiscal Years 2012–2017; and the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) personnel policy review and analysis are addressing the challenge of growing T.E. Lawrences to develop the microregional expertise in support of persistent presence, while not threatening an individual’s career goals or advancement opportunities.

Personnel Policies. The ARSOF investment line of action requires continued analysis and review of current Army personnel policies to support the development of T.E. Lawrences. A T.E. Lawrence special operations Soldier is one who is linguistically fluent and retains a deep cultural understanding enabling development of long-term relationships with indigenous people in a select country. A Soldier attains this level through continuing assignments in a country at some expense of established professional development requirements. Career progression of ARSOF officers, warrant officers, and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) currently dictates assignment and education requirements, which sometimes conflict with the development of cultural, language, and regional aptitude required to support human capital devel-

Figure 2. The ARSOF Construct



Key: 4th PSYOP Group = 4th Psychological Operations Group; 95th CAB = 95th Civil Affairs Brigade; 160th SOAR = 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment; 528th SB = 528th Sustainment Brigade; CA = Civil Affairs; GCC = Geographic Combatant Commanders; IA = Interagency; IW Center = Irregular Warfare Center; PO = Psychological Operations; RASP = Ranger Assessment and Selection Program; SF = Special Forces; SOATC = Special Operations Aviation Training Company; USASFC = United States Army Special Forces Command

opment to sustain an investment approach. Consideration should be given to supplementing mandatory attendance at Department of the Army NCO courses, officer Intermediate Level Education (ILE), and warrant officer advanced courses with expanded educational opportunities, both in military and more likely civilian schools, in foreign countries. Although many partner nation military education programs do not offer similar NCO and warrant officer opportunities, select ARSOF Soldiers should be considered for attendance at corresponding officer ILE programs. An additional dilemma in developing ARSOF T.E. Lawrences in support of the investment line of action is the traditional requirement for Soldiers to change assigned locations every 2 to 3 years; development of

3^d Special Forces Group trains with AT-4 antitank rocket launcher before rotation to Afghanistan



U.S. Army (Corey T. Dennis)

cultural and language expertise and necessary human relationships is contradictory to the current change of station mandate faced by ARSOF Soldiers. Solutions that focus on the requirement to retain Soldiers committed to a select country—while not threatening career progression—are being explored by USASOC and the Army. Fundamentally, operations in an IW environment demand corresponding irregular personnel management in order to develop the type of Soldier needed to enhance those strategic capabilities that combatant commanders and Ambassadors require.

ESS Requirements. The challenges surrounding the persistent engagement and operation lines of action lie in ESS requirements necessary to conduct operations in

the global IW environment. Army special operations logistics competency resides with the 528th Sustainment Brigade. The brigade is knowledgeable in all aspects of land, sea, and air logistics and is experienced at leveraging theater sustainment capacity in support of ARSOF operational requirements. The 528th provides ARSOF-unique communications and medical capabilities, to include a recently acquired Trauma Level II medical transport capability. This capability provides lifesaving medical care for Soldiers operating in remote locations. However, in previous years, programmed ARSOF operational capability growth increased without a corresponding increase in ESS capacity. Resolving the current ESS capacity and capability gap includes both a SOF organic and nonorganic enabler solution set.

The commander of USSOCOM recently directed the reintroduction of the long-omitted fifth “ARSOF truth,” which states, “Most special operations require non-SOF assistance.”²⁴ Special operations must operate as part of the Total Force, and there are few operations that can be conducted without assistance from joint and interagency partners. Army special operations ESS requirements to conduct operations in an IW environment were identified during the POM and QDR processes. Army and USSOCOM analysis to resolve current ARSOF ESS shortfalls propose resolution through two methodologies. The first is organic growth of SOF-unique ESS requirements in the areas of logistics, intelligence, and medical support to Special Forces group and battalion formations. The second is a concept of direct- and general-support relationships for non-SOF-unique ESS requirements involving the collaboration between combatant commanders and Services through the Global Force Management process to ensure programmed, dedicated ESS assets in support of global ARSOF missions.

Army special operations origins are rooted in IW operations and possess a tremendous IW capability, capacity, experience, and history. USASOC will seek to maintain its operationally balanced force, while increasing its IW capability and capacity in support of joint, interagency, and multinational efforts. To contribute to countering irregular threats by a whole-of-government/-nation approach, ARSOF investment, persistent engagement, and operations lines of action bring unique, complementary capabilities providing a range

of strategic options for our Ambassadors and combatant commanders, thus serving our nation as a strategic bridging and enabling force. ARSOF will remain a critical IW contributor within the Army and the joint force and will continue to adapt and evolve capabilities to meet the demands of an era of persistent conflict. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, April 12, 2001, as amended through August 19, 2009), defines *foreign internal defense* as the “participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency.”

² Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, February 2008), specifies: “Special operations forces conduct most irregular warfare operations. Sometimes conventional forces support them; other times special warfare operations forces operate alone. However, if special operations forces and host-nation forces cannot defeat unconventional and irregular threats, conventional Army forces may assume a lead role. The joint operations grouped under irregular warfare include the following: foreign internal defense, support to insurgency, counterinsurgency, combating terrorism, and unconventional warfare.”

³ In its proponent role for the Army and executed by the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, USASOC is responsible for the doctrine and education foundation for unconventional warfare and, as designated by USSOCOM, is the lead component for the ground aspect of foreign internal defense.

⁴ Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, “O” Flake, Number 09-13, June 19, 2009, Subject: Fifth SOF Truth. The “O” Flake states that “the operational effectiveness of our deployed forces cannot be achieved without being enabled by our Service Partners.” For this reason, the commander of USSOCOM directed the addition of a fifth SOF truth: most special operations require non-SOF assistance. The other four SOF truths are: humans are more important than hardware, quality is better than quantity, special operations forces cannot be mass produced, and competent special operations forces cannot be created after emergencies occur.