Special operations forces have been characterized as uniquely suited to match the current security environment of increasingly diverse, complex, and dynamic threats. With the Danish Defense Agreement of 2014, Denmark joined the ranks of some of its closest allies and established a Special Operations Command to oversee the development and deployment of Danish special operations. Yet, how exactly should Western special operations develop to stay abreast with evolving threats and which possibilities and challenges come with the establishment of dedicated special operations commands?

This anthology is the result of a research project providing international interdisciplinary perspectives on special operations forces, based on three main themes:

• Leading and organizing for strategic effect
• Professional entrepreneurship and self-perceptions in special operations forces
• Political and popular perceptions of special operations forces

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Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Special Operations Forces

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS
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Foreword

Rear Admiral Nils Wang  
Commandant at the Royal Danish Defence College

The 2016 Royal Danish Defence College (RDDC) conference held at Frederiksborg Castle addresses important interdisciplinary perspectives on Special Operations Forces.

If we look out at the world, the landscape of threats and hazards is complex and dynamic. Hybrid warfare, regional conflicts, collapsing states, and international terrorism are different aspects which call for flexible military capabilities that can be deployed toward a range of goals in diverse environments.

Maybe this is the reason why Special Operations Forces (SOF) have become so popular over recent years. Denmark, along with numerous other countries, has opted to strengthen its Special Operations (SO) capability by establishing a dedicated command to provide strategic direction and ensure the proper development and use of our national SOF capability.

But what exactly does that entail? How do you achieve strategic effect from SOF? How do you organize to best support this capability? How do you ensure that continuous innovation remains the order of the day in SOF so special operations stay abreast with and preferably ahead of evolving threats? What, exactly, is the much talked-about SOF-mindset? Are political and popular perceptions of SOF aligned with what SOF can and should actually do?

Despite the growing policy interest in SOF, the volume of research trying to add to our understanding of such questions is still limited.

These proceedings take an important step toward addressing these essential questions.

Here at the RDDC, we embarked on a journey a couple of years back. We wanted to strengthen the quality of the education we offer Danish officers, and we wanted to provide them with an internationally recognized and recognizable degree – a Masters (MA) in Military Studies.
The implication is that we increasingly base our teaching in general and our MA of Military Studies on research.

We sometimes debate among ourselves whether this journey – towards stronger research-based teaching – will move us too far away from the military profession. As if rigorous thinking should somehow be anathema to the profession. I personally am convinced that this is not the case.

Some of the research that RDDC scholars – military and civilian – present in this anthology are good examples of why. This research grew out of a collaboration between Danish Special Operations Command (DNK SOCOM) and RDDC. Together we identified research topics that were interesting and relevant from a research perspective as well as a practitioner’s perspective.

And DNK SOCOM granted our researchers full access to interview and collect data inside the fence of DNK SOF.

This research does in many ways exemplify what we want to do more of:
- It represents a close collaboration between researchers and practitioners.
- Our research team mixes RDDC staff with civilian and military backgrounds.
- It also mixes RDDC staff from different institutes – strategy, leadership, and language/culture.

We believe this is a useful way to produce new knowledge, which is not just relevant to a narrow academic audience, but to a broader set of disciplines. And, not least, to the practitioners and to the national security professionals, that we ultimately serve here at the college.
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Introduction

_Gitte Højstrup Christensen_

During the Second World War, the American and British governments each established special units that were used to conduct unconventional operations with the purpose of waging war in different ways than traditional military confrontation (Luttwak, 1982, p. 16; JSOU, 2011, p. ii). These units were later described as “irregular warriors and irregular diplomats” (Wylie, 2006, p. 111), and some claim that their “unique capabilities and strategic reach resulted in decisive outcomes within World War II” (JSOU, 2011, p. i). Even though both the American and British units were dissolved after the war ended, they nevertheless laid the foundation for what later came to be the American CIA and the British SAS. Additionally, these WWII special units can also be understood as catalysts for how many western countries since developed special operation forces (SOF) and commands in an attempt to counter new types of threats, such as hybrid warfare, terrorism, and intra-state conflicts (Kilkullen, 2009).

Data shows that since the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, several countries (especially western ones) have downsized regular military forces and also reduced budget expenditures to conventional capacities (Johnsen et al., 2016; IISS, 2015; Kutsch, 2014; SIPRI, 2014). However, almost simultaneously with these budget cuts and a reduction of conventional forces, many countries have increased funding for the development of special operations forces and commands and expanded their SOF units (Johnsen et al., 2016; Noonan, 2015; Finlan, 2009; SIPRI 2014; Holte, 2014).

In 1998, strategic thinker Colin Gray argued that the SOF research field was severely lacking strategic analysis, historical examinations, conceptual clarification, political-theoretical considerations, and both empirical and theoretical studies (Gray, 1998, p.153). Nineteen years later, Gray’s critique of the SOF research field is arguably still valid. Professor in War Studies Alastair Finlan pinpoints that the late development of special operations and special operations forces has resulted in the SOF research field being “absent from the canon of strategic studies” (Finlan, 2009, p. 13). However, despite a collective focus and political interest in developing special operations capacities within recent years, research published within this area of study shows a lack in consensus about the defining elements of what makes special operations and special operations forces “special” (Johnsen et al.,
Due to the absence of consensus, several scholars have argued that adequate operational theory on the strategic use of special operations forces does not exist (Wey, 2014; Spulak, 2007; Kiras, 2006; Gray, 1998). Furthermore, some scholars and practitioners have even disputed the argument that “special operations” in and by themselves “defy precise definition” (Tugwell & Charter in Barnett et al., 1984, p. 29). However, JSOU Associate Fellow Robert Spulak points out that this lack of adequate SOF theory is a vital problem, because “[t]here is a need for a theory of special operations to guide the application of SOF to strategic ends beyond the ad hoc, immediate, and creative mind of the military planner implementing strategy” (2007, p. 3). This lack of adequate theoretical definition of special operations and special operation forces, has led to vague and negating descriptive terms, depicting what SOF is not, such as “unorthodox” (Johnsen et al., 2016, p. 9) “unconventional,” (FM 305.130, 2008, pp. 1-2); and produced abstract catchphrases such as the “SOF-mindset” (Yarger, 2007, p. 6) and “out-of-the-box solutions” (Bucci, 2015, p. 48). These abstract and negating descriptions arguably do not provide politicians and decision makers with the necessary and sufficient knowledge and understanding of SOF that is needed to ensure informed and competent leadership and implementation of this highly prioritized political instrument. If decision makers lack an adequate understanding of the capabilities and limitations of special operations forces, western nations are arguably unlikely to derive full benefit from their investments in SOF. Harry Yarger, retired U.S. Army Colonel and Professor of History, further points out that “[i]mproper employment of SOF (e.g., in purely conventional roles or on inappropriate or inordinately high-risk missions) runs the risk of rapidly depleting these resources” (2013, p. 40). This calls for a broader understanding of SOF as “warrior diplomats,” i.e., serving as a preventative political tool, rather than as “elite killing machines,” used as a last resort – which is how they are often portrayed in popular media.

The Role and Scope of this Anthology
In focusing on the role of SOF, this anthology addresses a theme, which has become both increasingly prioritized and politicized within the past decade. However, research and theories on SOF have not followed the rapid development and are still at an embryonic stage. Therefore, this anthology represents perspectives from several disciplines, which serves the purpose of gaining a more holistic understanding of the strategic utility of SOF and the defining variables that make special operations “special”.
The chapters have been organized into three major themes, addressing the strengths and potential, as well as limitations and problematics associated with SOF. The themes are: Leading and organizing for strategic effect; Professional entrepreneurship and self-perceptions of SOF; and Political and popular perceptions of SOF.

The specific research questions addressed are:

**Leading and organizing for strategic effect:**
- What should drive SOF organization: traditional structures or emerging and future mission requirements?
- Should SOF organize for today or tomorrow?
- Nature or Nurture: should effective special operations leaders be identified early or can they be developed?

**Professional entrepreneurship and self-perceptions of SOF:**
- What kind of leadership, processes and work climate support employee-driven innovation in SOF?
- Can the professional background identity and cognitive maps of SOF operators inform, challenge, and improve future special operations?
- What is Design and to what extent should it inform SOF education and training?

**Political and popular perceptions of SOF:**
- What will Danish politicians accept about the use of Special Operations, and what will they not accept? Which tasks do they prioritize? Do they prefer preventive actions or reactive actions?
- Scalpel or Easy button: what are the political risk implications of special operations forces?
- What explains the paradox that “risk societies” continuously use of the risky means of special operations?

This anthology is a collection of research papers and opinion pieces, and is not based on one particular theoretical model and does not try to endorse any single definition or explanation. Instead, it is an attempt to map out different aspects and perceptions associated with SOF in the 21st century. Our hope is that this anthology will contribute to a better understanding of SOF’s strategic capabilities and limitations, and act as an inspiration for further debate and research within this field.
References


A special thanks to Dr. Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, Director of the Institute for Strategy at the Royal Danish Defence College, who has been the driving force behind this project.
**Topic:**

**Leading and organizing for strategic effect**

**Operationalizing Organization**
- Should SOF organize for today or tomorrow?

  *Dr. Jessica Glicken Turnley*

**Adaptive & Agile: The Human Platform as the Determining Factor for Future SOF Organization**
- What should drive SOF organization: traditional structures or emerging and future mission requirements?

  *Colonel (Retired) Bernd Horn*

"I was selected for that ...": The Need for a Balanced, Adaptive Approach to Leadership Selection
- Nature or nurture: Should effective Special Operations Leaders be identified early or can they be developed?

  *Dr. Emily Spencer*
Research question: Should SOF organize for today or tomorrow?

Argument: Organizational structure includes not only behaviors, but also values, vocabularies or sensemaking frames to express the values, and the environment in which the organization is embedded. This discussion will use examples to show how the American SOF community and USSOCOM have tried to express their distinctiveness to the U.S. national security and military communities through organizational structure. It also gives an example of how an operational SOF unit, Task Force 714, used organizational structure, in the fullest sense of the word, as an operational risk reduction mechanism.

Conclusion: The research question needs to be reframed. If the special operations community is aware of the power of organizational structure, rather than ‘organize for today or tomorrow,’ it should be prepared to use organizational structure as a dynamic strategic and operational resource to maintain distinctiveness and provide creative avenues for action under any strategic or operational situation.
Abstract
This discussion argues that the organizational question for SOF should not be, ‘should we organize for today or for tomorrow,’ but rather how organizational structure can best be used as a dynamic strategic and operational resource. It presents a deep definition of organizational structure that contextualizes behavior in the values driving behavior, the cultural vocabularies describing it, and the environment in which organizations are embedded. Using examples from the American special operations community, this discussion shows how awareness of the depth and power of organizational structures will help to make such structures available as operational and strategic resources for SOF.
The special operations forces (SOF) community finds itself today in a position of perhaps unprecedented visibility with the associated political power and budgets that brings. This rise in visibility, budget, and power has been driven by the emergence of new threats, global terrorism, and transnational networks of bad actors. Large, SOF-related institutions such as the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) have appeared in response, and in some countries SOF have become formalized as a military service. These changes raise questions the community did not have to engage with historically, when it operated as impromptu collections of individuals who coalesced around a mission or worked together informally to find a solution to an unusual military problem. Many of these questions revolve around organizational structure. Organizational structure, the regularized patterns of behavior in a defined and bounded collectivity, has long been a subject of interest both for analysts and practitioners in many domains. Questions a military organization might pose, such as should we organize for today’s conflict or tomorrow’s eventualities, reflect some of this concern. This discussion will highlight the potential flexibility and dynamism of organizational structure by repositioning it from a management-based description of ‘today’s’ or ‘tomorrow’s’ organization with its implications of prescriptive behaviors, to a dynamic operational resource SOF can use proactively to address immediate as well as strategic tasks.

The discussion begins with a description of organizational structure in theoretical terms, contextualizing it in normative (value-laden), cultural-cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. It positions organizational structure as a way for a collectivity to set expectations for its participants and reduce uncertainty. However, the discussion also recognizes that organizations are open systems, operating within environments to which they must be responsive even as they works to shape them. Several examples will illustrate how USSOCOM and the American SOF community have struggled to use organizational structure at a strategic level to reflect their distinctiveness to the U.S. national security and military communities. Shifting to an operational perspective, the discussion then argues that the particular or special qualities of special operations personnel allow the force to use organizational structure as a dynamic operational resource, using a brief description of Task Force (TF) 714 in Iraq as an example.

These two SOF-based perspectives on organizational structure – the strategic and institutional, and the operational – suggest that perhaps ‘organizing for today or tomorrow’ is not the most useful question for SOF. The question as
posed assumes a reactive and rather static approach where organizational structure positions SOF solely in response to environmental pressures and establishes prescriptions for behavior within a military community. This discussion suggests that the challenge is more complex – how can SOF use organizational structure in a proactive mode, to ‘change the game’ at both strategic and operational levels to provide creative avenues for action under any strategic or operational environment, while maintaining their position and their distinctiveness in a military community?

Definitions

The structure of a collectivity. Collectivities can be formal organizations such as USSOCOM or informal communities such as the collection of active duty and former SOF personnel. They run the gamut from very small, such as the 12-man operational detachment – Alpha or ODA team of the American Special Forces, to the very large. The U.S. military, for example, is the largest employer in the world with about 1.5 million active duty personnel in 2014 and about 750,000 civilian employees (U.S. Government, Office of Personnel Management). Every collectivity develops an organizational structure. This organizational structure is, as W. Richard Scott ([1981] 2003), an American sociologist, defines it in its simplest description, “patterned or regularized aspects of relationships existing among participants in an organization…” (Scott, [1981] 2003, p.18).

Scott’s short definition of organizational structure focuses only on behavior, and provides a descriptive but not an analytical frame. A more robust definition of structure contextualizes regularized behavior in terms of the values or norms that drive it, and the socially constructed frameworks by which those behaviors are communicated and understood by participants. Behaviors thus can be understood analytically only as part of the broader structure of the collectivity. As Scott ([1981] 2003) goes on to argue,

all social groups…are characterized by a normative structure applicable to the participants, cultural-cognitive frameworks supporting shared understandings, and a behavioral structure linking participants in a common network or pattern of activities, interactions, and sentiments. These three interrelated structures constitute the social structure of a collectivity (emphasis added) (Scott, [1981] 2003, p.20).

While ‘social structure’ does encompass more than is normally understood by ‘organizational structure’ in a management context, it is the premise of
this discussion that any structuring or regularizing of behavior (the more narrow definition of organizational structure) that does not address or at least take into account the norms and culture of the collectivity has a very high likelihood of failure. Hence an approach to organizational structure that begins from the broadest base is, as argued here, the most robust.

Scott ([1981] 2003) describes the *normative structure* of a collectivity as the criteria by which a group of people individually and collectively set goals, decide which behaviors are acceptable in the effort to achieve those goals, and identify those who get to engage in which behaviors. For example, under what circumstances is it acceptable to kill people? And who is allowed to engage in that type of behavior? A normative question more pertinent to the topic of this discussion (and at the forefront of discussions in military and policy circles in several countries today) might be, how formalized is it desirable for SOF to become?

The *cultural-cognitive frameworks* in Scott’s definition are sensemaking frames (Weick, 1995), socially constructed shared understandings which serve as a shorthand for the patterns of behavior defined by normative structures. To continue the example of authorized killing in certain situations by specified individuals, ‘war’ is an important sensemaking frame in most collectivities. In the U.S., only Congress (not the President) can legally declare that the country is at war – a declaration that frees up certain kinds of resources and assigns specific authorities. (The continuing debate in Congress over whether the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (Public Law 107-40, 2001), a Joint Resolution passed by Congress almost immediately after the terrorist attacks in the U.S. of 9/11, legally constitutes a declaration of war highlights the importance of this sensemaking frame.)

Formalized institutions provide an important shorthand for the social roles and location of functions and individuals. Institutions thus can act as sensemaking frames. The creation of USSOCOM as a formal organization out of what had been a recognized but informal grouping of personnel in each of the military services, gave the special operations community authorities, resources, and responsibilities it did not previously have, as well as a formal voice and seat at the table in the national security community. After it was established, ‘USSOCOM’ became a shorthand way to refer to these authorities and to the diffuse SOF community. Sensemaking frames thus help provide a vocabulary to communicate the values found in the normative structure. In the case of the establishment of USSOCOM, for
example, the U.S. found it desirable for a variety of reasons [Locher, 2004] to formalize and regularize the SOF community), a move which supported certain kinds of behavior and discouraged others.

The patterns or regularities in the behaviors of members of a collectivity, the third dimension of Scott’s ([1981] 2003) social structure, are what he calls behavioral structures. These behavioral structures are what are most commonly called organizational structures and are the focus of many management approaches.

Together, Scott’s three constructs – the normative structure by which goals are set and acceptable behaviors defined, the cultural-cognitive frameworks which provide meaning structures, and the behaviors by which the first two elements are simultaneously shaped and actualized – constitute a particular social structure. None of the three components can be defined, understood, or managed without consideration of the other two.

One final component is necessary to complete an analytic description of organizational structure as an embedded part of a social structure: an organization’s environment or socio-physical context. The importance of environment for organizational analysis was introduced to the social sciences in the 1960s and 1970s by theorists such as the anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1972). Bateson drew upon concepts in cybernetics to discuss organizations as open systems, constantly exchanging information with their environments. The relationship between a collectivity and its environment was conceived as a synergistic one. Social and physical environments serve as ever-varying sources of information and resources for a collectivity, and as the ‘consumer’ of its various outputs. Environments thus both shape and are shaped by all three elements of social structure. These types of discussions prefigured organizational conceptions based on complexity theory and chaos which emerged in the early years of the twenty-first century, and which will be introduced later in this discussion.

The remainder of this discussion will focus on ways to use Scott’s ([1981] 2003) expanded context for organizational structure and a recognition of the importance of environment in shaping an organization’s character and direction, to gain insight into how SOF might think about and use organizational structure to accomplish various types of goals. Emphasizing the importance of the normative and cultural-cognitive or sensemaking aspects of social structure in any discussion of organizational structure, this
discussion also will illustrate how the socio-political environments within which SOF operate significantly impact possibilities for that structure. Although much of what will be said here is applicable to all special operations forces, the focus will be on the American example.

The special operations community. A description of the structure of the American special operations function begins with the various organizations that simultaneously provide an operator with different normative structures and meaning frames within which he understands and contextualizes experience and generates new behavior, behavior which, in turn, helps shape those organizations. The very complicated formal structure under which American operators act and the informal community to which they simultaneously belong reflect certain desiderata of the American national security community. For example, an Army Special Forces (SF) operator is simultaneously a member of the Army as his uniform and paycheck show, a member of a special operations (SF) unit trained and equipped by USSOCOM, and a member of an informal community of SOF operators which include members of other services, and retirees who often serve as mentors or instructors. Each of these formal and informal organizations provides him with certain ways to make sense of the world, and different strategies to accomplish goals.

It is important to remember for the rest of this discussion that USSOCOM is not the same as the SOF community, and that there is often significant tension between the two. (See Turnley (2008) for a further discussion of the continued interplay and tension between the informal SOF community and the formal national security community as represented in many ways by USSOCOM.) This is a point worthy of note as militaries such as the Danish Defence consider establishing formal structures to manage what has heretofore been informal communities. One of these collectivities – USSOCOM – is a formal, statutorily defined organization with certain legal obligations and responsibilities. The other – the SOF community – is an informal group (or network) of like-minded men and women who connect intermittently through personal relationships, and who leverage those relationships to accomplish certain goals. A brief discussion of the distinction in the American case will illustrate the point and its importance.

Members of the SOF community in the U.S. usually begin their military career as a member of a military service – the Army, Navy, Air Force, or the Marines – and this social identification generally remains strong throug-
hout their careers. Although USSOCOM has service-like authorities (what are called MFP [major force program]-11 responsibilities after the federal budget designation) for recruiting, training, and equipping personnel, these responsibilities are limited to ‘special operations-specific’ activities. And despite recurring debate within the U.S. military community about whether or not SOF should be a ‘fifth’ service, as it is in some countries, the American SOF community has generally resisted such a distinction, and today it is not. As a Pentagon-based special operations respondent told me during an interview, “If we became a service – then we would be a service!” That is, he believed that official designation of special operations as a service would come with all the cumbersome and sclerotic bureaucratic procedures and attitudes that he perceived as accruing to the current services (personal communication, September 2014). In other words, the assignment of special operations to a particular place in an organizational structure would mean it would ‘automatically’ acquire certain attitudes and values. Thus while USSOCOM’s role may look somewhat like a military service, it is, by design, not exactly the same. This is a distinction that stems from recognition of what it means in a normative sense to be a military service in America.

In addition to its MFP-11 responsibilities, USSOCOM also serves as a unified combatant command. (It is the only U.S. institution with both unified command and MFP-11 responsibilities.) USSOCOM also has command authority over all SOF personnel based in the U.S. although the theater or geographic commands have responsibility for SOF deployed in their respective geographic areas of command. More importantly for this argument, since 2005, per the Unified Command Plan of 2004 developed under President George W. Bush, USSOCOM has served as the lead combatant commander for planning, synchronizing, and as directed, executing global operations against terrorist networks in coordination with other combatant commanders (U.S. Special Operations Command, 2007, p.16).

As the terrorist threat evolved, American military and national security planners believed that transnational/transregional nature of the terrorist threat made it strategically difficult for any one of the historic geographically based combatant commands (such as Central Command, or CENTCOM) to take the lead in combatting terrorism globally. The appointment of USSOCOM to the lead position was an apparent recognition by the American national security community of the different scope and nature of the conflict the
nation faced, a recognition that the ‘sensemaking frame’ of the conflict had changed from those that historically supported a geographic focus with a Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) in the lead. USSOCOM’s global orientation and definition by type of force rather than by geographic area of responsibility moved it into the supported or lead position. The sense or meaning shaping the American approach to the conflict had re-formed, and the military turned to a different type of organization to lead it. This part of the organizational structure of the U.S. military – in this case as exemplified by the assignment of the lead combatant command position – changed to reflect the environment.

The authorities assigned to USSOCOM are discharged through a headquarters organization located in Tampa, FL, which is comprised of about 6,000 people (military and civilian), about a tenth of the total personnel allocated to SOF. Most of the individuals working at USSOCOM headquarters have no SOF experience. The military personnel may be looking for what is called a ‘joint’ billet\(^1\) to further their career (all military positions in USSOCOM, as in all unified commands, are joint positions) and chose or were assigned to USSOCOM for various reasons. And while there are many retired SOF working on the civilian side at USSOCOM, SOF experience, or, indeed any military experience at all is not a requirement for a civilian job at USSOCOM, although it might help a candidate in a competitive process. Thus although USSOCOM is recognized as a formal voice for the broad American SOF community, those who staff the command may have had little or no contact with the SOF community prior to their employment at USSOCOM. In a parallel note, many of those in the SOF community, which includes active duty and retired personnel, as well as certain enablers and ‘friends’, are not currently and some never were under the direct jurisdiction of USSOCOM. The formal and informal communities thus exist simultaneously and independently, and overlap in membership.

**Reflecting the environment**

An organization’s environment exerts powerful forces on the structure of any collectivity. A brief history of the ways in which the SOF community and USSOCOM deliberately attempted to use behavioral structures to project

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\(^{1}\) A joint assignment is one outside of the individual’s own military service which allows him to address issues involving other services, or international issues. Joint assignments are required for promotions in pay grades of O-4 (major, or lieutenant commander in the Navy) and above.
a self-image, and the success and failure of those efforts will illustrate this power.

From early in its history, USSOCOM has endeavored to use its MFP-11 and combatant command roles and responsibilities to reflect the SOF community and its skills, talents, and capabilities to its environment, the broader military and national security community. For example, General Schoomaker, the first Commander of USSOCOM who served from 1997 to 2000, reorganized his command to reflect a commitment to a new way of warfare, the special operations approach recognized by the establishment of USSOCOM.\(^2\) He removed the traditional military J-staff structure, a structure which is organized along hierarchical functional lines, and replaced it with five centers which reported directly to him. These Centers were designed to operate as self-synchronizing teams, under Directors of balanced rank and responsibility, removing the requirement to use the Chief-of-Staff as the traditional staff choreographer. This allowed the CINC [commander in chief]/ DCINC [deputy commander in chief] to increase their span of control by making the Center Directors report directly to them (Mellinger, 2001, p.46).

The center structure thus allowed the Commander to establish direct relationships more broadly within the organization, moving it away from the relatively limited confines of the hierarchical J-staff structure and towards a more networked look and feel, somewhat reflective of the pre-USSOCOM SOF community.

However well this reorganization may have worked for the SOF community, it did not work for the broader military community. Coordination with the larger national security community had become extremely important in 2005, as USSOCOM assumed the lead role in ‘planning and synchronizing’ all American activities against terrorist networks. However, with the Center-based structure at USSOCOM, “Guys from other places just didn’t know who to talk to in USSOCOM because we didn’t have a J-designation,” said an individual who was active duty military working at USSOCOM during

\(^2\) See Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream*, 23-24, for a somewhat more detailed discussion of these organizational changes in the context of establishing institutional legitimacy for USSOCOM.
that period (personal communication, 2007). Ultimately, General Brown, USSOCOM Commander during the period when the lead role in combatting terrorism was assigned, revived the J-staff structure which funneled into a single point of contact for the Commander in his Chief of Staff, “in keeping with the command's new GWOT authorities” (U.S. Special Operations Command, 2007, p.17), although he did keep the directorates and the center structure superimposed upon it. USSOCOM ended up reflecting the military back to SOF, rather than causing the military to reflect SOF.

A second example of the power the military environment exerted on the structure and organizational definition of the SOF community comes from the organizational structure of USSOCOM’s Pentagon presence. In 2006-2007, just after USSOCOM had been formally designated the lead or supported combatant command in the ‘War on Terror,’ as it was called then, and given the additional mission of ‘synchronizing’ the activities of all participants, the command opened a small office in the Pentagon in Washington, DC. (The command headquarters are located in Tampa, FL.) The Pentagon office was staffed by lieutenant colonels and colonels, the officer level the SOF community believed represented it well and was able to engage strategically on its behalf. However, the USSOCOM personnel in the Pentagon office found that they were not treated with parity at discussions in the Pentagon. In order to effectively engage, they found that they needed flag and general officers at the table so the military services would believe that they were dealing with peers at USSOCOM. Without the rank at the table, others in the national security community did not assign the opinions of the SOF personnel the same weight as those that came from the services (personal communication, 2005).

SOF flag and general officers were in short supply in the immediate post-9/11 world, with only nine available in 2001 (Malvesti, 2010, note 5). This was partially because “SOF generals and admirals find it difficult to progress within the special operations community after they pin on the first star, partly because non-SOF officers fill many key slots” (Collins, 1994, p.121). Also, SF officers in particular found it difficult to complete

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(3) It is interesting to note that the source from which this fact is taken points out that who constitutes a SOF general or flag officer is imprecise. Some services and the Office of the Office of the Secretary of Defense define SOF personnel only as those in designated SOF billets or with certain skill sets, USSOCOM leadership takes the view that anyone who has once participated in the SOF community through service in a SOF billet remains a part of that community, wherever he may now be servicing.
many of the formal educational requirements for flag or general officer rank in addition to the extensive duties a SOF billet required (Collins, 1994, p.124). Finally, and most importantly for this discussion, with its historic focus on operations and assumption of a formal institutional command only a few years prior to 2001, prestige in the SOF community derived from operational performance not military rank and status. In fact, as late as 2005, SF operators would talk of the choice of a SOF billet as a ‘career killer’ if an individual was interested in advancement through the officer ranks. Special operations was a path to be chosen only because of a commitment to operations, and to be avoided if there was interest in career (rank) advancement (personal communication, 2005). This provides an example of how normative structures (valuing operational experience over advancement in rank) are reflected in organizational structures. The low value placed on rank vis-à-vis operations led to few special operators seeking rank advancement.

By 2010, a mere five years after USSOCOM assumed the lead combatant command role, and only nine years after 9/11, the number of SOF general and flag officers had reached 21 (Malvesti, 2010, p.4), more than double the number in 2001. Today the USSOCOM’s Pentagon office is headed by a senior civilian and a three-star general who is “responsible for planning, coordinating and executing actions with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Services and other government agencies in the National Capital Region on behalf of the Commander USSOCOM,” according to the Air Force website of Lieutenant General Thomas Trask, the individual occupying the position at the time of this writing. The explosion of SOF flag officers and the appointment of a three-star general and senior civilian to head the Washington Pentagon presence, reflect the firm embedment of USSOCOM in the military community and the impact of the military environment on SOF’s organization. The changes also raise the possibility of a change among SOF themselves in what it means to be a special operator. Has, in fact, the relationship of the importance of a career marked by advancement in rank vis-à-vis the importance of operations shifted within the American SOF community? This would make for an interesting field study.

A final example of the SOF community reflecting its broader military environment through organizational issues can be illustrated through changes in its acquisition activities. Rapid operational innovation has always been one of SOF’s fundamental qualities. It arises, in part, from the
creativity of individual operators and a culture that supports it (Spulak, 2010, p.2). This location of innovation in the operator differs from conventional forces, where innovation is an institutional function driven by budgets and programs.

One of the reasons USSOCOM was established was to eliminate the wild fluctuations in funding for U.S. special operations that had occurred after World War II, through the Vietnam War and its aftermath (Locher 2004). However, as Jessica Turnley (2008) put it in her discussion of the tension between the informal SOF community and the formal government structure represented by USSOCOM,

formal access to resources in the U.S. governmental structure as a legitimate actor means increased accountability for expenditure of those resources. This increased accountability means formalism in the planning and tracking of how funds are used....In key ways, this formalism is antithetical to the special operations approach. If the organization's greatest value is the capabilities of its people – capabilities that specifically focus on innovation, creativity and improvisation – the formalism that is required in order to get increased and reliable funding will change the nature of the environment within which the organization's members operate (Turnley, 2008, p.26).

The post 9/11 years saw significant increases in special operations personnel and funding. The special operations force increased in size by 47% from 2001-2014, while overall special operations-specific funding increased by three times over the same period (U.S. Government, Government Accountability Office, 2015, p.14). Procurement spending alone increased from USD$500 million in fiscal year (FY) 2002 (Baker & Buckles, 2011, figure 10), reached a high of about USD$2.3 billion in FY 2011. It has recently dropped to about USD$1.5 billion (Geurts, 2014, slide 15), still far above the USD$500 million of a decade prior.

These increases in procurement spending did not mean a corresponding proportional increase in funds available for operational innovation, however. By FY2015, over half (about 60%) of USSOCOM’s acquisition budget had become locked in procurement ‘mortgages’ (Geurts, 2014, slides 15-16) – funds allocated to long-term projects or procurements for maintenance of existing platforms. This is significantly up from 30% in FY10 (Geurts, 2014, slides 15-16), and illustrates a formal expectation that an acquisition
must come with funds to support it for its operational lifetime. It also shows that, for a significant proportion of acquisitions, that lifetime is exceeding one budget cycle (one year). The funding available for immediate needs, the funding that would support operational flexibility, has become a much smaller percentage of available funds.

Acquisition funding practices (which are community norms codified in procurement policies) thus are constraining operational practices. The sequestration of over half the budget available for ‘stuff’ in long-term projects or maintenance of already procured platforms indicates that the organization (USSOCOM) is becoming less willing to provide space for the individual-level innovation that had been a hallmark of the SOF community. As a retired Navy SEAL, working at USSOCOM headquarters as a civilian at the time he made this statement said, “We didn't used to have a lot, so we were innovative and creative because you had to be – we had to beg, borrow and steal… Now we have USSOCOM to get stuff for us the regular ways… The leaner you are the more creative you are” (personal communication, 2007). As the procurement function of USSOCOM continues to develop its resemblance to that of its military peers (its environment) and away from a reflection of the SOF community (where innovation and operational flexibility would be located in the operator), the organization may, as Turnley (2008) put it, “select for different successful skills” (Turnley, 2008, p.26). Informal gatherings by operators with similar needs over a beer (i.e., the gathering of a SOF community) might a be better way to stimulate the creativity directed at immediate operational needs that has historically characterized SOF than formal requests through formal acquisition channels (USSOCOM) that can take months if not years to respond.

**Organizational structure as an operational resource**

Examples such as the procurement example and the changes in the staffing of the USSOCOM Pentagon office show how the application of sensemaking frames to behavior as expressed through organizational or social structure can be seen as a risk reduction strategy. As Weick (1979) put it,

> Organizing serves to narrow the range of possibilities, to reduce the number of 'might occurs.' The activities of organizing are directed toward the establishment of a workable level of certainty (Weick, 1979, p.6).

Social structure establishes behavioral expectations for its participants, expectations which reduce uncertainty and so are perceived to reduce risk.
(The general officers representing the military services in the Pentagon ‘expected’ to interact with a SOF peer in budget negotiations and military strategy sessions: they had no strategies for engaging as a military equal with a lieutenant colonel. When confronted with this rank disparity, the interactions became socially expensive as time was spent [indirectly] challenging and establishing the legitimacy of players.) Through those expectations, the structure provides a cognitively inexpensive mechanism for interaction, allowing members to operate by heuristics, or ‘rules of thumb.’ Heuristics provide adequate although not perfect solutions, allowing the quick recognition of classes of behaviors likely to be acceptable in a particular type of situation and avoiding the need to fully analyze every situation. Behaviors will be different, for example, if ‘procurement’ is defined as an institutional function or if it is an operational strategy exercised by individuals.

The particular behavioral expectations incorporated in a given organizational structure are both allowed and constrained by the types of expectations the participating individuals are cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally able to construct and fulfill. Through their formal and rigorous selection and assessment structures, SOF organizations select for certain capabilities in all of Scott’s ([1981] 2003) dimensions: selection for a SOF component usually requires more than just physical capability. SOF organizations thus can expect different behaviors from their members than can conventional forces, and so have the opportunity to use organizational structure in different ways. For example, the small, cross-trained teams, such as ODAs, that are the hallmark of special operations are generally not possible to create in a conventional force. Even though the men on an American Special Forces ODA⁴ are trained to a specialty (such as medic or explosives), the high base level of capability of all twelve of the men determined through selection and assessment means that all members of a unit are capable of certain things that would not necessarily be true of twelve men thrown together

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(⁴) Although all positions in American SOF were opened to females as of 1 January 2016, as of this writing there are no females who have passed selection for Army Special Forces operational detachment alpha (ODA) teams, Navy SEAL teams, Marine MARSOC teams, although they have served in other Army special operations functions such as psychological operations/
in a conventional force squad. As Turnley (2011) pointed out in a study of group size in SOF,

Simply chopping the GPF into smaller pieces will not turn it into SOF because it will not be possible to infuse those pieces with the qualities of SOF. A full transformation would require the men in those [smaller] units to have the necessary attributes or capabilities, which would enable them...to exercise the flexibility and creativity that also characterize SOF...SOF and GPF [general purpose forces] units differ fundamentally in the nature of their tasks, [and] the nature of the men who compose the units... (Turnley, 2011, p.65-66).

SOF increase certain aspects of operational certainty by ‘changing the game’ to one in which they have a better chance of success by foregoing certain aspects of discipline for what Robert Spulak (2010) called creativity (at the level of the small team or individual operator).

SOF use creativity to avoid the methods used by conventional forces and the associated risks due to the unpredictability of war, yet still accomplish those objects by changing the risks to those that can be overcome by SOF (Spulak, 2010, p.5).

SOF thus have the capabilities to act in the context of an organizational structure that minimizes operational risk differently than does the structure of the conventional force. This includes the use of small, cross-trained teams, and the push of decision-making authority down to the operator which allows him the freedom to be creative in Spulak’s (2010) sense of the term.

Although perhaps not put in place by design, the structure exhibited by American special operations forces where the informal community of operators is clearly distinct from the formal institutional voice yet interacts with and, to a certain extent, is controlled by it, it is one which allows SOF

(5) It is important to remember that there are individuals in the large force who operate at SOF levels. Many SOF programs, such as the American, use the large military force as their recruitment base. Although attrition rates in selection programs are famously high – around 60% or more for American Special Forces – that many do pass points out that these individuals do exist in the general pool of large military personnel. Many may simply opt not to apply for SOF programs for various reasons, but to stay in the large military forces. See Robert G. Spulak, Jr, A Theory of Special Operations: The origin, qualities, and use of SOF. JSOU-R-07-7. Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2007, for a further discussion
units to ‘operate on the edge of chaos,’ a concept borrowed by sociology from complexity theory. ‘Operating on the edge of chaos’ describes a system operating in the transition space between order and chaos, in which behavior of the individual elements appears to be highly unconstrained and yet which, over time, yields ‘rich’, i.e., useful and meaningful patterns. These are what is known as ‘learning’ or ‘adaptive’ organizations, in which order emerges to address an environmental need and dissipates when the need is no longer present. Order – exemplified in this case by the behavioral regularities known as organizational structures – thus becomes a resource to accomplish an organizational goal.

In organizations operating ‘on the edge of chaos’ members may choose to come together in structured ways as dictated by circumstance. This is a very different modus operandi than that in which interactions are dictated ex ante, before the fact, by doctrine, policy, or procedures and rules. For this reason, these types of organizations exhibit a high level of organizational resilience, where resilience is defined as the means by which a system (any system, including an organization) recovers from or operates through a disturbance (Bhamra, Dani, and Burnard, 2011). For example, manipulation of organizational structures – the patterned behaviors by which individuals interact – is one way in which high reliability organizations avert catastrophe.

Organizational resilience (also called agility or flexibility – the ability to adapt to and operate within local conditions) has long been touted as an attribute of SOF units. It usually is seen as a function of their ability to operate as networked or relationship-based structures as distinct from the formalized, bureaucratic structures found in large military forces and which shape USSOCOM. Social networks, as an organizational mechanism, push the responsibility for ‘creating’ organizational structure away from formal mechanisms of control and to individuals, a strategy amenable to an organization operating ‘on the edge of chaos.’ The personal relationships or connections that are the building blocks of a social network or informal community must be created and activated by a specific individual and operationalized through behavior.

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(7) Turnley, in press
The focus on direct, interpersonal engagement at the level of the individual, and the deliberate use of such engagements as the basis for sensemaking (Spulak’s (2010) ‘creativity’ or game-changing activities) and other organizational activities allow SOF to manipulate and use the structure of the organization itself as they exercise creativity, using the organization’s structure as an operational resource.

Take TF 714 as an example. TF 714 is a highly trained, elite American military counterterrorism organization that had an extremely successful history of missions built around surgical strikes and hostage rescue. In 2003, it was deployed to Iraq, tasked to dismantle the al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) insurgency. The task force soon found that they were “were losing to an enemy…we should have dominated,” according to retired U.S. Army General Stanley McChrystal, then TF 714 commander (Shultz, 2016, p.1).

Historically, the task force had operated under a ‘find, fix, finish’ (F3) approach. The task force conducted a raid, and collected what materials it thought would be useful and detained appropriate individuals. Both materials and personnel were sent behind the operational lines to individuals from the DOD and other agencies who were trained in intelligence analysis and exploitation. Often weeks later, intelligence deemed useful by the exploitation and analytic organizations was returned to the operational front for use in planning additional raids.

The task force had found that, although each individual raid in Iraq was successful, collectively the raids were failing to disrupt AQI. Under its current paradigm, TF 714 would have found it difficult to conduct more raids more quickly, as the intelligence it needed was slow in reaching the operators. To become more agile, the task force needed to ‘find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze, disseminate’ (F3EAD), that is, to perform many of the intelligence functions itself. For this to happen, General McChrystal needed to intimately engage the necessary intelligence expertise for the ‘exploit, analyze, disseminate’ tasks he had added to the task force’s job description. Expertise for these tasks was resident in the government, although it was not in his formal organization and mostly not even in his agency, the DOD.

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General McChrystal chose to follow a model developed by the Joint Interagency Task Force South, or JIATF-South (Munsing & Lamb, 2011). JIATF-South had been able to successfully integrate several organizations (and multiple countries) into a single cross-agency team, heavily dependent on intelligence fusion, focused on drug interdiction in the Caribbean. To follow the model in Iraq, TF 714 physically and organizationally co-located individuals from what were formerly discrete agencies in facilities located near the point of operations (not on a base far behind the lines). Note that TF714 did not try to change the statutory responsibility of those agencies (or its own), or reassign individuals from one agency to another. In these co-located facilities, operators and intelligence analysts from many different formal organizations worked together in open bullpens that allowed immediate communication with anyone from any agency.

The TF 714 headquarters was … dominated by a large open space without cubicles, compartments, or limits on movement within it. It was an unrestricted, organic workspace whose aim was to facilitate the free flow of information and ideas through collaboration and interaction….At the front was a large U-shaped set of tables where General McChrystal, his component commanders, and senior interagency representatives sat… (Shultz, 2016, p.47).

As General McChrystal himself put it, as quoted in Richard Shultz (2016), any of them [working in the bullpen] could walk freely across the room for quick face-to-face interaction. And with the touch of a button on a microphone, everyone’s attention could be captured simultaneously … providing every component on the task force with an unobstructed, constantly up-to-date view of the rest of the organization (Shultz, 2016, p.48).

Leaders of the raids were given more authority than they had under the previous model, moving decision-making closer to the organization’s defining behavior, and locating it in those with the greatest behavioral knowledge and expertise. Military rank was used to acquire necessary resources, and to provide entrée for TF 714 to conversations at the strategic level.
Under this new organizational model, the number of raids conducted by TF 714 per month increased from 18 to around 300, and the task force achieved its goal of disrupting AQI.

As much of TF 714’s operations are highly classified, there is no information on the activities or performance of the unit after their tenure in Iraq, and with the new leadership that has been put in place since the Iraq experience. However, TF 714 activities in Iraq provide an example of how a SOF unit used organizational structure as an operational resource. TF714 effectively operated ‘on the edge of chaos,’ using and ignoring formal structure as appropriate, and locating authority in individuals regardless of rank when the situation warranted. Capitalizing on norms which valued individual capabilities as well as military rank, TF714 used relationships as well as formal structures to achieve its goals. In effect, TF 714 took the question of ‘organize for today or organize for tomorrow’ off the table completely by creatively using organizational structure to help accomplish a particular task. It organized for ‘now’ – not for today or tomorrow, and created informal relationships through co-location and close working ties that will be sure to serve SOF well in the future. The organization was one which addressed the task of the moment, and had within it mechanisms for individuals to move out of that particular configuration when the task was accomplished. The question for SOF thus might be recast as one of organizing for today in a way that provides maximal flexibility in an operational environment with minimal constraints on how to organize for tomorrow.

Conclusion
As General Schoomaker said in the epigram at the beginning of this discussion, “SOF organizational innovation is as important as innovation in weapon systems.” SOF as a whole are uniquely suited to operationalize organization as a resource for mission success. Operating at the intersection of an informal SOF community based on relationships and a large, formal bureaucratic military organization, they are, indeed, operating on the edge of chaos.

This discussion argues that the organizational question on the table for SOF should not be, ‘should be we organize to address today’s problems or to position ourselves for tomorrow’s.’ Rather, as TF 714 showed, the SOF community should think about organizations and organizing entirely differently. SOF should be prepared to use organizational structure in every situation as a strategic and operational resource, manipulating
formal patterns of interaction within the special operations normative, cultural-cognitive and behavioral frames to fit the situation. Environmental conditions may make this very difficult – and, in some cases, not possible, as some of the other examples presented here showed. However, keeping the importance and power of a robust concept of social structure front and center will help to continue to make organizational structures available as an operational as well as a strategic resource for SOF.
References


Chapter 2

Adaptive & Agile: The Human Platform as the Determining Factor For Future SOF Organization

Colonel (Retired) Bernd Horn

OPINION PIECE

Research question: What should drive SOF organization: traditional structures or emerging and future mission requirements?

Argument: Utilizing a task-tailored SOF task force approach coupled with producing adaptive and agile SOF operators provides the best option for ensuring future capability in a dynamic, complex, and constantly changing security environment.

Conclusion: In an unpredictable and resource-constrained environment, focus should rest on the human platform working within an adaptive organizational model. Specifically, selecting the right people, training and educating them, in concert with developing the necessary leadership/decision-making/risk-accepting culture, will allow for the implementation of agility of thought and action in a complex and dynamic operating environment.
Abstract
Determining future force structures and capabilities is a daunting task for any military. It is no less challenging for special operations forces (SOF). The current operating environment is already complex and dynamic. The future security environment is predicted to be even more complicated. As such, does SOF invest in new structures (e.g., headquarters, formations, units) to meet predicted future requirements? Often growth is not even an option for resource constrained nations and their militaries. Or, does SOF invest in its “human platform” to ensure it will be able to succeed in the future battlespace and be able to deal with the threat that has not even been identified yet? This paper will argue that the solution to meeting future mission requirements will be a program that is focused on utilizing task-tailored SOF task forces coupled with ensuring that SOF operators are adaptive and agile capable of dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty.
Preparing for the future is always a difficult task. The trade-off between what is known to be effective and efficient today compared to new, innovative, and untried structures that may meet the exigencies of the future is a difficult conundrum to solve. In meeting future needs, the question always becomes how great a risk (e.g., financial, doctrinal, structural, technological), in terms of capability, do you take on projected force structures or threats? For Sir Michael Howard, the renowned military historian, the issue was clear. “No matter how clearly one thinks,” he explained, “it is impossible to anticipate precisely the character of future conflict.” In finding a solution to this quandary, his philosophy was simple. He asserted, “The key is to not be so far off the mark that it becomes impossible to adjust once that character is revealed” (United Kingdom, MoD 2010, p. 2).

This advice is particularly important for special operations forces (SOF). Historically, political and military decision-makers have looked to SOF during periods of crisis or to fill capability gaps that conventional military capacity has been unable to deal with. If the past is a predictor of the future, then political and military decision-makers will continue to look to SOF as the solution to difficult, unforeseen and/or ambiguous threats, as well as other wicked problems. As Admiral William McRaven, a former commander of US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), declared:

> The world today is as unpredictable as ever. As such, the American people will expect us to be prepared for every contingency, to answer every call to arms, to venture where other forces cannot and to win every fight no matter how long or how tough. They will expect it, because we are the nation’s special operations force. (Quoted in McNally 2011)

Another former USSOCOM commander agreed. “Reality,” affirmed Admiral Eric Olsen, “is that SOF is asked to do everything that others cannot do”. Quite simply, SOF will be expected to address emerging future threats that may not yet have even been imagined. As such, the question going forward is whether SOF organize themselves for that conceptually undeveloped future security environment and/or threat, or, do they rely on traditional structures/organizations and hope to adapt once, as Howard argues, “the character” fully reveals itself?

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For SOF, the answer to this question lies in its adaptability, which resides in its reliance on the human platform, and which fuels SOF’s strategic utility and relevance to the nation. This strategic salience includes SOF’s ability to conduct operations that conventional forces, as well as other national security organizations and agencies, are unable to perform, and which make it such a unique national asset. Specifically, it is SOF’s human platform that provides governments with the best options to achieve desired outcomes at acceptable levels of risk. As such, the critical focus must remain on developing the SOF operators that are able to execute not only the national no-fail tasks with which governments entrust SOF, but who are also able to adapt and respond to the unforeseen threats as they arise.

After all, in a constrained resource environment, both financially as well as in terms of human resources, most nations are not in a position where they can simply create or expand capability (i.e., special purpose units) to meet their core tasks, as well as each and every emerging trend or threat. The focus must remain on the adaptable human platform, which will allow SOF organizations to remain strategically relevant to their governments by being able to execute their core tasks, whatever they may be, as well as meet the governmental expectation that SOF will continue being capable of responding to “threat next.” In essence, the focus on the human operator, rather than structures (e.g., new units or formations) is the key to future adaptability and this adaptability will allow SOF organizations to remain extremely agile and responsive to the future security environment, particularly in countries whose military institution is relatively small.

**SOF Defined**
Initially, it is important to define SOF to ensure there is a baseline of understanding when referring to the term. As such, for this paper, SOF is defined as:

organizations containing specially selected personnel that are organized, equipped and trained to conduct high-risk, high value special operations to achieve military, political, economic or informational objectives by using special and unique operational methodologies in hostile, denied or politically sensitive areas to achieve desired tactical, operational and/or strategic effects in times of peace, conflict or war (Canada, DND 2008, p. 7).
SOF tasks, in keeping with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) doctrine include Direct Action (DA), Strategic Reconnaissance (SR) and Military Assistance (MA). However, sub-tasks within each of these categories opens the aperture to include such activities as counter-terrorism; recovery operations; hostage rescue; countering chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear (CBRN) weapons; opposed boarding; terminal guidance operations, among others (NATO 2009, pp. 2.1-2.5). In addition, individual nations may include other tasks for their SOF to perform.*

*For instance, Canadian Special Operations Command official tasks include:

- Counter Terrorism;
- Maritime Special Operations;
  - Maritime Counter Terrorism;
  - Opposed Boarding;
- Direct action;
- Special Recovery Operations;
  - Personnel Recovery Operations;
  - Hostage Rescue Operations;
  - Noncombatant Evacuation Operations;
  - Material Recovery Operations;
- Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction;
  - Counter-Proliferation;
  - Non-Proliferation;
  - Weapons of Mass Destruction Elimination;
- Special Protection Operations;
  - Close Personal Protection;
  - Special Force Protection;
- Sensitive Site Exploitation;
- Special Reconnaissance;
- Irregular Warfare;
  - Military Assistance;
  - Stability Activities; and
  - Counterinsurgency.

The Contemporary and Future Security Environments

Any discussion on future SOF structure cannot be undertaken without due consideration to the contemporary and future security operating environments. It is precisely the unpredictable and ever-changing security environment that has propelled SOF into the limelight as a “force of choice.” Specifically, the battlespace is, and will continue to be, extremely
ambiguous and complex. It encompasses everything from state and non-state adversaries, conventional military threats to asymmetric challenges (e.g., improvised explosive devices; operations in population centric urban environments; opponent use of human populations as camouflage as well as shields; use of religious structures for sanctuary, weapon storage, staging and mounting attacks; and the use of internet and social media to pass disinformation and to attack political will). Moreover, the overwhelming use of the human domain by opponents to shield operations and increase maneuverability, as well as attack political will, has placed a premium on precision in operations, as well as the ability to operate with and amongst the population.\(^\text{10}\)

Furthermore, the reliance by antagonists on hybrid warfare, in essence a task-tailored mix of conventional and irregular forces and tactics, as well as the use of terrorism and criminal activities within the context of a confrontation, conflict or war, further exacerbate the difficulties of conducting operations.\(^\text{11}\)

In fact, it is often difficult to ascertain whether an incident(s) is a political or a law-enforcement issue, or a military problem. As such, those operating in this geo-political minefield require agility of thought and action, as well as a risk-accepting, proactive mentality. In an age where the speed of information is virtually instantaneous, ponderous hierarchies and rigid, deeply layered decision-making structures have arguably become antiquated.

The reality is that the security environment is extremely dynamic. The delivery of news and events is no longer fully controllable. The media is no longer represented by a credentialed series of actors (i.e., formalized news organizations), but rather the operating environment has become a virtual space. Unfiltered, instantaneous feeds on real-time activity, emanating from social media, has the capacity to fuel conflict and instability around the globe. Furthermore, through social media individuals can generate flash mobs, as well as widespread, if not global, protests and discontent. Every individual has the power to act as a sensor, activist, or reporter. As such, the ability to act in the margins, in a discreet manner, will become increasingly difficult, and the likelihood that events can be suppressed will become extremely problematic, if not impossible.

\(^{10}\) Human Domain is defined as “people (individuals, groups, and populations) in the environment, including their perceptions, decision-making, and behavior.” USSOCOM, *Operating in the Human Domain*, Concept Paper, 3 August 2015, p. 4.

\(^{11}\) See Colonel Bernd Horn, On Hybrid Warfare (Kingston: CANSOFCOM PDC, 2016).
The net effect is that the security environment will only increase in ambiguity, chaos, complexity, and uncertainty. Persistent conflict, based on hybrid warfare, will be the strategy of choice by adversaries who will both feed, and attempt to take advantage of, global instability. Within this volatile, fluctuating and constantly transforming operational environment, individuals capable of adapting and empowered to make decisions based on the situation at hand will become absolutely essential.

A Question of Structures
Faced with such an uncertain, dynamic and complex operating environment the question emerges: how should SOF position itself to meet “threat next”? Arguably, a traditional outlook would focus on what structures (e.g., units, headquarters, and formations) should be adopted /created to ensure the requisite capability is present when the “unknown” future event is thrust upon us. After all, there is a degree of assurance and comfort in task centric units responsible for specific functions. For instance, they have a set focus; a calculated inventory of equipment; practiced tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP); as well as standard operating procedures (SOPs). These factors are all measurable and provide a degree of confidence, predictability and, therefore, comfort.

By using this model, as new threats or security concerns are identified, conventional wisdom would suggest expanding existing units to take on the task, or develop new units to meet the need as was done in the 1970s and 1980s with the explosion of specific counter-terrorist organizations to meet the rise of global terrorism during that period. The approaches are certainly viable, if the respective nation has the resources in terms of money, manpower, and institutional capacity and/or support.

However, with the exception of large military organizations, such as the American Department of Defense, most nations are constrained in terms of growth, particularly regarding the expansion of SOF, for a myriad of reasons. First, particularly during a period of constrained resources as currently exists, funding for new units, which entails more personnel, more infrastructure, and more equipment (potentially expensive specialized equipment) is untenable. Second, growth in a zero-sum-game context means other services will take a hit to support the expansion. This consequence will generate animosity and resistance from the losing services. Third, most nations do not have large enough militaries (i.e., the required depth in the gene pool) to support expansion of SOF organizations. In fact, many, if not
most, already face difficulties in filling the positions in their current SOF organizations. Lowering the required selection standards to increase intake, only results in lowering the capability of the SOF organization, which can lead to catastrophic operational or strategic failure.\(^\text{12}\)

Finally, since it is impossible to predict the future, expansion, or the creation of new units to meet potential future threats, may be a futile exercise. Moreover, once these new units/organizations are created, tasks will always be sought and found whether the original rationale for their creation is substantiated or not. However, the employment may be unnecessary (based on existing capability), or inefficient, and act only as a lightning rod for criticism.

Therefore, for most nations, meeting SOF’s responsibility to the nation and maintaining its strategic relevance may not lie in building new units or structures but rather in a focus on capability.\(^\text{13}\) It may simply be a function of continuing to invest in current structures and human resources. For instance, rather than a unit-centric approach to missions, operations, or threats, a focus on task-tailored special operations task forces (SOTFs) or SOF teams should be utilized. Organizational agility and flexibility, as

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\(^{12}\) Vietnam provides an excellent example. The Special Warfare Centre historically, on average, graduated less than 400 individuals in a given year. However, due to a perceived requirement for more Special Force operators in theatre, by 1962, the attrition rate, which was historically 90 percent, fell to 70 percent. Two years later, it plummeted to 30 percent. By 1965, US Special Forces accepted for the first time 6,500 first-term enlistees, as well as second lieutenants! Not surprisingly, the emphasis on quality - that is ability, experience, maturity and skill was ignored in favor of quantity. In theatre, the SOF culture of lax discipline and deportment, as well as “unconventional” tactics, exacerbated by the type of inexperienced, and often immature, individuals who were now serving in SOF created difficulties. Rightly or wrongly, the reputation of SOF suffered. They became viewed by the conventional military, as well as by much of the public, as largely a collection of ill-disciplined cowboys and soldiers of questionable quality who were running amok without adequate control mechanisms. This legacy haunted the special operators for decades. In the post-Vietnam era, American SOF witnessed their budgets and organizations slashed unmercifully. For example, the Army slashed SOF manning by 70 percent and its funding by 95 percent. Charles M. Simpson III, Inside the Green Berets. The Story of the US Army Special Forces (New York: Berkley Books, 1984), pp. 72-73; Thomas K. Adams, US Special Operations Forces in Action. The Challenge of Unconventional Warfare (London: Frank Cass, 1998), p. 158; and Susan Marquis, Unconventional Warfare. Rebuilding US Special Operations Forces (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997), pp. 4, 35, 40 & 78.

\(^{13}\) By capability, I mean the potential for a respective SOF organization to carry out its mandated tasks, as well as its ability to respond to unexpected mission sets with its existing suite of personnel and equipment.
well as a decentralized leadership/decision-making/risk accepting culture, should become the central theme. Based on the task, a SOTF headquarters could be designated and the task force be populated with the requisite skill sets. This process may entail a single unit providing personnel; a mix of SOF units providing the manpower; or a mix of SOF, conventional, as well as other government department (OGD) personnel filling the SOTF.

For instance, during Canada’s participation in the war in Afghanistan, the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) SOTF was comprised of three of the four units, as well as members from OGDs.\(^{14}\) Currently, in Iraq, the CANSOFCOM SOTF is made up of members from all four of the command’s units. This approach allows for greater strategic capability, flexibility, and responsiveness, with less pressure on individual units to do all things.

The second investment to ensure readiness for the future is the focus on having an adaptable human platform. Admiral Olsen reflected, “The value of adaptive special operations forces is at least as much in their mindset as in their skill set” (Olson 2010, p. 1). Similarly, General Charles R. Holland, yet another former USSOCOM commander, revealed that the Command’s “primary success has always been ensuring we select the right people and train them for innovation” (Kennedy 2003, p. 21). It is precisely this mindset and level of skill that represents the best hedge against the future.

**The Human Platform**

The observations of the former USSOCOM commanders merit further examination. Importantly, SOF, of any nation, draws its principle strength from its people. The history and evolution of SOF demonstrates that the foundation of SOF operational capability is drawn from the human platform. It is the reliance on, and ultimate support of, the SOF operator and supporting staff that is instrumental to SOF success. This reality also represents one of the manifest differences between SOF and other military organizations. The success of SOF is predicated in specially selected, mature, experienced, highly trained and educated individuals working in small increasingly mission-specialized teams.

\(^{14}\) See Colonel Bernd Horn, No Ordinary Men. SOF Missions in Afghanistan (Toronto: Dundurn, 2016).
These individuals must possess the intellectual agility to conceptualize creative and effective solutions, which are executed with extreme precision in ambiguous situations in order to develop coherent options for political and military decision-makers who are faced with complex problem-sets and often, limited options.

In essence, the strength of SOF, as well as its ability to respond to unforeseen and unexpected threats and situations, are embedded within the capacity of its “human platform.” As such, the reliance of this human platform in turn requires the selection and employment of individuals who have the requisite philosophical, cognitive and physical attributes to thrive in the SO environment. Therefore, SOF organizations should seek individuals who are:

1. **Risk accepting** – individuals who are not reckless, but rather carefully consider all options and consequences and balance the risk of acting versus the failure to act. They possess the moral courage to make decisions and take action within the commander’s intent and their legal parameters of action to achieve mission success.

2. **Creative** – individuals who are capable of assessing a situation and deriving innovative solutions, kinetic or non-kinetic to best resolve a particular circumstance. In essence, they have the intellectual and experiential ability to immediately change the combat process.

3. **Critical and Agile Thinkers** – individuals who can conceptualize, analyze, synthesize and evaluate information, as well as reason and reflect on experience and situations, and take the necessary actions /decisions as required. They are able to transition between tasks quickly and effortlessly. They can perform multiple tasks at the same time, in the same place with the same forces. They can seamlessly transition from kinetic to non-kinetic or vice versa employing the entire spectrum of military, political, social and economic solutions to complex problems to achieve the desired outcomes. They can react quickly to rapidly changing situations and transition between widely different activities and ensure they position themselves to exploit fleeting opportunities. Moreover, they can work effectively within rules of engagement (ROE) in volatile, ambiguous and complex threat environments and use the appropriate levels of force.

4. **Adaptive** – individuals who respond effectively to changing situations and tasks as they arise. They do not fear the unknown and embrace change as an inherent and important, dynamic element in the evolution...
of organizations, warfare and society. They possess ingenuity and can “make something of nothing.”

5. **Mature, Self-Confident and Self-Reliant** – individuals who exercise professional military judgment and disciplined initiative to achieve the commander’s intent without the necessity of constant supervision, support, or encouragement. They accept that neither rank nor appointment solely defines responsibility for mission success. They function cohesively as part of a team but also perform superbly as individuals. They continue to carry on with a task until impossible to do so. They take control of their own professional development, personal affairs, and destiny and ensure they strive to become the best possible military professional achievable. They demonstrate constant dedication, initiative, and discipline and maintain the highest standards of personal conduct. They understand that they are responsible and accountable for their actions at all times and always make the correct moral decisions regardless of situation or circumstance.

6. **Decisive** – individuals who have an unconquerable desire to fight and win. They have an unflinching acceptance of risk and a mindset that accepts that no challenge is too great. They are tenacious, unyielding and unremitting in the pursuit of mission success.

7. **Capable of Working Independently or in a Team** – individuals who are totally dependable and embody a belief that first and foremost is service to country before self. They have an unwavering dedication to mission success and an acceptance of hardship and sacrifice. They strive to achieve mission success at all costs, yet within full compliance of legal mandates, civil law, and the law of armed conflict. They are able to do this working independently or as part of a team.

8. **Culturally Attuned** – Individuals who are warriors/diplomats, who are comfortable fighting but equally skilled at finding non-kinetic solutions to problems. They are capable of operating individually, in small teams or larger organizations integrally, or with allies and coalition partners. They are also comfortable and adept at dealing with civilians, other governmental departments (OGD) and international organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). They are culturally attuned and understand that it is important to “see reality” through the eyes of another culture. They understand that it is not the message that was intended that is important but rather the message that was received that matters. They strive to be empathetic, understanding and respectful at all times when dealing with others. They comprehend that respect and understanding build trust, credibility, and mission success.
9. **Effective Leaders and Communicators** – individuals who through their own dedication and willingness to perform can motivate and inspire others. They consistently demonstrate an uncompromising, persistent effort to excel at absolutely everything they do. Their driving focus is to attain the highest standards of personal, professional and technical expertise, competence, and integrity. They place an unremitting emphasis on continually adapting, innovating and learning to achieve the highest possible standards of personal, tactical and operational proficiency, and effectiveness. Through this behavior, they set the example for others. In addition, through their ability to effectively communicate through their words and actions, they are able to share their vision and intent, thus motivating and inspiring others to strive for excellence and mission success.

10. **Possess High Levels of Perseverance /Stamina** – individuals who have achieved an exceptional level of physical fitness and have the stamina to perform under constant physical and mental stress.

11. **Work Well Under Stress and in Ambiguous Environments** – individuals who continually overcome heavy workloads, tight deadlines, time constraints, fear, risk, personal responsibility, etc., to accomplish the mission. Moreover, they are not intimidated or flustered by change, the unknown or ambiguous circumstances. Furthermore, they use critical thinking, as well as personal and vicarious experience to overcome unknown, new or ambiguous situations.15

These attributes are not ranked in any particular order. Their exact measurement is also problematic, although SOF organizations dedicate

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15 Selection standards are a national/SOF organization-centric activity, although due to similarities in tasks many countries will have a similar approach and outcome. Normally, a job analysis will determine the critical predictors. From these predictors, attributes necessary to successfully conduct the task are determined. These requirements will be identified in broad categories such as physical fitness, interpersonal skills, and communication. These broader categories are in turn broken into numerous smaller categories. Tests are then developed to evaluate the necessary attributes. Despite the in-depth scientific study that goes into the process, many argue the true selection determinant is training attrition, quite simply the ability of a candidate to complete the physically demanding training period. See Colonel Bernd Horn and Major Tony Balasevicius, editors, Casting Light on the Shadows. Canadian Perspectives on Special Operations Forces (Toronto: Dundurn, 2007), 37-58; Canada, CANSOFCOM Capstone Concept for Special Operations 2009 (Ottawa: DND, 2009), pp. 4-5; Eric L. Haney, Inside Delta Force, (New York: Dell, 2003), pp. 28-107; Tom Clancy, Special Forces (New York: Berkley Books, 2001), pp. 61-92; and Charles M. Simpson III, Inside the Green Berets, 23.
much research into scientific study trying to refine selection and training processes. Assessor experience and observation becomes an important factor. In addition, there is some latent tension between some of the attributes. For example, being decisive and self-reliant can clash with working in a team. When in doubt, the key attribute sought from a SOF operator is the ability to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty.16

Significantly, once selected and trained, SOF individuals must be placed on a career cycle of training and educational development and employment as excellence in executing drills is not enough. To this end, SOF personnel must continually receive educational upgrading and operational experience in consonance with the SOF emphasis on cognitive strength to enable critical thinking, innovation, adaptation and problem solving within the context of the broader spectrum of conflict. This training and education must allow SOF personnel to identify and contextualize the utility of their missions at the operational and strategic levels. It must also enable them to rapidly adopt and operationalize new equipment and technologies.

This focus on adaptiveness and a cognitive approach to operations is key to their ability to meet future challenges. Equally important is the requirement for SOF personnel to be completely at ease and proficient in working within an integrated environment with joint, interagency, and allied partners. These partnerships will allow for the requisite skill sets, networks, and experience to meet the widest array of potential problems and threats.

An investment in SOF personnel will pay dividends. Specifically individuals who individually, in small teams, or SOTFs can deploy into operational zones and assess the situation; adapt their mission as required based on the reality on the ground; and conceptualize potential solutions and possible options to ambiguous, complex and/or wicked problems for political and military decisions-makers (i.e., SOF) will represent the best likelihood of meeting unforeseen and/or unknown threats.

Conclusion
Adjusting an organization to meet the potentially unknown threats of the future security environment is an extremely difficult task. After all, it is impossible to predict with full confidence what that future will look like. As such, should a nation or military gamble on new structures or organizations, or should it hope its normal course adjustments will be sufficient to meet the unknown and unforeseen perils of the future?

This question is highly relevant to SOF. History has shown that when nations are faced with a crisis or a capability gap, they normally look to SOF for the solution. As such, SOF must ensure it is properly postured to meet that critical remit. However, for most SOF entities it is difficult enough in a resource-constrained environment to produce the required number of SOF operators to meet current demands, much less expand or create new units. Quite simply, it is a function of financial resources, human resources, inter-service rivalry and pressures, as well as governmental confidence in deploying SOF. Therefore, ensuring SOF can meet future demands becomes more a question of fully developing current capacity rather than a focus on creating new structures or expanding those structures that currently exist.

As a result, the focus should rest on the human platform working within an adaptive organizational model. Specifically, selecting the right people, training and educating them, in concert with developing the necessary leadership/decision-making/risk-accepting culture, will allow for the implementation of agility of thought and action in a complex and dynamic operating environment. A highly competent, intellectually agile manpower pool, combined with a flat command structure and a task-tailored SOTF concept of operations, will provide a further hedge against “threat next.” The key remains in being adaptive and agile, as well as trusting in the human component.

(17) By an adaptive organizational model I mean, an organization that is capable of keeping stride with rapid changes in the security environment by:
1. Entrusting decision-making authorities and responsibilities, as well as the necessary resources to subordinate leaders;
2. Shifting priorities to meet the needs of the current and evolving situation (i.e., ensuring that organizational capacity and requirements are synchronized at all times);
3. Optimizing resources (i.e., human, technological, informational, equipment & material);
4. Eliminating unnecessary, redundant or outdated equipment, material, practices and processes;
5. Adjusting operations quickly and efficiently to meet rapid change; and
6. Introducing new technologies quickly and proactively.
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Chapter 2


Chapter 3

“I was selected for that ...”: The Need for a Balanced, Adaptive Approach to Leadership Selection

Dr. Emily Spencer

OPINION PIECE

**Research question:** Can effective special operations leaders only be identified early on or can they be developed?

**Argument:** While effective SOF leaders should be identified early on in their careers based on desired attributes, without the proper development of their skills through training and education, their potential will most probably not be realized. As such, the question should not be one of nature or nurture but rather which nature and how best to nurture.

**Conclusion:** Effective SOF leaders should be identified early based on attributes and skills that match the specific task(s) s/he will perform. They then need to receive career-long education and training in order to be able to fulfill their potential.
Abstract
The question that this paper addresses deals with the topic of Nature or Nurture, specifically asking should effective special operations leaders be identified early or can they be developed? The thesis of this chapter is that while effective SOF leaders should be identified early on in their careers based on desired attributes, without the proper development of their skills through training and education, their potential will most probably not be realized. As such, the question should not be one of nature or nurture but rather which nature and how best to nurture, a conundrum that many SOF organizations have been struggling with for years. Ultimately, nature and nurture always work together, and the circumstances will always dictate the requirements. Consequently, effective SOF leaders should be identified early based on attributes and skills that match the specific task(s) s/he will perform. They then need to receive career long education and training in order to be able to fulfill their potential. Additionally, they need to play well with others and leverage diversity, whether that is in the context of a national SOF command, with conventional forces, within a whole of government perspective or with international allies. Lastly, the ability to adapt with regard to leadership selection, training and education will remain central to success in an ever-evolving defense environment, and this truth is particularly relevant for small nations.
The Tortoise and the Hare

One day a hare was bragging about how fast he could run. He bragged and bragged and even laughed at the tortoise who was so slow. The tortoise stretched out his long neck and challenged the hare to a race.

The race began, and the hare, being such a swift runner, soon left the tortoise far behind. About halfway through the course, it occurred to the hare that he had plenty of time to beat the slow trodden tortoise.

“Oh, my!” thought the hare, “I have plenty of time to play in the meadow here.”

After the hare had finished playing, he decided that he had time to take a little nap.

The hare finally woke from his nap. “Time to get going,” he thought. And off he went faster than he had ever run before! He dashed as quickly as anyone ever could up to the finish line, where he met the tortoise, who was patiently awaiting his arrival.18

Anyone who has ever worked in a special operations forces (SOF) community has likely heard the response “I was selected for that” from an operator who has been asked if s/he has certain attributes or skills associated with the task at hand. This response tends to be particularly prominent with respect to attributes and skills that are generally associated with being a good SOF leader. Specifically, SOF leaders are expected to be adaptable, critical and creative thinkers, motivated, inspiring, and have good people-skills, just to mention a few characteristics. In the decentralized command structure of most SOF organizations, many, if not all, SOF operators will be in a position of leadership at some point in their careers, regardless of rank. As such, it is beneficial that most SOF organizations also select their operators based on the above-mentioned criteria. Consequently the retort, “I was selected for that” has some degree of validity.

Is leadership selection based on attributes associated with effective SOF leadership enough to ensure good leadership, however? In a word: no. While selection based on attributes is likely an effective, if not necessary, component to becoming an effective SOF leader, in the absence of continuous education and training to hone the skills required of good SOF leaders, the potential that selection identifies is sadly likely never realized. Like the age old nature or nurture debate writ large, the efficacy for SOF leadership also lies somewhere in between. As such, while effective SOF leaders should be identified early on in their careers based on desired attributes that are important to the specific task(s) s/he will perform, without the proper development of their skills through training and education, their potential will most probably not be realized.

Undeniably, to be an effective SOF leader, an individual must possess the appropriate attributes and skills to excel in a special operations environment. Attributes are core characteristics that individuals develop as a response to their environment such as being adaptable, communicative, loyal, and compassionate, for example. Attributes act as strong predictors as to how an individual will behave in a specific situation. While not an exact science, there are a number of personality tests that are designed to measure individual attributes. In comparison, skills are learned behaviors that are maintained and improved with practice. Since skills are behaviors, they can be measured in terms of performance. In essence, attributes speak to a person’s potential in a given environment, and skills reflect what an individual actually does in that circumstance, reflected in some cases as the realization

(19) In the Canadian model, key attributes that are required include being: risk accepting, creative, agile thinkers, adaptive, self-reliant, eager for challenge, naturally orientated to the pursuit of excellence, relentless in mission success and culturally attuned.

(20) Notably, attributes should not be confused for traits which are thought to be inherent characteristics. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this paper, attributes, which are generally learned at a young age and are resistant to change, will be considered as part of “nature” within the nature-nurture debate. It should also be recognized that psychological measurements are not without their faults and, indeed, their efficacy is sometimes questionable. See for example, R. Michael Furr and Verne R. Bacharach, Psychometrics: An Introduction (Sage Publications, 2014). Despite challenges to their exact reliability in predicting behavior in all situations (See for example, “Traits are Powerful Predictors of Behavior: Psychological Essay”, https://www.ukessays.com/essays/psychology/traits-are-powerful-predictors-of-behavior-psychology-essay.php Accessed October 17, 2016), many armed forces, including the Canadian Armed Forces, use personality tests designed to measure individual traits and attributes to help guide selection and determine the suitability of an individual to a specific role in the organization.
of potential. As the epigraph of the *Tortoise and the Hare* illustrates, however, potential, especially if not harnessed appropriately, can be nullified.

Clearly, attributes alone are not guarantors of success. Indeed, particularly in a SOF environment, it is what a person does or does not do that is important rather than what s/he supposedly can, or cannot, do. Nonetheless, showing potential for efficacy in a certain environment is a good starting point for building and maintaining the appropriate skills required to succeed.

Consequently, on one hand the “nature or nurture” debate seems somewhat moot with selection and development being both obviously crucial to success with respect to performance in a SOF role and SOF leadership in particular. On the other hand, however, the issue is still quite germane as it highlights the crux of the SOF leadership conundrum.

Specifically, inquiring whether or not effective SOF leaders should be identified early on in their careers, or if they can be developed later, reflects key assumptions that are being made regarding SOF leadership that need to be deconstructed. Indeed, the more pertinent questions are: which attributes should SOF leaders be selected for and how should their education and training be designed to maximize the achievement of their potential? In essence the question should not be nature or nurture but rather which nature and how best to nurture, a conundrum that many SOF organizations have been struggling with for years.

On the surface, the issue does not appear to be that complex. Fundamentally it simply involves identifying what SOF leaders are expected to be capable of doing: identifying and selecting for attributes that reflect the potential for success in these areas; and, training and educating individuals so that they will behave in a manner that achieves desired ends. Delineated in this manner, it would appear that the selection, education, and training of SOF leaders should be easy. Reality, however, has proven otherwise. Each of the above-mentioned concerns is fraught with challenges and deserves further exploration.

**SOF Leader Roles**

In order to be able to appropriately select and train SOF leaders, it is first important to clearly delineate what SOF leaders are expected to do in order to ensure that there is a proper match of attributes and skills to desired outcomes. The issue is not in the logic of this approach but rather in clearly
and precisely defining what SOF leaders are expected to do. The simple answer to this query is “everything” and plays into the super-hero image of SOF that Hollywood helps to propagate. This all-inclusive response is also reflective of the savior-type role that many SOF operators see themselves in.

More realistically, however, SOF leaders should not be expected to be everything to everyone all at once and under all circumstances. In fact, there are very distinct levels of leadership based on the size of the team and the level of engagement (i.e., tactical, operational, or strategic leadership). Additionally, there are distinct leadership roles in terms of the type of team being led. For instance, the SOF leader who is leading a direct action (DA) raid is relying on different attributes and skills than is the SOF leader who is leading a military assistance (MA) team. Whether or not the team being led is uni-national and/or uni-cultural and/or multinational and/or multicultural, for example, may also make a difference to the type of leadership that will be most effective. Additionally, the degree of perceived risk and/or threat will be a factor.

In short, there should not be a rigid SOF leader model with only one standard for leadership selection education and training. Instead, SOF should have an adaptive leadership model that reflects the varied and unique roles that leaders may find themselves in, and leadership selection, education, and training should be reflective of the type of SOF leader that is desired to best fulfil that specific role.

Academically this breakdown of roles and responsibilities is logical and the argument is well supported. It would also be relatively straightforward to assign desired attributes and skills that would facilitate effective leadership in any given environment.

As a real-word issue, however, this type of adaptive model is much easier to describe than to implement. In particular, the more SOF leaders are specialized, then the increasingly difficult it becomes for them to adapt or change roles. This complication is underscored for small nations. For instance, while the US may be able to maintain a degree of specialization with regard to SOF leadership selection and development, it is harder for nations such as Canada and Denmark to follow this template because the size of their force is already comparatively small, and their members are more likely to be called on to perform multiple roles within the organization. In this case, size does indeed matter.
Also, it should be noted that having an adaptive leadership approach should not challenge the need to have one clear, precise definition of leadership to work from. For instance, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) defines effective leadership as “directing, motivating and enabling others to accomplish the mission professionally and ethically, while developing or improving capabilities that contribute to mission success.” (Canada, 2005, p. 5)

While the “what” leadership is remains the same in all circumstances, the context of the situation and the make-up of the group being led will determine the best practices with regards to “how” effective leadership can be achieved. The elements will also help to determine which leader attributes and skills are best in any given situation. In the end, leadership represents a dynamic relationship between the leader, followers, and the environment. Since the SOF operating environment is predictably different based on tasks, it seems intuitive that the leadership practices, and leader attributes and skills should also be matched to the tasks.

As such, there is valuable middle-ground that can be harvested from accepting the premise that there should be no rigid SOF leadership model but rather an adaptive one that is driven by the tasks that will be performed, and with the level of specialization being determined by the availability of SOF and the desired goals of the nation (i.e., means and ends). Most importantly, developing a fluid SOF leadership model based on projected leadership roles and responsibilities would ensure a better match of leadership attributes and skills to the specific SOF task that a specific leader will perform than any singular rigid model of SOF leadership could provide. Ultimately, an adaptive SOF leadership model driven by the specific tasks will be performed would allow both the benefits of nature and nurture to be optimized through specific selection, training, and education. Notably, if we do not know what tasks a SOF leader will be performing, then selection based on attributes will be of minimal to no value. Additionally, the broader the set of tasks to be performed, the more attributes will likely be required to fulfill these tasks thereby likely minimizing the pool of potential candidates. In short, in order to use attributes for selection, you first need to know what tasks you are selecting for. The broader your list of tasks, the more attributes will likely be required to fulfill the skill-sets involved in task accomplishment. As such, knowing what you want your SOF leaders to do is the singular most important element for selection and training.
Desired Attributes

Attributes do not predict how someone will behave in a certain situation but they can indicate probable tendencies to see the world a certain way and to act accordingly. Attributes are considered learned behaviors and, as such, are subject to change. At the same time, however, they are core characteristics that individuals develop as a response to their environment and are not easily transformed.

Identifying and selecting SOF leaders based on attributes can be an effective way of maximizing the benefits of nature in order to ensure success, but it will only be effective if the attributes are desirable for the specific leadership tasks that are being selected for. Just as there should be no rigid SOF leadership model, there should be no rigid list of attributes that reflect SOF leadership potential and, as much as the resources of the nation will allow, attributes should be aligned with specific SOF tasks.

For example, DA missions and MA missions lie on opposite sides of the SOF task spectrum. In a simplified manner, DA missions are generally kinetic, fast-paced, of short duration, and conducted with like-minded and similarly trained individuals. They often demand little compassion and, in fact, could be hindered by empathy. They do not rely on collaborative decision-making and instead are dependent on impeccable training, embedded tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs), rehearsals, and instinctual behaviors for success. In short, these operators are the “door-kickers”. At the other extreme of the SOF task spectrum, MA missions are generally slow-paced and of long-duration. They often require patience, empathy and co-operation to succeed. They are collaborative and rely on relationship-building. While there are individuals who may be good at both DA and MA missions, it is easy to see that the two types of tasks are almost opposite in nature. Due to these distinctions, it is reasonable to conclude that the aptitudes of leaders who excel in each element would also be somewhat unique.

Clearly, using attributes to identify leadership potential is only effective if the attributes match the leadership roles and tasks that are being selected for. If you are going to rely on “nature” to help you select for potential success, then you first need to make sure that you are selecting the right “nature” for your environment and tasks. As the above descriptions illustrate, not all attributes are best suited to all SOF tasks.
Education and Training for SOF Leader Success

Regardless of task, while selection based on nature helps to build potential, success can only be achieved through continuous and appropriate education and training. Training elicits a standard response to a predictable problem. Through training, standardized TTPs, practice, and rehearsals, the body and mind can learn to react a certain way despite physical and/or mental stresses. Education on the other hand allows for a reasoned response to an unpredictable problem. With education, individuals can be empowered with knowledge and the ability to reason effectively. In the environments in which SOF operate, individuals need both training and education in order to be successful.

Many kinetic actions that SOF perform rely on training, practice and rehearsals for success. For instance, close quarter combat (CQB) requires that the team be able to react with precision and follow standardized drills in order to maximize effectiveness and minimize blue-on-blue casualties. As the chaos of combat progresses, individuals may need to adapt to the circumstances, but they do so relying heavily on motor-skills developed during training and rehearsals. Not only is there little time to reflect and analyze under these circumstances, high adrenaline and increased heartrate, physiological conditions that often occur when in combat, can leave individuals, what author Malcolm Gladwell has termed, “mind blind”. This condition limits one’s ability to reason and instead behavior becomes instinctive and is informed by previously rehearsed practices.\(^{21}\) As such, for many kinetic actions, there is no substitute for good training and rehearsals.

Under many other circumstances in which SOF find themselves, however, there is a need to adapt and innovate, skills that are dependent on the ability to think critically and creatively, a combination that is often referred to under the rubric of strategic thinking. As Admiral Ray Smith, former Commander of the Naval Special Warfare Command explained, “We want a kid who can think...who can make decisions on his own....You have to have a young man [SOF operator] who has the capacity to think on his own under very stressful conditions” (Marquis, 1997, p. 47). Echoing these sentiments, one Delta Team Commander revealed, “Many times we had to

think and act instantly, with no guidance at all … They [operators] have to be able to think as well as fight.”

Strategic thinking has also been described as “the art of outdoing an adversary, knowing that the adversary is trying to do the same to you.” In a way, the concept is that simple: at its core, strategic thinking is about outsmarting an opponent whom is simultaneously trying to outmaneuver you. Clearly this skill is of utmost importance to SOF operators as the above citations suggest.

This importance is amplified when it comes to SOF leadership. Within a defense paradigm, the situation in which one needs to apply strategic thinking is rarely simple. First, the issue is generally neither contained between two belligerents, nor acted out within the construct of a zero-sum game. Instead, multiple players may be involved and mutual gains and/or losses are possible. A further complicating factor in this non-“black-and-white, you win, I lose” scenario is that success is interpreted subjectively. Moreover, not only is the meaning of success potentially different between players, its delineation may even fluctuate within a specific state over time. The omnipresence of the media simply underscores these challenges by allowing nearly everyone, particularly those not in harm’s way, the capacity to simultaneously judge the actions of those on the ground in near real time through their own subjective lenses of right and wrong, success and failure. These circumstances are compounded in a special operations environment. Not surprisingly then, it is important to ensure that SOF leaders not only make good decisions but make the right decisions.

Notably, it is rarely sufficient for SOF leaders to make the right decisions, they then often need to carry out the right actions, including in many circumstances influencing a group of people, in order to achieve the desired effect. Consequently, emotional intelligence – the ability to regulate your own emotions, recognize those of others, and use this space to achieve your

(22)  Dalton Fury, Kill Bin Laden (New York: St. Martin’s Griffen, 2008), xxvi. Notably, Fury did also note that the ability to think is “why Delta picks the kind of operators that it does.” My argument throughout this article is that that type of selection can only be useful if it is developed with education.

objectives – becomes equally as important and critical as creative thinking. A good definition of strategic thinking should thus include all three concepts and can be stated as “the art of applying critical, creative and emotional intelligence in a holistic manner in order to achieve sustainable success within complex, dynamic and multi-player environments.”

The ability to apply strategic thinking – that rare combination of critical and creative thinking, and emotional intelligence – is perhaps the singular most important factor to SOF leadership success in a non-kinetic environment. As such, continuous education on how to think and exposure to new ideas and perspectives are imperative.

In the end, for non-kinetic activities, education becomes the central element of the nurturing process and key to unlocking the potential that selection holds. The issue then becomes one of what type of education is required, how can it be delivered and how can it be fit into, if not prioritized within, an already full workload. Notably, there is no one-size fits all model to an-

(24) This definition was derived by the author after careful reflection and thought regarding the current literature on the subject. Notably, viewed in this manner, strategic thinking is a type of thought process and is thus different than thinking strategically. Thinking strategically does not imply a distinctive thought process but rather thinking at a certain level of engagement. Nonetheless, the terms have been used interchangeably. For example, as Stephen Gerras notes, strategic thinking “requires feedback to adapt or learn from the interaction with the internal and external environment. It also requires one to be self-aware [sic] of biases, tendencies, ethical influences, and assumptions that are often mental road blocks to thinking strategically and building an effective vision or strategy.” Stephen Gerras, “Thinking Critically about Critical thinking,” in Strategic Leadership The Generals Art, eds. Mark Grandstaff and Georgia Sorenson (Vienna; VA, Management Concepts, Inc., 2009), 50-51, cited in Eifler, Developing Strategic Thinking Leaders in the U.S. Army, 4; Moreover, as Paul Schoemaker, Steve Krupp and Samantha Howland explain: “Through research at the Wharton School and at our consulting firm involving more than 20,000 executives to date, we have identified six skills that, when mastered and used in concert, allow leaders to think strategically and navigate the unknown effectively: the abilities to anticipate, challenge, interpret, decide, align, and learn. Each has received attention in the leadership literature, but usually in isolation and seldom in the special context of high stakes and deep uncertainty that can make or break both companies and careers. … An adaptive strategic leader—someone who is both resolute and flexible, persistent in the face of setbacks but also able to react strategically to environmental shifts—has learned to apply all six at once.” Paul J.H. Schoemaker, Steve Krupp and Samantha Howland, “Strategic Leadership: the Essential Skills,” Harvard Business Review, January / February 2013, p. 2. Additionally, much military literature that deals with the topic of strategic thinking is clearly focused on decision-making at the strategic level of war. See for example, Lieutenant-General K. R. Pennie, “Strategic Thinking in Defence” Canadian Military Journal, Autumn 2001, pp. 21-28.
swer these queries, as each nation will have to balance their ways, means, and ends for themselves.

**Concluding Remarks**
What becomes more important than having the answers at this stage is asking the right questions. To return to our earlier discussion, the question should not be nature or nurture but rather which nature and how best to nurture. The answer to this conundrum is not universal and instead rests within each nation's means, ways, and ends. Some general conclusions can nonetheless be put forth.

In particular, the first step should always be to ask what you want your SOF leaders to be able to do. Based on the answer to this question, one can then determine which attributes and skills are appropriate to select for. Once the right match of personnel to tasks has been achieved, then one should ask how best to develop potential through training and education. While training and education may be somewhat task tailored, a good foundation in how to apply strategic thinking will support more specific studies and allow data to be transformed into knowledge and expressed in the application of effective courses of action. What this conceptualization provides is the “who” and “what” to the government directive of “where”, “when”, and “why”. Most importantly it also empowers SOF leaders to think of and implement the “how”, which is the crucial element in achieving strategic effect.

Notably, selection does not directly translate to success as the fable of the *Tortoise and the Hare* illustrates. In this classic version, the moral is that slow and steady wins the race. Clearly this is not a palatable ending for the type-A personalities that are drawn to SOF, however. And indeed, the story has alternate endings.

After losing the race, the hare did some soul searching and realized that he had lost the race only because he had been overconfident, careless, and lax. If he had not taken things for granted, there is no way the tortoise could have beaten him. So he challenged the tortoise to another race. For some reason, the tortoise agreed. This time, the hare went all out and ran without stopping from start to finish. He won by several miles. The moral: fast and consistent will always beat slow and steady.

But the tortoise was no fool and he too did some thinking; then challenged the hare to another race, but on a slightly different route. For some reason,
the hare agreed. They started off. In keeping with his self-made commitment to be consistently fast, the hare took off and ran at top speed until he came to a broad river. The finishing line was a couple of kilometers on the other side of the river. The hare sat there wondering what to do. In the meantime the tortoise trundled along, got into the river, swam to the opposite bank, continued walking, and won the race. The moral: first identify your core competency(ies) and then change the playing field to suit your core competency(ies).

Importantly, the hare and the tortoise, by this time, had become pretty good friends and they did some thinking together. Both realized that the last race could have been run much better. So they decided to do the last race again, but to run as a team this time. They started off, and this time the hare carried the tortoise to the riverbank. There, the tortoise took over and swam across with the hare on his back. On the opposite bank, the hare again carried the tortoise and they reached the finishing line together. The moral: teamwork always out-performs individual competency in varied circumstances.25

The moral for our purposes is that nature and nurture always work together, and the circumstances will always dictate the requirements. As such, effective SOF leaders should be identified early based on attributes and skills that match the task. They then need to receive career-long education and training in order to be able to fulfill their potential. Additionally, they need to play well with others and leverage diversity, whether that is in the context of a national SOF command, with conventional forces, within a whole-of-government perspective or with international allies. Lastly, the ability to adapt with regard to leadership selection, training, and education will remain central to success in an ever-evolving defense environment, and this truth is particularly relevant for small nations.

(25) The above was adapted, including some original language and phraseology, from the “Hare n’ Tortoise: Story with a Twist” http://saktishree.blogspot.ca/2008/11/hare-n-tortoise-story-with-twist.html Accessed September 8, 2016.
References
Professional entrepreneurship and self-perceptions of SOF

Special Forces: Leadership, Processes and the British Special Air Service (SAS)
- What kind of leadership, processes and work climate best supports employee-driven innovation in SOF?

Dr. Alastair Finlan

Thinkers at the Cutting Edge: Innovation in the Danish Special Forces
- What kind of leadership, processes and work climate best supports employee-driven innovation in SOF?

Karina Mayland, Rikke Haugegaard, and Allan Shapiro

Identifying Special Operations as a Distinct Foreign Policy Instrument
- Can the professional background identity and cognitive maps of SOF operators inform, challenge and improve future special operations?

Anton Asklund Johnsen

SOF as Designers
- What is Design and to what extent should it inform SOF education and training?

Dr. Nancy Roberts
Research question: What kind of leadership, processes, and work climate best support employee-driven innovation in SOF?

Argument: Special Forces are a different type of soldier that offers new possibilities within the military landscape of war. The leadership of David Stirling of the SAS in WWII provides an exemplar of best practice/bottom-up innovation of how to generate operational level effects using unorthodox units that demand atypical personality types and unusual command/control processes.

Conclusion: Asking first order questions of what are Special Forces and how are they different within the spectrum of Special Operations Forces, also in relation to conventional forces, provides a firm intellectual foundation to select an historical example of best practice/innovation in terms of leadership (David Stirling and the SAS) and processes (the so-called ‘Chinese Parliament’) that has great relevance for contemporary units.
Abstract

This paper addresses the research question of what kind of leadership, processes, and work climate best support employee-driven/bottom-up innovation in SOF. It starts with the suggestion that the term Special Operations Forces (SOF) needs to be intellectually unpacked and its diverse elements (of which Special Forces are just one part) disaggregated in order to elicit definitional clarity. From this conceptual starting point, it becomes immediately clear that Special Forces represent the ‘special’ component in the SOF designation. This research contends they are a new type of soldier (and a product of modern warfare) that is defined by differentness in relation to conventional forces and activities within a battlespace, working in traditionally restricted areas. David Stirling, one of the founders of the famed British Special Air Service (SAS), is highlighted as an exemplar of the sort of leadership that provoked rare operational level effects. The paper also suggests that unorthodox forces operating in a unique operational environment demand unusual personality types and atypical command/control processes encapsulated by the so-called ‘Chinese Parliament’ that emerged in the SAS.
This paper focuses explicitly on British Special Forces and uses historical instances to illustrate examples of leadership, processes, and work climate that encourage and sustain employee-driven/bottom-up innovation (from within the units themselves) that produces tangible benefits at the operational level. It also considers processes and work climate under the same heading as the two elements are intimately connected and suggests the working environment of Special Forces demands unorthodox command structures, personality types and disciplinary processes. The focus in this research is on the Special Air Service (SAS) and considers the significance/merits of the so-called ‘Chinese Parliament’ in terms of operational effectiveness and also the limits/pitfalls to decentralized decision-making. Without question, the development of so-called ‘special operations’ in the modern age represents an exercise in entrepreneurialism in military affairs or, to put it in other terms, the taking of risks to achieve profitable outcomes in the course of a particular campaign. Whether by design or accident, secret military units are very much at the forefront of recent and contemporary military operations in Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen, which poses distinct challenges for the nation states that wield them and the wider conventional forces that provide these soldiers with recruits and equipment. The military personnel who conduct such ventures are described as ‘Special Operations Forces’ (SOF), which is a relatively modern umbrella term for a variety of distinct units that are geared towards conducting military tasks that set them apart from mainstream conventional forces. The scale of distinctiveness among soldiers in Special Operations ranges from low to high and encompasses elite units who remain on the spectrum of conventional units, albeit at the upper end in terms of skills and capabilities, to Special Forces who exist in another category entirely. Elite and special are often perceived as synonyms and often used as such, but in reality, notwithstanding a constant recruitment flow primarily from the former to the latter, they are foundationally different. The separation between Special Forces and Special Operations Forces is often overlooked in the contemporary literature, and this paper starts by dwelling a little on the question of what Special Forces are and goes on to explore the challenges they pose. It looks briefly at the defining qualities of Special Forces before turning to an historical example of entrepreneurship in terms of leadership by focusing on the remarkable period of time when the British Special Air Service (SAS) was under the direction of one of its founders, David Stirling.
What are Special Forces?

‘Special Forces’ as a term and a concept gained purchase in Britain in the Second World War. Its influence spread ideationally to the United States armed forces during the war and, in America today, the label ‘Special Forces’ is a designation for a specific unit, the famed US Army unit known as the Green Berets created in 1952. In the UK, however, Special Forces as a description continues to carry more social, historical, and intellectual weight than SOF. This research argues that Special Forces are *sui generis* on the scale of fighting forces in human development. They are best understood as atypical or ‘different’ (Finlan, 2008, p.3) military personnel who fall outside of traditional understandings of military formations and strategies. From this interpretive standpoint, they are a manifestation of a new type of soldier that cannot be found in the annals of ancient history, and as such they challenge longstanding approaches to war. This paper suggests that traditional models of military leadership, processes, and work climate are inapt for Special Forces, but in order to lay the groundwork for this argument, it is important to dwell a little on how they are different. The global origins of Special Forces in the Second World War can be process-traced precisely back to their birth in the UK’s armed forces and the desperate position Britain faced in the early years of the war against Germany, especially after the fall of France in 1940. The word ‘special’ was used to describe a proliferation of units that were different in some way, either in purpose or role, from traditional conventional forces. They included, among others, the Special Operations Executive (SOE)\(^{26}\) and the Special Air Service (SAS). Though apart from sharing a word, and it is important to recognize that SOE was not on the spectrum of Special Forces, these organizations conducted quite divergent activities in their theaters of operations. In essence, the former was an example of a *paramilitary* organization (this is the critical distinction) whose members, known as agents, operated in civilian clothes in occupied countries working closely (coordination and supply) with resistance movements and primarily engaged in ‘subversion and sabotage, against the enemy […]’ (Foot, 1999). SOE was an independent precursor force part of the Ministry of Economic Warfare that operated in the grey area between spies and Special Forces, as well as facilitated the reception of the latter with indigenous elements. In contrast, the SAS was an exclusively *military* force that conducted their tasks in uniform behind enemy lines and often

worked with resistance movements as one of their roles, once conventional forces were established in that operational environment such as in France in 1944 after the D-Day landings. The designation 'special', particularly in the case of Special Forces, was also used as a means of deception, against enemy intelligence, often to persuade the Germans they were facing much more substantial force than what actually existed. These two elements: difference and deception, continue to define and cloud a clear articulation of Special Forces in relation to the traditional combat arms of a nation.

The emergence of Special Forces in WWII was dependent on two key factors. First, a facilitating technological context that allowed them to develop and be a unit that could conduct sustained unorthodox activities within a theater of fighting and, second, a permissive social environment, characterized by desperation that created space within traditionally conservative military organizations to try something different. The maturation and combining of existing technologies to a specific point of progression permitted new possibilities in the prosecution of warfare. In this respect, the emergence of Special Forces mirrors previous technological leaps forward in making war: it is not the introductory point of a specific technology that changes its prosecution, but rather the mid/latter phases when technology has matured into a reliable state, and military thinking has caught up with its potential. In other words, the combination of technological maturity and innovative thinking broadens out the scope of the possible. The tank, or main battle tank in modern parlance, developed in World War I but devastating in World War II (especially in the early years), is a good example of this process. For Special Forces, key technological advances included: the development of stable/transportable modern explosives (plastic explosives and time

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(27) This was very much the case with the creation of the Special Air Service. Brigadier Dudley Clarke came up with their designation 'L' Detachment, Special Air Service Brigade to confuse the German Army in North Africa into thinking that the original 66 members of the SAS were actually a brigade-size formation. See Mortimer, Gavin. Stirling's Men: The Inside History of the SAS in World War II. London: Cassell, 2005, p. 13.
(29) M.R.D. Foot claims plastic explosive was 'developed in the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich just before the war' and its developers joined a technical section of SOE. See Foot, SOE, Kindle Edition. Other lightweight explosives included Nobel 808, gun cotton, thermite and ammonal to name some of the more prominent ones.
pencils/detonators\(^{30}\)); lightweight automatic weapons (the Thompson,\(^{31}\) Sten\(^{32}\) and M-3\(^{33}\) varieties); wireless communication devices (Morse sets\(^{34}\) and S-phones\(^{35}\)) and insertion/transport aid (jeeps and parachutes\(^{36}\)). Communications, firepower and transport (in combination) laid the technological foundation for their existence. In fusion, they facilitated military innovation/novel ways of conducting war and, importantly, the development of a new type of soldier that stood apart from traditional force structures, dominant military cultures and long-standing approaches to warfare with an ability to operate in historically restricted realms of the battlefield, broadly conceived. In sum, for the first time in military history, thanks to technology and new thinking, military forces could operate behind enemy lines with genuine effect and communicate (or be coordinated) in real time with their headquarters.

So what did this mean in operational terms? With imagination, determination and luck, critical parts of an enemy’s war fighting capacity could be targeted to generate effects that could be felt at the operational level. This level is located ideationally and physically in terms of command between strategy

\(^{30}\) ‘The time pencil looked a bit like a ‘biro’ pen. It was a glass tube with a spring-loaded striker held in place by a strip of copper wire. At the top was a glass phial containing acid which you squeezed gently to break. The acid would then eat through the wire and release the striker’. Cited in Mortimer, Gavin. The SAS in World War II. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2015, Kindle Edition.


\(^{32}\) The Sten gun was invented and mass-produced in the UK during WWII. It ended up as the eponymous weapon of resistance with over a million handed out to guerrillas around the world by SOE. It was cheap (£1.50 a copy), used the same type of 9mm bullets used by German machine guns (MP28 and MP40) with a reputation for being temperamental. When it worked, it fired 550 rounds a minute. See Foot, SOE, Kindle Edition.

\(^{33}\) The M-3 ‘Grease Gun’ was an American mass-produced submachine gun firing a .45 calibre bullet.

\(^{34}\) One of the earliest UK Special Forces units, the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) was using wireless sets at the start of WWII to send signals over distances of over 1,000 miles. See Thompson, Julian. The Imperial War Museum Book of War Behind Enemy Lines. London: Pan, 1999, p. 18. Wireless sets became smaller and more powerful as the war continued.

\(^{35}\) The S-phone was just 15lb in weight and allowed people on the ground to communicate directly with aircraft or ships trying to locate them. See Foot, SOE, Kindle Edition.

\(^{36}\) Willys Jeeps were popular with Special Forces and, fitted with heavy machine guns, offered a powerful punch to light forces. Parachutes enabled Special Forces and their vehicles to be dropped behind enemy lines depending on the range of the aircraft.
and tactics. It involves the higher management or orchestration of tactical engagements within a given theatre of operations. An operational level effect would be one that impacted on the tactical environment to an extent that higher-level conduct was affected in a significant way. Mission types included destroying vital military assets behind enemy lines that sustained the ability to wage war, such as transport and fighter aircraft on the ground, to the all-important fuel depots (so critical to machine-based warfare of the modern age), ammunition dumps and, with daring, targeting command and control assets in the form of senior military and political leaders. The nexus with technology remains one of the foundational principles on which the utility of Special Forces rests and provides the essential platform for them to conduct their activities. The natural operating environments of Special Forces as ‘non-contiguous’ units (Finlan, 2008, pp. 56-60) are historically: behind enemy lines; just in front of them in the space between armies popularly called ‘no-man’s-land’ in World War I; and, today, increasingly undercover in civil societies. This working environment and their predilection to operate in small numbers means that Special Forces need unorthodox leadership, processes and work climate to gain maximum effect within the battlespace. It requires an uncommon type of soldier who can exploit the possibilities of such a non-traditional/inverted military environment cut off from contiguous friendly forces with the enemy to the front, to the rear, and on the flanks. For conventional soldiers, such a state of affairs would be considered a catastrophic military position; however, for Special Forces, it is their natural operating habitat.

**Leadership**

A good starting point with regard to what sort of leadership is suitable for Special Forces is to consider the role model of one of the founders of the British Special Air Service, David Stirling, who led the unit to a brief golden age of employment in the North African theater of operations. To all appearances at the start of the war, David seemed far from promising material for military life with a penchant for partying, gambling (Cowles, 2008, pp. 56-60). Non-contiguity is a challenge in itself to the smooth functioning of military units behind enemy lines. It needs a certain type of personality type (comfortable fighting in small groups and in isolation) and a different type of discipline because usual mechanisms cannot work in Special Forces. This is a major difference with conventional forces.

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(38) This can include cross-border raids into the territory of other states, and Operation Neptune Spear in 2011, which resulted in the death of Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan, is a good example.
1958, p.15), laziness with a nickname ‘the giant sloth’ (Thompson, 1999, p.4), and a noted habit for falling asleep in military lectures. However, this was in many ways the innate paradox that often encapsulates many of those naturally suited to Special Operations. Prior to the war, this unusual young man was in training to be the first person to climb Mount Everest (Cowles, 1958, p.15) and his gambling habit symbolizes the essence of special operations as a more direct route to military victory. Gamblers, of course, do not want to live like the majority of people who work all their lives with usually modest but steady incomes, mortgages, and an accumulated pension to support them during retirement. Instead, they take chances with their current income or take loans to seek big wins. Put simply, they seek a shortcut to enjoying a better life now by daring to take big personal risks. It is interesting to note that the motto of the Special Air Service, even in modern times, is ‘Who Dares Wins’ (Mortimer, 2005, p.31), and it was coined by David Stirling. It was hardly surprising that Stirling’s approach to his personal life, seeking adventure in small parties of people engaged in mountaineering and taking risks with his safety (actual and financial), would translate perfectly into a vision of Special Operations. From a poor experience in the Commandos that is often overlooked as the unit that provided the clay from which the SAS was molded, Stirling realized that these elite troops, or what we would label Special Operations Forces today, were badly employed due to conceptual shortcomings. His critique and alternative approach is recorded by Virginia Cowles:

commando parties usually contained a minimum of 200 men because they were designed to approach their targets from the sea and at least a third of their force had to remain on the beach to keep the bridge-head secure. These numbers, he said, meant that the element of surprise often was lost soon after the landing began.

He felt that the conception was wrong. Surprise, he was certain, was the key to success. Much better to drop half a dozen men, use every one of them, and to retain surprise until the demolition fuses went off (Cowles, 1958, pp.18-19).

The North African theater of operations lent itself towards this type of operations because ‘the fighting... between the two armies was concentrated along the coast road’ (Cowles, 1958, p.19), and small parties of soldiers dropped behind enemy lines could wreak havoc by attacking valuable military assets such as aircraft arrayed on airfields.
The most important aspect of Stirling’s leadership that can be described as a form of employee driven/bottom-up innovation within a military organization was his genius for understanding the scope/possibilities of special operations. Nevertheless, like many described with genius-type attributes not all of his ideas worked (the very first mission of the SAS based on parachuting into the desert was a disaster), but it was the searing clarity of his analysis of the military situation and the role for these unorthodox forces that underpinned their subsequent successful utility. Britain’s conventional desert units did not have the capacity to destroy the German and Italian air forces in air-to-air combat, and this imbalance of military power had significant implications for the overall conduct of operations. By using Special Forces to destroy the enemy’s highly valuable military assets on the ground, small groups of determined soldiers could have an impact far out of proportion to their size and, most importantly, generate an operational level effect. It is this element of Stirling’s leadership of the SAS in the golden years of 1941-1943 that was at the heart of extraordinary success of British Special Forces in North Africa and the effectiveness of the SAS was directly correlated to a tight adherence to his concept of operations based on an extraordinarily accurate appreciation of the military situation. Of course, Stirling’s social connections, highlighted by some as the wellspring of his influence in the British military command (Newsinger, 1997, p.6), helped greatly in the early days of setting up the unit, and it stretched as far as to the top as Winston Churchill (Cowles, 1958, p.226), but his relationship with the top military commanders in the desert, Auchinleck and Montgomery, was based on something else: pure military effectiveness. The senior military leadership simply did not have the spare capacity or the inclination in the pressure cooker of the North African theater against highly dynamic opposing generals such as Rommel to chit-chat or socially interact greatly with junior officers. Their time was limited and access to them was rigorously controlled and based entirely on merit/necessity. Stirling’s direct access to the senior command was earned due to the extraordinary success of his unit. It is estimated they managed to destroy 350 aircraft on the ground in the desert campaign (Wynter, 2008, pp.302-303). To put that in a modern context, that figure is nearly eight times the number of total combat aircraft (note that no distinction is made here as to whether the aircraft are operational,

being repaired or out of service) in Denmark’s armed forces today (*The Military Balance*, 2016, p. 90) and almost one hundred aircraft more than the total of those available in Britain’s Royal Air Force (Ibid, p. 154). With the capture of Stirling in 1943, the SAS never really regained the operational level effect it had in North Africa in the remaining years of the war, despite expanding greatly. This paper suggests that effective leadership of Special Forces is not just about running a unit well but having a clear concept of utility within the scope of a theater that provokes operational level effects. Throughout the history of ‘Spec Ops’ to borrow a term from Admiral McRaven (McRaven, 1996), this has actually been quite rare. It perhaps explains to a degree why the effectiveness of Special Forces in campaigns from the Cold War to the present day has varied greatly. Two examples of best practice that stand out in the historically short annals of Special Forces are the desert war in North Africa in WWII and the emergence of the so-called Afghan Model in Afghanistan in 2001. The former was deliberately based on Stirling’s ideas, and the latter remains open to speculation as to whether it was a fortuitous set of circumstances or, perhaps as Colonel Pete Blaber of Delta Force suggests, ‘an operational sweet spot’ (Blaber, 2008, p.202) that manifested itself in the course of an initially uncertain campaign. Nevertheless, to replicate operational effects and gain the maximum benefit from Special Forces in future campaigns places a spotlight on a particular type of leadership that worked very effectively in the past, and David Stirling stands out as an exemplar to be emulated.

**Processes and Work Climate**

Processes within Special Forces and their overarching work climate are deeply connected, and a foundational factor to be taken into account with both dimensions is that the operating environment of Special Forces as non-contiguous elements working in small groups in isolation, often behind enemy lines or just in front of them, places different demands on the units and their personnel. First and foremost, it is a setting that simply does not appeal to the vast majority of the armed forces, who make up the conventional forces. Most soldiers prefer to fight in large formations such as battalions, brigades, and divisions in the safety of numbers/firepower and with the enemy ideally to the front of them. It takes an unusual kind of soldier who is comfortable surrounded by enemy units with little chance of rescue should the mission be compromised. This is captured well by the situation of the reconnaissance teams of the SAS and the Special Boat Squadron (SBS), who were flown on missions 150 miles from friendly forces based at sea (Finlan, 2008, p.40), across the freezing waters of the
South Atlantic Ocean during the Falklands Conflict, in which mechanical failure of the helicopter/ditching alone would have, in all likelihood, resulted in death. Not many would feel comfortable operating in such an environment, which was taken to a further extreme when another party was inserted on a one-way mission to Argentina (Finlan, 2008, p.41), approximately 400 miles from the British naval task force with no hope of rescue in an emergency. These examples highlight a number of salient points. First, operating in isolation from mainstream units necessitates not just an untypical personality type but also an unorthodox command structure and, not least, an unusual disciplinary process. In conventional armies, discipline is positively enforced through what is best described by sociologists as surveillance (Goffman, 1991, p.18), usually in the form of designated personnel rigorously enforcing rules and regulations through punitive measures. Such a system, common to all total institutions, from asylums to military organizations, needs numbers of people to be effective. This is simply not possible given the small set-up within Special Forces, but more importantly, it raises the practical question of how does one maintain control and, in the worst-case scenario, discipline someone deep behind enemy lines without risk of compromising the mission?

A key process within British Special Forces that emerged in the early years of their development in World War II was the recognition that traditional means of maintaining discipline were impractical, and therefore it required a greater focus on the individuals and their qualities to overcome the natural impediments of their operating environment to maximize effectiveness. It was the experience of commanding one of the earliest forms of these non-contiguous units in the desert war that persuaded David Stirling to assert that ‘a high standard of self-discipline in each soldier was the only effective foundation for the Regimental [SAS] discipline’ (Adams, 1989, p.18). Operating far from friendly units and support also demands soldiers who are self-reliant, innovative and capable of working with minimal supervision/oversight. These traits in themselves pose certain command challenges to leading independent, highly individualistic, and strong-willed individuals with enhanced close-combat skills. Traditional directive styles of command will struggle in such gatherings, and in view of the small size factor inevitably alternative processes have developed over time. In the UK, one manifestation of these processes in the SAS was the emergence of the so-called ‘Chinese Parliament’ (Jeapes, 2005, p.66). The ‘Chinese Parliament’ is essentially a mechanism that allows all members of a team to express their views about a mission. In view of the small size of teams, which can be as few as four
soldiers on some missions with an utter dependence on teamwork and cooperation to be successful, such mechanisms are vital for water-testing procedures, techniques, tactics, and approaches. It ensures that everyone has the opportunity to voice opinions and debate the tasking that should ensure errors, previous experiences, or better ideas are brought to the fore before the mission occurs.

In very small units, the strength of the whole is completely dependent on the coherence and resilience of all parts working effectively, and casualties at this micro-scale of military operations carry greater consequences than with larger units whose numerical superiority carries innate redundancy lacking in Special Forces. Such unorthodox decision-making processes would be perceived as extraordinary in conventional forces, especially in the U.S. and U.K., in which the boundaries and hierarchy between officers and soldiers are rigorously maintained, but in many ways, it fits with Stirling's radical vision of a classless meritocracy. Nevertheless, such processes while enlightened and decentralized do carry certain risks, and a good example would be the infamous Bravo Two Zero mission in the Gulf War of 1991. Despite being advised by his commanding officer and senior non-commissioned officer to take a vehicle on patrol, the team leader, known internationally by the pseudonym Andy McNab refused (Ratcliffe, 2001, pp. 269-71), and the decentralized processes that permitted a soldier to overrule such prescient advice proved catastrophic to the mission. While Special Forces require different command and control processes to conventional soldiers to operate effectively, such a working climate needs to be enlightened yet with clear limits. Without strict enforcement mechanisms, Special Forces have the potential to transgress boundaries due to their ability to conduct both black operations in conventional campaigns and undercover operations within civil society, both of which possess normative and ethical pitfalls with profound consequences for the units and the nations that employ them.

Conclusion
This paper has focused on what kind of leadership, processes and work climate best supports employee-driven innovation in SOF. Without question, research in this area has a new significance in light of both the rapidly changing military environment that the world faces in the twenty-first century and the noticeable trend that nation states have increasingly turned to their indigenous SOF commands as the ‘go bag’ option in an international crisis. From the Afghan Model in 2001 to the seizure of Crimea in 2014 and the contemporary operations to support the Assad regime in Syria, Special
Forces have offered their respective countries game-changing capabilities that has brought down despotic regimes, seized valuable strategic territory or supported beleaguered international allies. This research has specifically focused on one aspect of Special Operations Forces deliberately because it is too large a subject area to encompass in a paper this size. As such, it has a lens on British Special Forces and particularly the Special Air Service that possesses perhaps the largest concentration of literature devoted to it in the field of Special Operations. A good starting point for any research concerning Special Forces is to tackle the first order question of what are they and how are they distinct or not from mainstream types of soldiers throughout history as well as other SOF units. The argument here is that they are very different and challenge traditional approaches towards making war. From this intellectual anchor, the paper makes the case that unusual units require a particular type of leadership in order to generate operational effects and maximize the impact of these unusual soldiers. It focuses on the role of David Stirling’s in the Second World War and his extraordinary vision of special operations as a historical example of enlightened leadership that remains greatly relevant in the modern day. The unusual operational environment that non-contiguous forces are located, often behind enemy lines, clearly demands atypical personality types, unorthodox command structures and disciplinary procedures and the paper highlights the role of the so-called ‘Chinese Parliament’ as a mechanism for better mission effectiveness. It is also a vehicle to maximize the utility of small parties of soldiers conducting what are essentially micro-scale operations with less resilience for taking casualties than those conducted by larger conventional forces.

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References
Thinkers at the Cutting Edge: Innovation in the Danish Special Forces

Karina Mayland, Rikke Haugegaard, and Allan Shapiro

**Research question:** What kinds of leadership, processes, and work climate support employee-driven innovation in SOF?

**Argument:** In the Danish Special Forces, transparent leadership and experimental problem solving are vital components in the organization, securing space for employee-driven innovation through dialogue across ranks and disciplines. These distinctive features of the daily work environment enable innovations for better solutions in the battlefield.

**Conclusion:** There is a need for securing space for this type of innovation and the integration of this distinctive knowledge and experimental problem solving into the future development of the Danish SOCOM capacity.
Abstract
This article is a contribution to the discussions about the unique capacity of Special Operation Forces (SOF). Based on data from interviews and observation in a field study among the Danish Frogman Corps, the Royal Danish Navy Special Operations unit, and the Danish Jaeger Corps, the Danish Army Special Operations unit, the article investigates the work environment of the two Special Operations units supporting an innovative capacity. What kind of leadership, processes and work climate support employee-driven innovation in SOF?401

In the units, the initial research findings point to a dynamic environment characterized by transparent leadership and experimental problem solving. The daily interaction in both units center on the overall goal of optimizing operational effect, a seemingly free and open interaction of Special Operation Forces staff co-creating and testing new solutions to meet operational demands. In this article, we focus on analyzing ‘transparent leadership’ and ‘experimental problem solving’, which involves dialogue across disciplines and ranks and testing innovative possible solutions before implementation. We argue here that the ‘experimental problem solving’ is a unique feature of the Danish Special Operation Forces’ organization. We point to the need of securing space for this type of ‘innovation environment’, and integration of this unique knowledge in the future development of the Danish SOCOM capacity. In addition, more attention should be given to how work processes of Special Operations Forces can inspire innovation processes in other parts of the Danish Defense as well as partner nations.

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The establishment of the Danish Special Operations Command (SOCOM) in 2014 points to the increased need for different military solutions to current threats, solutions which are more innovative and agile. This study builds on the assumption that Special Operations Forces (SOF) should be a non-conventional military force qualitatively different from conventional military forces in order to do ‘the unexpected’, and hence both strategically and operationally strengthen the SOF capacity to prevent, contain, or defeat complex and dynamic threats (Ehrensvärd 2014; Finlan 2008). Strategic and deliberate development of the current SOF innovative competency seems crucial in order to meet the operational tasks regarding these ever-changing challenges. As a strategic capacity, the ability to innovate entails a well-known organizational infrastructure to ensure that ideas be appropriately ‘nurtured’ at all levels. In addition, supportive and courageous leadership and systematic innovative methods and tools are important (Bason, 2010; Tidd & Bessant, 2009). Furthermore, innovation is a necessary and decisive strategic capacity to master in order to deal with high complexity operational environments, due to cross-organizational dependencies (i.e., politics, cross-institutional cooperation, international partnerships, etc.). Innovation is also relevant as possible solutions to the specific complexity in military operational tasks and environments, as stated in the 2015 Danish SOCOM framework directive (Defence Command Denmark 2015). More knowledge about the practical processes of developing and processing ideas into innovations in SOF seems necessary. With this in mind, how can we best describe the work environment in the Danish SOF organization? This article investigates the specific work environment in the specific context of the two Danish Special Operations units supporting an innovative capacity. The research question is as follows:

What kind of leadership, processes, and work climate support employee-driven innovation in SOF?

The initial research findings point to a dynamic work environment characterized by what we conceptualize as transparent leadership and experimental problem solving. The daily interactions in the two corps center on the overall goal of optimizing operational effect, a seemingly free and open interaction of Special Operation Forces staff co-creating experimenting and testing new solutions to meet operational demands. In this article, we focus on analyzing ‘transparent leadership’ and ‘experimental problem solving’, which involves dialogue across disciplines and ranks and testing innovative possible solutions before implementation. We argue
here that the ‘experimental problem solving’ is a distinctive feature of the Danish Special Operation Forces’ organization. The findings in this study can support a crucial focus on strengthen the managerial ability to qualify the innovation processes and the actual innovations, and thereby support organizational effectiveness. In addition, this study aims to contribute to a broader knowledge base by exploring the innovation capacity in the Danish SOF.

This study on the innovation ability in Danish SOF is the first contribution to a more specific understanding of the underlying premises for innovation in the Danish SOF. Describing the premises for innovation seems necessary in order to avoid the risk of minimizing, or maybe even destroying, the ability to innovate in the effort to establish an effective command. In a bureaucratic structure, we often find barriers for experimentation and entrepreneurship because of the need for control, predictability, and accountability (Tidd & Bessant, 2009; Turnley, 2008). The risk of minimizing or even hampering the current innovative capacity in the establishment of a bureaucratic command – focusing on control, legitimacy, and bureaucratic procedures – seems to be a profound concern. The discussion on whether or not the public sector has an urgent need for (more) innovation and the need for strategic management of public sector innovation is not going to be dealt with in this paper. Keeping the discussion in mind, though, points to a general concern regarding the need for innovative solutions to meet the growing complexity facing the public sector (Bason, 2010). To claim that innovation and creativity is needed in SOF operations, and hence in the SOF community, is furthermore the explicit statement in the 2015 Danish SOCOM framework directive (SOCOM 2015). The aim is to build a flexible, effective, and entrepreneurial organization in order to meet the current tasks and challenges. This leads us to point to the distinct need for the SOF community to acknowledge the importance of balancing the two, often contradictory, requirements: control and legitimacy on one side, and innovation and experimentation on the other.

Knowledge about how innovation develops, the supporting conditions and specific barriers for innovation in the two corps, seems to be crucial knowledge seeking to support a strategic, deliberate innovation effort.

Innovation
Looking at innovation as processes framed by a specific context in a specific context the theoretical frame and literature has to support this perspective.
Much literature on military innovations focus on more or less top-down driven innovations initiated by political pressures to develop new capacities, influenced by resource scarcity, intraservice competition, a civil–military relation or by organizational culture (Grissom, 2006). The understanding of top-down innovation in the SOF environment is necessary in order to understand how political strategic contextual and operational factors influence, and even trigger, innovation and through this understanding facilitate, develop, and control innovation in a specific organization. Understanding military innovation as a bottom-up phenomenon seems necessary when the interest is to develop a more profound understanding of the local factors supporting or limiting innovation initiated, driven by or implemented by the local actors. Based on the understanding that the SOF mindset is both a creative and unconventional (Danielsen, 2015), and a different and independent way of thinking (Marquis, 1997), there seems to be a need for understanding how the contextual and interpersonal factors support or limit innovation as an organizational competency. In this paper the intention is to present a broader understanding of the elements constituting innovation and creativity as an organizational capacity also framed by local circumstances and not only framed by top-down initiatives or individual thinking style or mindset. The theoretical point of departure is that creativity and innovation can have organizational leadership and interpersonal barriers (Amabile, 1998, Darsø 2001). Even though recruiting and training for creativity and a special SOF mindset supports innovation on one hand these barriers can reduce the innovative potential in an organization. In order to study these elements of innovation in the SOF environment we have to look to theories focusing on innovation as an organizational competency and thereby factors built into relations and processes.

To work with innovation as an organizational competency, Darsø (2001) proposes a conceptualized framework for the innovation process in order to have a mental framework for understanding and eventually working systematically with innovation. Darsø defines innovation in the following manner:

“Innovation is to see future possibilities and to be capable to actualize them in a value creating manner” (Darsø 2011:13, own translation).

Darsø (2001) refers to a knowledge dimension and a communication dimension as framing factors of innovation. The knowledge dimension denotes the ability to challenge existing and esoteric knowledge in order to find small
cracks and openings for new knowledge. The knowledge dimension concerns the curiosity to investigate the unexplored and the unknown (Darsø, 2011). The knowledge dimension concerns the sharing of knowledge to build on a broad range of existing knowledge, but even more challenging it involves actually unfolding the unknowns and engaging in creative and experiential knowledge creation in teams in order to build on diversity, ignite creativity, and develop fundamental new solutions responding to the actual need/problem (Darsø, 2011).

The importance of this dimension is that it takes courage and persistence to place oneself and others in a mental room of insecurity, complexity, and openness. The knowledge dimension needs a safe mental space to exist (i.e., trusting in relations and concepts to navigate through this developing process; Darsø 2011).

The communication dimension calls for a certain culture, or leadership style, in order to provide trust and openness. In addition, this leadership style must acknowledge diversity and possess an awareness of allowing personnel to challenge each other's proposals in order to optimize solutions (Darsø 2011).

In the innovation literature, the concept of innovation has, over the past two or three decades, developed into a virtual imperative for managers and leaders in organizations. The literature on public sector innovation has grown heavily and focused on the need for reinventing “itself” by adapting to new challenges and opportunities (Bason 2010: 6). Innovation literature has developed from describing the ‘genius’ as the source of ideas and innovations (Tidd & Bessant 2009; Drucker 2007) to the study of the antecedents and outcomes (products, services, etc.) of innovation (Van de Ven et al. 2008) and the co-creation by several participants to find innovative solutions to profound new ‘not-known-before’ and complex challenges (Bason 2010, Tidd & Bessant 2009). Public sector innovation has become a growing concern due to changes in public sector complexity and the ever-increasing scarcity of resources and rise of wicked problems (Koch & Hauknes 2005, Bason 2010). The concepts of innovation and bureaucracy seem mutually exclusive, and the characteristics of bureaucracy seem to ‘kill creativity’ (cf. Amabile, 1998), thereby challenging public sector innovation in practice. The process of innovation – and the supporting and challenging factors from idea to implementation in the daily work environment – is in focus in this study.
The focus on innovations meeting the actual needs of everyday challenges, and the preconditions and barriers connected to this kind of innovation, provides important knowledge for the organization (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). In this study, we look at the potential for strengthening the innovative capacity of the SOF community leading to even more effective resource utilization and operative capacity.

The understanding of the innovation process as non-linear, emergent, and somehow unpredictable has challenged the classic understanding of innovation processes as linear, controllable, and well-known. In addition, linear innovation, or “planned innovation”, often takes place in Research & Development units and project teams in well-defined stage processes (Van de Ven et al. 2008). To unfold the perspective on emergent, incremental innovation in organization theories on knowledge creation, learning, and co-creation (Bason, 2009; Brown, 2009; Darsø, 2012; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Stacey, 2003) seem appropriate to follow in this study in order to understand the kind of innovation emerging in the SOF environment. Turning to theories of employee-driven innovation (Høyrup 2012; Darsø, 2011) the notion of embodied tacit knowledge (cf. Bourdieu, 1977) developed in very tight connection with actual problem solving becomes relevant in this study.

Employee-driven innovations often have a huge organizational potential because the innovations, and implicitly the changes followed by these innovations, are based on actual needs tied to the operational task and, thereby, also highly sustainable and valuable (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Høyrup, 2012). Employee-driven innovation emerges from the daily experiences, contextual understandings, and up-to-date information tied to the specific task and challenges at hand. “Employee-driven innovation is a form of direct participation in which the employee takes the initiative to develop, propose, and implement change” (Gyes et al. in Høyrup et. al 2012, p. 7). In this study, the focus on employee-driven innovation frames the empirical investigation. Furthermore, employee-driven innovation as high-involvement innovation can result in both incremental and radical innovations, having far-reaching impact for the organization, based on innovation drivers such as expertise, experience, ideas, creativity, and skills of the employees (Tidd & Bessant, 2009; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). This theoretical perspective eliminates the discussion on whether or not employees should be or are innovative because the actual needs in themselves emerging from everyday experiences and
practice are important sources of innovation – whether or not individual are perceived as creative or innovative (Duguid & Brown, 1991).

Creativity is widely used as a concept in the discussions about SOF. In this study, creativity refers to creative thinking skills, expertise, and motivation (Amabile, 1998). Creative thinking skills determine how flexibly and imaginatively people approach problems. Expertise is technical, procedural, and intellectual; and motivation is understood as a passion for solving the problem at hand with an intrinsic motivation (Amabile, 1998). These factors are very important feature in regard to innovation (Darsø, 2001; Høyrup, 2012; Amabile, 1998). Though, if not supported in an organizational frame of innovation creativity are not turned into organizational value.

Employee-driven innovation is to be understood as “bottom up-innovations” (Brown & Duguid, 1991, Høyrup, 2012) and as such it challenges the traditional understanding of leadership focusing on bureaucracy, command, control, and regulations – especially in the public sector.

The role of leadership is vital in order to stimulate support for employee-driven innovation – often aiming at solving needs and challenges in complex environments. This type of leadership (in support of innovation) is quite different from routine and supervisory leadership (Darsø, 2001, Snowden & Boone, 2007). The leadership role can even be to shield experimentation, leading to actual innovation from other parts of the organization in order to create time and space for innovations to unfold (Hartmann, 2014). These theoretical perspectives frame the study in order to explore the underlying premises of the innovation capacity in the Danish SOF.

We know relatively little about the generative processes by which innovations develop in the SOF community. This specific knowledge becomes a stepping-stone in order to think more strategically about the innovation effort in SOF. The focus in the interviews and the participant observation in training in the two corps have been: Where do new ideas emerge and develop? What factors support, qualify, or hamper the development of ideas?

Field Study Design
As the field study covers all organizational levels from operational teams to the top level of SOF, the 26 informants represent most organizational layers (i.e., operational team leaders, platoon commanders, subject matter experts, personnel from the training wing, a chief of staff, two unit commanders
The field study was carried out in the period between May and September 2016, and the study was a combination of interviews and observation during training and exercises.

All interviews were conducted in Danish, and for writing this article, the authors have translated all quotes.

Cultural and organizational differences between the Jaeger Corps and the Frogman Corps were identified, with corps identity seeming very strong. We have experienced some ‘friendly rivalry’ between the two corps. During interviews, informants refer to their respective Jaeger Corps or Frogman Corps as their main group identity. However, when studying the way employee-driven innovation develops in the two corps, the differences appear to be minor. We have observed differences in work processes and leadership roles, but it is not within the scope of this paper to conduct a comparative study of the two corps. In our field study, work processes and leadership roles seem, at a first glance, very much alike. For this reason, our data has been merged into a single pool, but when quoting our informants, we still indicate to which corps the informant belongs. This is a pilot study, and if we continue to study innovation in Danish SOF, the differences in the two corps and the way they conflict with and complement one another calls for further investigation.

Four of the informants did not have a SOF background. The responses and perceptions from these respondents did not differ from the rest of the respondents, which indicates a significant degree of shared organizational culture across the sub-groups. The same themes were explored in all interviews but in relation to the working area of the respondent. This has enabled a cross-organizational understanding.

The Significant Enablers of Employee-driven Innovation in the Danish SOF

The research question for our field study is: What kind of leadership, processes and work climate support employee-driven innovation in SOF? The findings from interviews and observation point to two overall themes, which are important factors for facilitation of employee-driven innovation in the Danish SOF: transparent leadership and experimental problem solving.

Theme A – Transparent leadership. A dominant factor is the understanding of leadership and collaboration practiced within the two corps. The way
leadership is understood and practiced enables the employees and leaders to engage and/or support the possibility of constructive innovation in order to constantly optimize, refine, and develop new solutions to operational demands.

**Theme B – Experimental problem solving.** The second theme is actually the most apparent in the interviews and observations. Transparent leadership enables the experimental attitude to problem solving in the two corps. Problem solving is about optimizing, qualifying, and understanding the task in order to deliver the optimal solution possible to a complex and risky problem – with many unknowns attached to it. In exercises and daily interaction, we found processes and interactions related to the constant development of ideas. No detail is too small to be reviewed, and this creates continued processes of experimentation and testing.

**Other relevant themes.** In this study, we found indications that a strong work ethic and a competitive spirit within and between units enable employee-driven innovation. The strong ethic is endurance, where the readiness to work hard at solving the task is embodied knowledge (cf. Bourdieu, 1977). Competition allows units and individuals to compete for the best solutions but also to aim for the solution that will work best in operations and ultimately defeat enemies. “They work so hard on developing new solutions, because they really want to win” (SOCOM officer, workshop, October 14, 2016). However, these enablers are not exclusive to the SOF community and can be found in other high-performance cultures (Tidd & Bessant, 2009:135), and therefore we have chosen not to discuss what we label as ‘work ethic’ and ‘competitive spirit’ in this paper. Another relevant theme is how the selection and initial training of personnel shapes the working style and ability to innovate. In this study, searching for what is distinct for the Danish SOF, our data have guided us to focus on transparent leadership (theme A) and experimental problem solving (theme B).

**Theme A – Transparent Leadership**
The empirical data illuminates a strong sense of a holistic understanding being heavily supported by a very strong sense of working together as a team or an interdependent unit. The holistic understanding embraces a duality. It resembles a strong understanding of your own level of command but also integrates the knowledge of strategic and operational goals and demands from other organizational levels and specialties. This underscores the interdependency across the chain of command that is necessary for
success and a strong, even though mostly tacit, understanding of the importance of balancing local needs and wishes towards an understanding of organizational and holistic goals. “Everything is a struggle for resources. Even though you are a nerd, you have to have a holistic point of view. You have to find a balance and a prioritization, which is almost equally important to being professionally very highly skilled” (interview Jaeger Corps, May 30, 2016). The notion of a holistic understanding is stressed by the constant reflections concerning why and how problems are solved and tasks are undertaken. “It is the free mindset we have. However, it is built upon an analytical process. We reflect upon what we do, why we do it, and what the motive is – and with a strong focus on operational security” (interview, Frogman Corps, August 1, 2016).

Transparent leadership is tied to the fact that the overall intent of the two corps is understood, known, and supported by everyone. From the interviews and observations, it seems evident that strategic considerations and reflections are presented to and discussed with the entire corps on a regular basis – both in weekly assemblies of the entire corps and on a more ad hoc basis. The organizational openness supports a sense making process in the two corps, establishing guidance for everybody in order to qualify decision-making, training, development, etc. This also has some challenges attached to it. The interviews and observations illustrate that this high amount of information and knowledge being transferred from commanders sometimes could lead to a blurred strategic direction. Noting this challenge, informants expressed that they would not operate without this knowledge, as it seems to enable a holistic mindset and a true understanding of a specific task, which then enables agility, creativity, and innovation. The ability to think at the cutting edge and foresee developments of new mission tasks and needs seems to be a feature of the SOF community.

“We get the information about current operations, and we have the fresh ideas, and sometimes we are stopped – otherwise it can get out of hand. But we are often way ahead in developing ideas in a certain direction” (Interview Frogman Corps, September 8, 2016).

“We are extremely sensitive and responsive to information, but we actually sometimes run too fast. We often outpace the decisions, and then we are in another direction – it has to be controlled” (interview Frogman Corps, September 8, 2016).
This way of “thinking in advance” enables sense making and being prepared for operations. Even small hints of possible future tasks and operations ignite creativity, entrepreneurship, and ideas leading to possible solutions in the framework created by the top leadership. The transparent leadership in both corps strengthens the facilitation of a constructive dialogue about future operations. But it also has to be controlled, discussed, and qualified in order to actually support the strategic goals. “When I arrive at a ship, I see that this and this is not possible. I have to improvise with what I have in order to make it ready for the others to be able to do their jobs” (interview Frogman Corps, September 8, 2016). The leaders and commanders in the corps are very aware of the role they have in relation to creating space for experimental training and facilitating innovation.

“I have to accept that people choose different solutions than I would have chosen. As a commander, I have to give people time to think! When I hear a problem statement, I’m already solving it….I have to leave some space and time for everybody else to think” (interview Jaeger Corps, June 23, 2016)

and

“You have to have confidence in people doing the right thing; otherwise we do not get anywhere. If you set up the overall limitations, then they are going to find the best way. You have to be confident that people are doing the right thing” (interview Jaeger Corps, June 23, 2016).

He continues:

[As a commander] “It is about facilitating the process, not influencing the result…. I am supposed to give the intent, the background, and the guidelines” (interview Jaeger Corps interview, June 23, 2016).

**Team Spirit and Constructive Dialogue**

The crucial dependency of team members in order to succeed is vital in the two corps. In a very practical manner, you obviously have to trust one another, possess intimate knowledge of what to anticipate from one another, and lean on everybody’s specific qualifications and contributions in order to succeed. The understanding of teamwork, and the embodied knowledge (cf. Bourdieu, 1977) that you cannot succeed alone, advances the notions of trust and mutual interdependence. Teams in the two corps focus on successful
completion of a task, leaving no room for selfishness. Responsibility has been delegated to team leaders through the chain of command. Leading officers at the top level have faith in their team leaders, and trust them to operate and find solutions together with their teams.

The focus on setting high goals and constantly raising the bar is immense. Personnel are pushing capacity forward; at the same time, ambitions are connected to the strategic goals and possibilities. All the informants in the study speak about how informal talks focus on the global political trends and the national governmental responses to these trends. Here, the personnel makes sense of the political trends in order to predict and anticipate the possible future scenarios.

Encouragement of dialogue and communication are profound in the two corps. Regardless of position, rank, or seniority, expressing your point of view on a specific matter is significant in the data from the field study. There seems to be no hesitation to speak up or introduce questions whenever you have something to point out or discuss. This relates to all organizational levels and positions. However, not all personnel agree that there is an open and constructive dialogue at all times:

“We have to be involved in the discussions in SOCOM. God damn it – we have to! We are not invited to all meetings, but we have now made a plan for who is going to be at the meetings every week. We have to be there, otherwise they are going to get the best of the decisions….in that way we will be a part of it” (interview Frogman Corps, July 1, 2016).

This quote points back to the strong understanding of joint responsibility in teamwork, and implicitly the crucial need for multiple perspectives, thoughts, and experiences in order to qualify every aspect of the operational practice. The strong need for the members of the two corps to influence future decisions seems crucial in qualifying the solutions.

The necessity of critique, dialogue, and communication in teamwork seems an obvious way of constantly improving the training, practice, and problem solving. Ultimately, the constant experimentation and daily dialogue are critical for delivering operational effect. No matter your rank, position, or seniority, you are expected to contribute. Likewise, all organizational levels are supposed to listen to the different operators, experts, subject-matter, ex-
erts, etc., because they are experts in the realities of the organization within their specific areas and have knowledge that is decisive for the final solutions.

“Whether it is that process (Military Decision Making Process, MDMP) or something else doesn’t really matter. It is the cooperation and the structure, the opening up and everybody getting an opportunity to offer a lot more. In the planning process (MDMP), as many as possible are involved. We do it together regardless of rank. Everybody is told the background and as much information as possible. Then everybody knows the background. The people get their assignments and we put it together afterwards. Then we combine our thoughts, inputs, and experiences. The result is that everybody is involved, and everybody has an understanding of the overall intent; and a much better understanding when they stand in front of a dilemma out there, and they keep the end state in mind when they make a decision out there” (interview Jaeger Corps, May 9, 2016).

Constructive dialogue and challenging the existing ways of doing things seems crucial to the two corps. The constant dialogue on how to do things, to adjust instantly, and make collaborative decisions is distinct. As mentioned before, every meeting, lunch break, or any kind of downtime is a chance to discuss the current task. The dialogue seems confrontational, to the point, and very straightforward. The discussions seem antagonistic, but the personnel are indeed listening to each other’s points of view. It is not a matter of winning the battle of discourse. It is really a matter of solving the task in the best way possible, challenging one another in order to push minds, thoughts, and solutions forward. Rank, positions, and seniority – it is not important in the end.

“We very much make use of one another. After introducing the MDMP-tool, everybody is involved in the planning process. That has helped us a lot; before just a few were involved. It creates a mutual understanding and an overall picture of the situations” (interview Jaeger Corps, May 9, 2016).

The ability to create space for innovation also relies on training time. In the training, ideas and methods are tested. Several operators report that limited training time, because of a high operational pace, hampers development, as the current amount of training only allows for bringing the teams up to
a satisfactory level on the basic skills. Development and innovation appear in the teams that master the basics to excellence.

In general, there is focus at all levels on debating leadership. A member of the Jaeger Corps explains: “They [SOCOM] want to micromanage it [a specific project] from the top. But our own commanders are trying to fight that” (interview Jaeger Corps, June 9, 2016).

The transparency in leadership and holistic understanding are nurtured by the ongoing discussions and talks across the two corps. Downtime and random meetings in coffee breaks are times for discussing, questioning, and debating work-related issues at all levels of the organization. If something seems unclear or impossible to accept, it is questioned regardless of rank or position.

“It happens on a regular basis that we challenge a task. If we get a half-finished task, we challenge it and send it back – that is just what we do. The feedback I ‘m giving is telling them what I think about the matter and how I understand the task. It is a loop – it is a dialogue. What I see between the lines is that I have to go both ways with that [vertical and horizontal]” (interview Jaeger Corps, June 9, 2016).

The strongly interconnected and interactive way of working both horizontally and vertically in the two corps induces a commitment to knowledge sharing. In addition, this open work environment speeds up the ability to innovate and develop co-created solutions. Furthermore, transparent leadership facilitates cross-organizational knowledge and co-creation in innovation.

**Theme B: Experimental Problem Solving**

Operational experimentation and trial-and-error seems to be a common way of working with innovation in practice. Ideas seem to emerge from different situations and have different origins. In the Danish SOF, international training exercises are important sources of ideas, knowledge, and experimentation. Often knowledge and know-how are brought back from SOF units in other countries, stressing the need for a strong international network as an inspiration for development of new ideas and subsequent innovation. The innovations are often incremental. Ideas are brought back to the two corps and modified to fit local circumstances and contexts, thereby creating innovations. In addition, ideas often crystallize in the context of deployment. Several stories of needs leading to ideas are
discovered when encountering new situations or operational demands. Often the development of new ideas happens in the intersection between new types of deployment and the current organizational capabilities. A new type of mission (e.g., a training mission in Afghanistan) leads personnel to think differently about their roles and how to create operational effect.

The operators and specialists innovate in order to optimize and enable new methods and tools. The focus is on improving methods, tools, and weapons in order to obtain better operational effect. If a need is recognized, it is immediately discussed and a potential solution is tested in practice. This process of constantly refining tools and methods is one of the foundations for innovation. It is the conscious articulation of knowledge and thoughts. This is knowledge sharing turning into knowledge co-creation (cf. Bason, 2010).

Experimentation is used both to qualify and to express the intuitive notions that all personnel develop in discussions, during training and reflection. The employee-driven innovation is developed through intrinsic motivation and a focus on solving actual operational needs. This kind of innovation is very important in operations and at the tactical level of the organization. There are several cases indicating that ideas and innovations developed at the tactical level – among operators and specialists – are becoming strategic innovations.

An example of an idea developed at the tactical level is the fighting/service dog project. For more than ten years, the idea that dogs could enhance the safety of the operators was dismissed at higher levels of command. Still the idea was raised occasionally, and now the concept is on the verge of being implemented. The notion that an idea has to meet the right circumstances in time and contextual settings is common. Ideas are not thrown away but remembered in the organization. Findings in this study indicate that ideas in bottom-up innovations can mature over time and, eventually, succeed when meeting the right circumstances and/or the right people to advocate for or implement them. An idea once rejected as a “bad idea” can turn into a good one and, eventually, innovation due to shifts in contextual, institutional, organizational, or task-oriented settings, or because of changes in perceptions of what is valuable or appropriate.

If still relevant, ideas are remembered, brought up, refined, and tested repeatedly.
Another example is the mobility concept (long-range vehicles), where allocated resources were pulled away from the project, just after the initial investment was made. This brought the development of the concept to a near halt. Still, training was done for years with the elements of the concept that had been delivered. This seems as accepting the setting for now, but negotiations with higher command was initiated to secure the release of the promised funds.

“It has to make sense – everything we do!” (Observation of combat training, Frogman Corps, August 15, 2016). At the same time, “meaning” seems difficult to define. Meaning relates to the operational task at hand – but the operational task is often blurred, complex, and ultimately unknown in advance.

In all the interviews and observations, sense making is connected to the operational task. In discussions on how to solve a given task, the final argument is tightly attached to the impact on operational capacity. The aim is to deliver operational effect, and there is a permanent preoccupation with pushing solutions toward optimizing and developing the operational capacity. The members of the two corps constantly refine their individual skills, equipment, and procedures. This permanent process of training to perfection leads us to name the Danish SOF a community of ‘combat nerds’.

Some respondents told about situations where arguments about a new idea arose because the idea was very challenging to the command structure. The solution is to try the idea out and experiment, to let the practice determine whether the new solution can create operational effect. This is an interesting example of trusting the power of experimentation and learning from tests. This approach is unique, being an approach which de facto challenges the chain of command. The approach illuminates the strong feeling of equality when qualifying operational effect – every voice is needed to qualify the problem solving and create the operational effect.

**Conclusion and Perspectives for Future Research**

In this article, we have investigated the work environment of the two Danish Special Operations units. The research question was: what kind of leadership, processes, and work climate support employee-driven innovation in SOF?

In daily practice in the units, we found a dynamic environment characterized by transparent leadership and experimental problem solving. The daily
interaction in both units center on the overall goal of optimizing operational effect, a seemingly free and open interaction of Special Operation Forces staff co-creating and testing new solutions to meet operational demands. From the interviews and observations, it seems evident that strategic considerations and reflections are presented to and discussed with the entire corps on a regular basis – both in weekly assemblies of the entire corps and on a more ad hoc basis. The organizational openness supports a sensemaking process in the two corps, establishing guidance for everybody in order to qualify decision-making, training and development.

The innovations are often incremental. Ideas are brought back to the two corps and modified to fit local circumstances and contexts, thereby creating innovations. In addition, ideas often crystallize in the context of deployment. Several stories of needs leading to ideas when encountering new situations or operational demands. Often the development of new ideas happens in the intersection between new types of deployment and the current organizational capabilities. A new type of mission deployment – e.g. a training mission in Afghanistan – lead personnel to think differently about their roles and how to create operational effect.

The operators and specialists innovate in order to optimize and enable new methods and tools. The focus is on improving methods, procedures, and weapons in order to obtain better operational effect. If a need is recognized, it is immediately discussed and a potential solution is tested in practice. This process of constantly refining tools and methods is one of the foundations for innovation. It is the conscious articulation of knowledge and thoughts.

Inspired by action research, we would like to continue this study with the two corps to strengthen the organizational explicit knowledge on experimental problem solving. Further, we wish to translate the tacit innovation knowledge into innovation, competencies and, in collaboration with Danish SOCOM, develop an explicit organizational innovation capacity.

Finally, we wish to explore the nexus between transparent leadership and space for innovation in order to maintain and nourish the unique tacit SOF understanding of the foundations for innovation. In SOF, the way employee-driven innovation is encouraged by commanders is an organizational strength, which is rather outstanding and should be investigated further. In this manner, the practice of innovation in Danish SOF can possibly inspire actors and organizations beyond the SOF community.
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Chapter 6

Identifying Special Operations as a Distinct Foreign Policy Instrument

Anton Asklund Johnsen

**Research Question:** Can the professional background identity and cognitive maps of SOF operators inform, challenge, and improve future special operations?

**Argument:** Civilian control and influence on foreign policy and national security policy are important premises to discuss as a framework for the research question given. How SOF themselves should leverage influence with their distinct capabilities depends much on which exact foreign policy instrument a Special Operation constitutes. Thus, a clarification of the strategic capabilities and limitations must be identified.

**Conclusion:** It is possible to locate distinct elements of a special operation, which can help clarify what SOF units should present and try to fulfil in a given foreign policy agenda in order to inform, challenge, and improve future special operations. In order to do so, concepts need to be operationalizable so they can be analysed and assessed in the context of the given foreign policy they are meant to support.
Abstract
This chapter briefly discusses political premises for the question asked and secondly provides a condensed research review that relate to the question. The author discusses questions on civilian control and the advancement of special operations and finds it specifically important for SOF to be able to clarify and explain what special operations strategic qualities exactly are. The author then elaborates on specific elements of special operations with a point of departure in the “cognitive maps of SOF” as formulated in the research question. The author recommends that in order to influence policy on special operations, it is essential to have insight into the instrument’s capabilities and limitations, as this provides the prerequisites for sound contextual strategic analysis.
With a critical perspective on the research question itself, this chapter asks questions on politicized research and civilian control in regard to foreign policy and special operations. The chapter then presents specific elements of special operations that relate to the posed question. The specific elements are discussed with a point of departure in an extensive study on special operations conducted in 2014-2016, where the main findings were published under the title “Clarifying the Anti-Systemic Elements of Special Operations: a Conceptual Inquiry” (Johnsen et al., 2016).

**Politicized research**
The research question itself does not imply that we need more special operations or further resources allocated to SOCOMs in the future, but taking the context into consideration one should be aware of pro-SOF agendas and (over-) politicized research when conducting independent research concerned with SOF policy. The context is that SOCOMs around the globe are on the rise partly because of their successful political maneuvering, as some would claim (De la Billiere, 1995; Pedazhur, 2016), and the question is also asked as part of a SOF conference that brings SOF shareholders and stakeholders together to share knowledge and ideas.

Therefore we must bear in mind that executing special operations is foreign policy (and to some extent domestic policy as well, i.e., anti-terror), where the purpose is to promote and protect the interests of a society. We do not need special operations for the sake of special operations, nor the SOCOMs, the SOF-patrons, or the operators. This of course seems an obvious statement, especially in the context of Scandinavian civil-military relations and these countries’ tradition of civilian control of military entities. Nevertheless, we need to explicitly remind ourselves of this when conducting reliable academic research on how to impact future special operations with help from stakeholders/shareholders, operators who are likely to have a main focus on keeping their jobs and not necessarily the much more abstract concern of serving the interests of a larger society.

In regard to the suspicion of a one-sided pro-SOF agenda – or at least a politicized context – an inquiry of civilian control needs to be raised as the premise for the main question.

**Civilian control and SOF**
Before asking whether SOF can, the question apparently should be asked whether or not they should at all, or at least to what degree SOF should
intervene in policy? How much and which type of influence should the operators have on future special operations? Should SOF only await orders and perform according to the expectations from the civilian leadership and the rest of society? And how should the balance of influence be divided between SOF themselves and the relevant civilian and military actors when it comes to who should inform, challenge, and improve the outline of future special operations?

These are far from descriptive questions, and they depend much on the values and norms of the society surrounding the given SOF unit. However, it still relates much to the question of SOF professionalism, as some of the core elements of a military profession depend on its relationship with civilian groups (Huntington, 1957). I will refrain from discussing the norms and values that dictate how much SOF in Scandinavian countries should inform, challenge, and improve future special operations, though this needs to be taken into consideration before trying to intervene in the policy behind future special operations.

With that notion of civilian control in mind, I will try to address the question more directly, though it will probably not be answered as expected.

It might be a valid hypothesis that SOF’s apparent abilities within military and political entrepreneurship and their adaptiveness to the environment around them (read ”Military Entrepreneurs and the Evolution of Special Operations Forces” by Ami Pedazhur for further insight into such a hypothesis; Pedazhur, 2016) can help inform, challenge, and improve SO. It might also be of interest to the SOF-community to receive academic suggestions on how specifically to influence policy.

However, I find it more appropriate to take my point of departure in an assumption that it is general dynamics, not SOF specific abilities, that need to be taken into account when trying to influence certain ways of conducting foreign policy, such as special operations.

This is based on an assumption that the dynamics of policymaking in general are independent from any specific professional skill set. This should not be mistaken with an assumption that policy on any given professional jurisdiction is not influenced by that given profession's expertise, responsibility, and corporate norms. Holsti’s theoretical model on the states relation to war(-like) matters support this assumption by addressing the
interconnectedness between the idea of the state (i.e., an implicit social contract), the physical basis of the state (i.e., international consensus on territorial limits and state legitimacy), and the institutional expression of the state (i.e., consensus on political "rules of the game"; Holsti, 1996).

Experts on how policy (concerned with violence) is, and ought to be, formed should give advice on which necessary formal and informal channels need to be utilized in foreign policy making. Special operation officers and SOF in general should focus on their field of expertise; that is, how to conduct special operations. The following discussion elaborates a bit on why SOF would benefit from a strengthened conceptual clarification, if they want to inform, challenge, and improve future SO, and thereafter gives suggestions as to how SOF could clarify some of the basic elements entailed in a special operation.

**Clarifying elements of special operations**

If SOF want to inform, challenge, and improve future SO, it seems only logical that they need to clarify to the decision makers what they are capable of: what specific strategically competence they can offer – which type of tool they are on the shelf of foreign policy instruments (Yarger, 2008, p. 71). And to some degree what they aim at being. This has nothing to do with their particular professional traits or their potentially particular collective cognitive aptitudes. It concerns communicative skills related to translating the shape and characteristics of their tool into the language of the decision makers – how to operate as a political creature. Being able to maneuver in a political setting is a desired ability by leadership within many, if not all, kinds of professions.

Internal improvement of future special operations also depends on a clarification of what the given SOF unit is, as such clarity then would provide better guidance on how to improve such specific skillsets. However, SOCOMs move on a double-edged blade as they, on the other hand, want to be flexible enough to change profiles according to the current foreign policy.

Furthermore, a clarification of the elements entailed in a special operation would not only help inform, challenge, and improve future special operations, it would open up possibilities for analysis by all kinds of stakeholders to make better judgments for the future use of special operations. Any clarifying theory on special operations should of course not be interpreted as dogmatic or fixed, but as sound arguments built on proper academic methods that
are open to debate. Though James Kiras raises a very relevant argument on why a theory on special operations can be dangerous (Kiras, 2015), a sound theory, not based on institutional interest, for instance, should offer grounds for nuanced debates on whether or not to use special operations and/or enhance the capacities. On the contrary, vague definitions that are not properly studied can be bent and used for institutional interest more easily than a well-defined and discussed concept.

The question addresses a certain type of professional character (“professional background identity”) and a certain SOF cognitive map, which are useful entries to discussing a potential clarification of SO elements.

The SOF cognitive map is not a term often used in literature on special operations and SOF; however, the ”SOF-mindset” is a term one often comes across when studying special operations. I assume the ”cognitive maps of SOF operators” is meant as more or less equivalent to the more described term ”SOF-mindset”. Maybe ”cognitive map” was coined in an effort to be more precise, as the ”SOF-mindset” often is rather amorphously described. However, a statement of certain cognitive maps requires extensive psychological studies of SOF, which to my knowledge have not been published yet. Therefore, the following is an attempt to give a more extensive description of the SOF-mindset as it is understood as equivalent to cognitive maps of SOF operators.

The “SOF-mindset” is used, both in literature and in everyday verbal communication as something that entails a special trait in the men (and women) enlisted as “badged SOF”41. Horn writes that “the heart of special forces pertains to their intellectual and philosophical capability, their distinct way of thinking: quite simply, a belief that no mission is too great, no task is too daunting, and failure is not an option” (2004, p. 10). This, Horn further argues, is what makes special operations succeed (2004, p. 10).

The SOF-mindset is also often associated with exceptional abilities that give an almost superhuman character to the badged SOF. Cohen addresses the political and symbolic effects and associations with a heroic special forces unit that entails exceptional abilities. He does this by highlighting a sarcastic

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(41) Badged SOF are those operators who have successfully completed the SOF recruitment programs.
quote from Halberstam who comments on the Kennedy administration's use of such heroic (para)-military forces in the 1960s. Halberstam writes,

They are all uncommon men, extraordinary physical specimens and intellectual PhDs swinging from trees, speaking Russian and Chinese, eating snake meat and other fauna at night, springing counter-ambushes on unwary Asian ambushers…. It was all going to be very exciting, and even better, great gains would be made at little cost (quoted in Cohen, 1978, p. 87).

Johnsen and Christensen rely on the term “unruly,” in combination with “initiative” and “creative,” as it gives a more precise and particular understanding of these “unconventional” dimensions (Johnsen et al., 2016). “Unruly,” should be understood as something difficult to control or manage as well as something that is actively, and in some cases automatically, opposed to standard procedures, which Tucker and Lamb, de la Billière and Cohen also highlight as significant traits of special operations (de la Billière, 1995; Cohen, 1978, pp. 53–81, Tucker et al., 2007, pp. 48-50).

Creativity in the context of the SOF-mindset encompasses the ability to both think and act in previously unseen or unthought-of ways in a given time and space, which adds an avant-garde sense to its operations (de la Billière, 1995; Cohen, 1978, pp. 53–81, Tucker et al., 2007, pp. 48-50).

The professional character of SOF and the SOF-mindset are inseparable, and both are apparently efforts in describing capabilities and limitations to a certain SOF-profession. A SOF-profession, distinct from other military professions, is like a potential distinct cognitive map, not evolved yet, but which could perhaps be useful in a clarification of what exact foreign policy instrument special operations are.

Claiming that SOF entails a distinct type of profession is like the concept of a “cognitive map”, something that is not often seen in literature on special operations or general military entities, for that matter. The professional traits of the soldier are the soldier’s professional relationship to violence (Janowitz, 1960; Huntington, 1957), and it is difficult to argue that SOF differ significantly on that core element, which in that perspective leaves them a part of the military profession. However, despite the fundamental common ground, on dealing professionally with violence, there are more differences between special operations and conventional operations than
just the SOF-mindset. Hence, as we get closer to a useful description of the elements entailed in a SOF profession by deciphering the meanings of the SOF-mindset, there are also other ways to find elements entailed in a special operation.

In Tugwell and Charters’ effort to define special operations, a central part of their framework is the para-political ability, which reflects “the intermediate objectives and the chosen instruments range from the political into military and paramilitary fields” (Barnett et al., 1984, p. 34). This shows an instrument that transcends the fixated division between civil and military institutions and becomes cross-institutional.

Philip Kapusta has coined the term “Gray Zones” (Kapusta, 2015, pp. 18-25), which at the moment is a concept warmly welcomed by SOCOMs around the world. In Kapusta’s elaboration of the Gray Zones, he emphasizes a wanted attribute about special operations that is comparable to the para-political ability that Tugwell and Charters find. It is the ability to function between, and within, a civilian and/or a military domain, when dealing with Gray Zone conflicts that are neither peace nor war (Kapusta, 2015, pp. 18-25).

Both Tugwell and Charters’ findings, along with Kapusta’s, give insight into the clarification of the cross-institutional component of special operations.

In a run-through of special operations taken from each decade, starting from the 1940s, it has been possible not only to confirm the components, creativity (avant-gardist), unruliness and cross-institutional attributes, but also to locate a significant fourth component of unexpectedness (Johnsen et al., 2016), which further helps clarify the concept of special operations.42

Unexpectedness refers both to internal and external unknowns. Internal unknowns involve going beyond, for instance, the military procedures that are acknowledged in a given context, whereas the external aspect exploits the adversary’s unknowns (Johnsen et al., 2016). Exploiting the adversary’s unknowns is similar to the element of surprise, which can be categorized as a component associated with conventional military activity. However, unexpectedness is categorized as a distinct special operation component because it differs from regular military surprise elements as it goes hand

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42 See Johnsen’s and Christensen’s article, “Clarifying the Anti-Systemic Elements of Special Operations: A Conceptual Inquiry” for further insight (Johnsen et al. 2106).
in hand with the aspect of going against one's own established procedures, which is not part of regular military operations (Johnsen et al., 2016).

The components unruliness, creativity (avant-garde), cross-institutional attributes, and unexpectedness are all qualitatively different from regular military components, but special operations also differ by being quantitatively (not qualitatively) different.

In 1993, William McRaven finished his thesis on special operations (McRaven, 1996), which provided a theoretical framework – based on quantitatively differences that help understand some of the basic elements in a special operation. McRaven’s framework has been successfully used for both analysis and subsequently for policy making (Ecklund, 2004; Lillbacka, 2014). This framework is based on certain military elements performed in a superior way that can be framed as tactical superiority (Johnsen et al., 2016). The tactical superiority consists of the components simplicity, purpose, speed, security, repetition, surprise, POS (political opportunity structure), intelligence, and resources (McRaven, 1996, pp; Driver et al., 2008).

**Closing Remarks**

A separate profession or not, it is possible to locate distinct elements of a special operation which can help clarify what SOF units should present and try to fit into a given foreign policy agenda in order to inform, challenge, and improve future special operations. These elements are categorized in a group that are qualitatively different from regular military elements, such as for instance unruliness and cross-institutional and a group that can be defined as quantitatively different, where elements such as speed and intelligence are significant attributes of a special operation.

With that, the question has perhaps not been answered as was hoped for, but instead relevant issues concerning the question have been elaborated upon. These issues are concerned with both politicized research on special operations as well as questions on the necessary civilian control in regard to the policy making of foreign policy concerned with special operations.

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(43) For further insight into these components, see McRaven’s "SPEC OPS; Case studies in special operations warfare: Theory and Practice" and Driver et al. "The theory of unconventional warfare: win loose and draw" (McRaven, 1996; Driver et al., 2008).
Further studies on the concepts concerning special operations are needed as well as in-depth inquiries into the utility and ramifications of this highly popular instrument. In order to do so, concepts need to present variables that are possible to operationalize so they can be analyzed and assessed in the context of the given foreign policy they are meant to support.
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Research question: What is Design and to what extent should it inform SOF education and training?

Argument: Design is “intentional change in an unpredictable world.” “Design assists humans in reshaping their world by creating new products, technologies, processes, services, organizations, and systems. Central to all design activity, regardless of the types of designs one creates, is the “ability to imagine that-which-does-not-yet exist, to make it appear in concrete form as a new, purposeful addition to the real world” (Nelson and Stolterman, 2012, p. 12). Thus, the designer, as change agent and innovator, creatively develops new designs to make or reshape the world into what she or he wants it to be. Design Thinking, a design process practiced at the Hasso Platner Institute of Design at Stanford University, has enabled NPS SOF teams to create new strategic designs for large-scale SOF systems. The paper briefly summarizes the three strategic design cases and their results.

Conclusion: Commands evaluating these NPS SOF strategic design projects have credited them with generating creative ideas and designs that typically do not surface when using standard approaches to problem-solving and planning. Thus, this paper recommends incorporating Design and Design Thinking into SOF education and training programs in order to enhance SOF’s creative and innovative problem-solving abilities, especially when confronting wicked problems at the strategic level.
Abstract
This paper briefly introduces the basic features of Design and Design Thinking – a creative approach to innovation and problem solving championed by the Hasso Platner Institute of Design at Stanford University. The paper then summarizes three SOF-led strategic design projects sponsored by the Department of Defense Analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in Monterey, CA. Based on the successful results of these strategic design projects, the paper recommends the inclusion of Design and Design Thinking in SOF education and training programs in order to better prepare SOF for the strategic and operational challenges they face.
Design is “intentional change in an unpredictable world.” As formulated by Harold Nelson and Eric Stolterman (2012) in The Design Way, design assists humans in reshaping their world by creating new products, technologies, processes, services, organizations, and systems. Central to all design activity, regardless of the types of designs one creates, is the “ability to imagine that—which-does-not yet exist, to make it appear in concrete form as a new, purposeful addition to the real world” (p. 12). Thus, the designer, as change agent and innovator, creatively develops new designs to make or reshape the real world into what she or he wants it to be.

The Design Way: Intentional Change in an Unpredictable World has a lofty purpose: to formulate a philosophy of design as intentional change; to elevate design as a third tradition of human inquiry and action that is on par with the traditions of science and art; and to promote a design culture—a nurturing environment in which design is protected and acknowledged as a legitimate form of inquiry. Science deals with what is, art expresses our personal images and sense of the world, and design invents a world that could be. Acknowledging that our current traditions of science and art have their limitations in dealing with what ought to be, the authors offer design as a better pathway to deal with the challenges of today and tomorrow. The Design Way is excellent in laying out the ontological and epistemological foundations of design, but it does not delve into specific techniques and tools practitioners find useful in actually engaging in design. To explore design praxis we turn to the design process known as Design Thinking.

Design Thinking
Design hubs focused on design praxis are springing up world-wide, such as Stanford University’s Hasso Plattner Institute of Design (D School) founded in 2005 by David Kelley, a Stanford Professor of Mechanical Engineering. The “D School” champions Design Thinking as a way to generate creative ideas and innovative solutions. As a center of innovation, it combines creative and analytical approaches to problem-solving, engages cross-disciplinary and collaborative teams, and employs integrative methods, tools, and insights that draw from the arts, the social sciences, and the business world. Other designers offer variants of the design process (Liedka & Ogilvie, 2011; Liedtka & Ogilvie, 2014) but for this brief overview, I focus
on the Stanford D School's Design Thinking approach (Stanford D School Website) which has informed my design work with SOF.\textsuperscript{44}

While design processes vary, Design Thinking typically begins with a design challenge usually in the form of a problem, issue, or question facing a company or an organization. Recent examples of design challenges in the U.S. public sector include:

- How to redesign education (IDEO website)
- How to redesign users’ online Social Security experience (Hall, 2011)
- How to design real-time energy use and monitoring in the General Services Administration (Hall 2011)

International examples of public sector Design Thinking include:

- How to redesign public services in the United Kingdom in health care and public services (Bason, 2013)
- How to redesign Peruvian education (Brown & Martin, 2015)
- How to redesign the work visa process in Singapore (Bason, 2013)
- How to redesign waste management in Copenhagen and how to redesign services for mentally disabled adults in Odense (Bason, 2013)

Stanford’s five-phase model in Figure 1 describes the basic building blocks of Design Thinking: Discovery, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test (Stanford D School Website). A sponsor’s design challenge, such as those listed above, initiates the Discovery phase. A design team begins Discovery by observing, listening, and learning (with empathy) from the people who live with the challenge. Data gathering includes a range of methods—searching archival records, making onsite observations, conducting face-to-face discussions and interviews—all to gain a deep appreciation of people, their needs, and their context.

\textsuperscript{44} I have no formal affiliation with Stanford's Hasso Platner Design Institute. I have attended multiple Stanford-sponsored Design Thinking workshops, used their materials in my SOF and NPS design courses, and had Stanford designers present to my courses and workshops.
Figure 1. Stanford Design School’s Design Thinking Model

The Problem Definition phase reframes the design challenge. Often design challenges are broad, not well articulated, and represent only the presenting problem and not necessarily the underlying problem or issue. So after gathering data during Discovery, design teams may need to reformulate the design challenge and fashion it into a more specific problem statement. Design teams also use this phase to specify any additional design constraints and criteria (e.g., the sponsor’s left and right limits) to further bound the problem space.

The Ideation phase generates creative ideas to address the reframed problem. Designers begin with “how might we” (HMW) questions (Parnes, 1967), such as “How might we restructure SOCPAC’s organizational relationships in the Pacific AOR? The design team then launches brainstorming sessions to harness diverse viewpoints and encourage “wild” ideas in order to move people beyond their preconceived notions and standard solutions. The brainstorming norms—defer judgment, one person speaks at a time, headline ideas, etc. (Stanford D School Website)—keep the brainstorming process focused and designers engaged. Depending on time and resources, designers may generate multiple ideas for prototyping.

Prototyping transforms ideas into physical representations. Prototypes come in many tangible forms: sketches, models or physical objects, even role-plays, skits, and videos. The goal of prototyping is to start with a rough representation of an idea (e.g., napkin drawing) to prompt design team conversations. Rough representations or low-resolution prototypes are preferred since they constitute small investments in time and resources. Designers then move to higher and higher resolution prototypes upon discovering what aspect of their prototypes is viable, learning from their mistakes as they work. “Fail early to succeed sooner” is the designer’s motto (Kelley, 2001, p. 232).
Testing is an iterative conversation between designers and those for whom they are designing. The goal is to solicit feedback on the prototype as early as possible in the design process. Testing may result in different outcomes: go forward with the prototype and continue making higher-resolution prototypes; go forward but with minor modifications; go back to the drawing board and select other ideas to prototype; or possibly, return to the problem, reframe it, and repeat the design thinking process. Ideally, through this iterative process, a creative and tailored-made solution emerges in response to the sponsor’s design challenge.

Unique Features of Design Thinking
While the five phases of Design Thinking may look similar to other processes of planning, decision making, they are indeed unique (Cross, 2011; Kelly and Kelley, 2013). First and foremost, Design Thinking is human-centered design. It begins by identifying people’s problems, experiences and needs. As Tim Brown in Change by Design describes it, the “real goal is … helping people to articulate the latent needs they may not even know they have” (Brown, 2009, p. 40). Great care is taken to surface latent needs using techniques such as Empathy Maps and Point of View statements. At the same time, even though human-centered design leads the Discovery effort, technological feasibility and economic viability must be factored into designs. Ultimately, the designer seeks tailor-made ideas and solutions that are the sweet spot among people’s needs and what is technologically and economically feasible (Brown, 2009, pp. 18-19).

Design Thinking calls for radical collaboration. It brings together people from different backgrounds and specializations to work in teams. “Since all of us are smarter than any of us,” “building on the ideas of others” is required to harness the team’s collective talent and increase their potential to generate new ideas and solutions. Radical collaboration even has potential to launch transformational change (Brown, 2009, p. 26). Although team members usually make unique contributions to the team and build on one another’s talents, they have no predetermined roles such as team leader (see Cross, 2011, ch. 6 and 7). Instead, design teams often rely on facilitators to guide the team’s work through the phases of the design process, and

most importantly, renegotiate the five phases when it becomes necessary to reframe problems, conduct additional discovery, and make changes in the prototypes when the feedback warrants it. Facilitators also help teams deal with conflicts that may arise, keep them focused on the schedule, and work within the sponsor’s left and rights limits (e.g., staying within budget and the project’s scope).

**Visualization** is central to Design Thinking. Visualization is the representation of ideas into a visual format that helps designers explore complex concepts, identify their points of difference and similarity, and build connections among them. All activities and steps in design work are visually displayed to assist the team in thinking and learning together and to chart its progress over time. (See Liedtka and Ogilvie, 2011, Section II). Prototyping, often referred to as “embodied thinking” or “thinking with one’s hands,” is one example of this visualization. Prototyping is the visual manifestation of a concept (See Liedtka and Ogilvie, 2011, ch. 10; Brown, 2009, chapter 4). It can begin as a low-fidelity sketch, mock-up, conceptual diagram, role play, model, even a story board.

Design Thinking has a *bias toward action*. The design process is iterative rather than linear. Rather than spending the bulk of allotted time focused on analysis and abstract discussions, the design team moves quickly into prototyping (sketches, concepts, etc.) to anchor the team’s deliberations on concrete and tangible ideas. The building starts with low-resolution prototypes. It continues with testing and moves toward higher and higher resolution prototypes when feedback is positive (Brown, 2009, pp. 80-86). Alternatively, the team may return to problem framing or idea generation when prototypes fail. Thus, there can be a great deal of movement back and forth among the design phases.

Design Thinking calls for *open spaces for design work*. Movable furniture and equipment are preferred so the space can be configured to accommodate different types of design activities. The space also should have plenty of whiteboards to display post-it notes and other visuals to support the team’s creative process. Walls typically are covered with user statements, pictures, and brainstorming sessions and maps, etc. that help the team keep track of its progress over time (Doorley & Witthoft, 2012).

Design Thinking requires *engagement and feedback from the sponsor and subject-matter experts at every phase of the design process*. The sponsor,
with the assistance of the design team, articulates the design challenge and specifies the terms under which the team will operate. During Discovery, the sponsor, subject-matter experts, and stakeholders provide background information and their perspectives on the design challenge. The sponsor and subject-matter experts also provide early, detailed feedback on the problem definition, the new ideas, and the low-resolution prototypes. Early and sustained feedback helps the design team amend or weed out prototypes early in the design process, thus saving both time and resources on flawed designs.

To bring Design and Design Thinking to life, we now turn to three examples of strategic design projects launched by SOF officers at the Naval Postgraduate School: Civil Affairs 2025; NORSOF 2025 and SOCPAC 2030. After a brief overview of each project, I highlight the challenges that designers will likely encounter when using Design Thinking to design and redesign large-scale SOF systems such as these.

**SOF Strategic Design Projects**

The application of Design and Design Thinking to product, process and service designs has been the starting point of most design challenges in business and the public sector. The military also has been engaged in Design and Design Thinking. For example, the U.S. submarine community engaged IDEO, an international design company, to help it redesign information processing on submarines. Military planners are exploring the application of design principles to planning campaign and operational designs (Elkus & Burke, 2010; Zweibelson, 2011; Graves & Stanley, 2013; Army Techniques Publication, 2015) and the U.S. services are setting up innovation cells. While the application of Design Thinking to the strategic design/redesign of large complex organizations and systems has been picking up momentum in business (Martin, 2009; Brown & Martin, 2015) and the public sector (Bevan et al., 2007; Brown & Martin, 2015), but it is rare among military organizations. To my knowledge, at this writing, the three cases introduced

(46) I should note that the Design approach and the Design Thinking process I outline herein are very different from the U.S. Army’s design methodology (ADM) that is being introduced at the staff colleges and the Joint Special Operations University. ADM uses concepts such as “design” and “design thinking”, but its intent is very different — to make the top-down, rational-analytic planning process more flexible and open to input from lower levels in the hierarchy. In contrast, Design and Design Thinking are creative processes that seek to invent the future in whatever form it might take — new products, processes, systems, organizations, or even strategic designs.
below are first efforts to use Design Thinking in strategic design – the design/redesign large-scale military organizations and systems. Fortunately my work at the Naval Postgraduate School in the Defense Analysis Department provided an opportunity to launch three strategic design projects for SOF: Civil Affairs 2025 (Hays and Nguyen, 2015), NORSOF 2025 (Berg-Knutsen & Roberts, 2015), and SOCPAC 2030 (Bourgeois, et. al., 2016).

Civil Affairs 2025 (Hays & Nguyen, 2015) was a sixteen-month, student-initiated design project led by two Majors from the Civil Affairs community in partial requirement for their MS degree in Defense Analysis. Their goal was the strategic redesign of the U.S. Army Civil Affairs (CA) Regiment in support of the Army 2025 strategic vision. They drew on The Design Way to imagine the future of Civil Affairs and employed the five-phase Design Thinking process to craft the strategic design. Their project had several unique features. The two students used their coursework over three quarters to gather data for Discovery. For example, course assignments in social network analysis and geospatial analysis enabled them to chart the history of Civil Affairs’ deployments and relationships. In addition, they invited eighteen Civil Affairs personnel to a four-day workshop, not only to review the Discovery data they collected but also to add additional data. This twenty-person design team then worked through the remaining design phases: Problem Framing, Ideation, Prototyping, and Testing. The results of this collaborative and multidisciplinary design effort yielded innovative prototypes on Civil Affairs identity, strategic messaging, branding, human resource management (e.g., recruitment, selection, training, and professionalization) and force structure. To date, two of these prototypes (identity and strategic messaging) are in the initial stages of implementation within the CA Regiment while the others await higher resolution prototype development.

NORSOF 2025 (Berg-Knutsen & Roberts, 2015). From September of 2014 through June of 2015, a group of ten Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) Officer students from Canada, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the U.S.A. set out to envision the future of Norwegian Special Operations Forces (NORSOF). The team began with Discovery, which included environmental analysis and in-depth discussions with more than 25 international subject-matter experts, and iteratively worked through Problem Framing, Ideation, and Prototyping. The team presented its prototypes in May 2015 to its sponsor, the Norwegian Special Operations Command (NORSOFCOM). The prototypes envisioned a reconfigured NORSOFCOM.
as a flexible, adaptable, highly maneuverable, well-connected network with a flat organization structure; a re-organized NOFSOFCOM to support inter-service, interdepartmental and international cooperation; a redesigned NORSOFCOM to integrate R&D and organizational innovation; a reoriented NORSOFCOM to emphasize Military Assistance and Unconventional Warfare; and a renewed NORSOFCOM where HRM would take a life-long perspective on career development with multiple career tracks activated to recruit, select, train, educate and retain the right personnel. The NORSOF Commander, pleased with the prototypes and recommendations that would inform his future development plans, congratulated the team on doing what he hoped it would do—generate very new and creative ideas that typically do not surface during traditional strategic planning processes. NORSOF also conducted an exploratory field study to compare the results of their two sponsored projects: the NORSOF 2025 project at the Naval Postgraduate School and the Strategic Planning project conducted at the same time by an independent Norwegian organization. Military officers who reviewed both project reports rated the NORSOF 2025 project higher on all indicators and highest on those pertaining to innovation.\textsuperscript{47}

**SOCPAC 2030** (Bourgeois et. al. 2016). In June of 2015, the commander of SOCPAC (Special Operations Command, Pacific) sponsored the design challenge: How can SOCPAC improve its ability to employ special operations in the Pacific Command's Area of Responsibility? A design team of five SOF officers took up the challenge and launched the design project using the Design Thinking process. During the Discovery phase the team collected archival data, conducted participant observations, and held stakeholder discussions in Hawaii. The team distilled the data into themes and then identified certain problem areas on which to focus their attention. The ideation phase followed where the team generated creative ideas to address the specific problem areas—issues of SOF identity, SOF training, and SOF organization structure in the Pacific AOR. Selecting ideas that they believed had the most merit, the team then went through multiple rounds of prototyping and then conducted testing on site in Hawaii and telephonically in Monterey. Ultimately, the team developed an organizational identity statement for SOCPAC (Prototype 1A) with a visual format that offers a range of options SOF could provide to stakeholders in the Pacific (Prototype 1B). Prototype 2 simulated and illustrated how a member of SOCPAC could use Prototype 1A and 1B to have a richer conversation about the application of

\textsuperscript{47} Espen Berg-Knutsen, Personal communication. September 2015.
SOF in a specific country. Prototype 3 proposed a shift in how SOCPAC interacts and coordinates with its stakeholders in the Asia-Pacific. To build out this third prototype, the team explored the network literature, zeroing in on the concept of network design and the variations among networks in terms of their communication, coordination, structure, and governance. Prototype 3 then proposed a smaller, more adaptable network design that the team believed would enable SOCPAC to transition from a collection of independent, loosely affiliated organizations to a highly functioning network organization in the Asia-Pacific. SOCPAC is currently implementing Prototypes 1a and 1b while reviewing Prototypes 2 and 3. SOCPAC also agreed to establish a cross-functional team representative of SOCPAC’s major staff sections to form a “community of interest.” Led primarily by the SOJ5, this community of interest has assumed responsibility for implementation of all of SOCPAC’s prototypes.

**Challenges of SOF Strategic Design Projects**

There are many challenges in strategically designing/redesigning large organizations and systems. I highlight nine that I have encountered in the strategic design of SOF organizations. No doubt there are more, but these are the ones that have surfaced in all three cases in which I have been involved.

**High-level sponsorship.** Launching a strategic design is possible without a sponsor but not advisable. All design projects can be interesting explorations of “what could be,” but they are unlikely to have much organizational impact without someone at the strategic apex serving as the design sponsor. In NORSOF 2025, for example, the head of the Norwegian Special Operations Command sponsored the design challenge, worked with the team to flesh out the design constraints, and reviewed the prototypes the team created for his development plan. The other two cases initially lacked this level of sponsorship, making generating support and funding for the design projects an issue. Eventually the teams secured higher-level visibility and support thanks to the community building exercises created during prototyping and testing for both the CA 2025 and the SOCPAC 2030 projects. But gaining high-level (rather than mid-level and lower-level) legitimacy to kick off a design challenge is preferable in order to focus the design work and make it less susceptible to competing organizational preferences and loyalties that can derail any design project. Authority does make a difference in providing “top cover” for the redesign of military commands.
Time and resources. There is never enough time and resources for design projects, especially those engaged in strategic design. These types of projects require understanding of a complex system and how it functions in addition to developing empathy for the people working in the system and stakeholders who identify with it. The team has to collect and absorb an “overwhelming amount of insufficient information within restricted limits of resources and time” (Nelson & Stolterman, 2012, p. 5). According to Nelson and Stolterman these demands cannot be met within the traditions of science and art. Instead, designers have to understand that what is called for is “imagination” and “good judgments,” “compelling compositions and effective creations (Nelson & Stolterman, 2012, p. 5).

The reality of the design experience. We never know the long-term efforts of design; many can have unintended consequences, as is true of all human endeavors. Indeed, wicked problems are often the result of interventions that previously failed (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Roberts, 2001: Roberts, forthcoming). So some degree of courage is required to recommend designs, the consequences of which are difficult to anticipate, including those that may incur the displeasure of one’s commanding officer. Time is also a factor. Even though the three design projects extended over time periods from nine to sixteen months, the design teams wanted more time in each phase of the design process. Designers have to fight the tendency to develop “perfect” solutions before handing them off to sponsors. One advantage for conducting design work at universities is that students graduate and are forced by their supervising faculty to complete projects within a limited period of time.

Design teams. Designers work in collaborative teams, but the question arises—who and how many people should be on the design team? I have experimented with numerous configurations based on project needs and students interest. The SOCPAC 2030 team included three Army and two Navy SOF. The NORSOF 2025 project had nine international and one U.S. SOF officers. The Civil Affairs 2025 project began with a two-member Civil Affairs design team for the Discovery Phase. It then expanded to a 20-person design team that included reservists and active duty military

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(48) Rittel and Webber (1973) first introduced the term “wicked problems” to describe general dilemmas in planning. Wicked problems have many characteristics, but the core issue is the inability of problem solvers to agree on what the problem is or what its solutions are.
members from the Civil Affairs Regiment to finalize Discovery and work through the remaining design phases. My preference is to work with 5-7 people on a design team. If a team grows any larger, I need additional facilitator support for major design sessions, as I did with the CA 2025 project. Even in advanced design teams, a facilitator is important in sustaining the team's positive and creative frame of mind, reminding the team of Design Thinking’s brainstorming rules of engagement, and keep the team moving together throughout all five design phases.

**Problem finding.** Problems are not handed to designers; designers have to find them, especially in large-scale organizations and systems. Sponsor-led design challengers tend to be general and vague since sponsors often do not know what “the problem” is—that is why they have asked for designers’ assistance in the first place. So in addition to helping designers make sense of the system, the purpose of Discovery is to find a problem that can launch Ideation and Prototyping. But here is where problem finding gets even more complicated. Problems often are nested within problems that are nested within problems. Bounding the problem space is difficult when everything seems to be connected to everything else. Which problem does the designer tackle first? Moreover, interventions to address the initial problem have the potential to breed downstream problems. According to Brown and Martin (2015), the more complex and less tangible the design product or “artifact” being introduced, the more the designer needs to anticipate and work with “ripple effects” that are the consequence of the design intervention itself. IDEO, for example, developed new services for MassMutual which required not only a new brand and digital tools, but a completely new business model and a new way of working that prompted a redesign of every aspect of the company (Brown & Martin, 2015). What began as an intervention to design a tangible product ended up being a design intervention for the entire system to manage the intangible challenges inherent in getting people to engage and adopt the new product.

**Mind mapping the whole system.** Designers of large-scale organizations and systems can be overwhelmed with data, differing perspectives and points of view, and an unending stream of variables that need to be taken into account to make sense of the system and how it functions. Complexity grows exponentially under these conditions. I use several techniques to manage the complexity. Mind Mapping exercises (Liedtka & Ogilvie, 2011, pp. 81-91) proved valuable in all three projects.
In CA 2025, I asked all workshop participants to individually identify the major themes that surfaced during the Discovery Phase. I then asked them as a group to reorganize the themes into major categories and then sequence the categories in whatever order they thought appropriate. It was through these exercises that Civil Affairs’ identity surfaced as a primary problem. The team reasoned that if Civil Affairs was not clear as to what or who it was, what it did, and why it did it, no amount of organizational and subsystem improvements (e.g., Human Resource Management [HRM]) would likely be successful. Moreover, changes in HRM designs would likely fail if the rest of the system was left untouched. So the team agreed that problem framing began with the acknowledgment that the CA community lacked identity. Their first prototyping exercise was to create an identity for CA 2025.

Another mind-mapping technique to help designers launch a strategic design is the Roberts Organizational Systems Framework (OSF) as illustrated in Figure 2. Team members are asked to organize information they collect during the Discovery Phase into the following categories: Environment; Key Success Factors; Direction; Design Factors; Culture; and Results (Roberts, 2016). I used this framework in all three strategic design projects, which enabled the teams to organize and interpret the flood of information in the Discovery Phase. More importantly, as a systems model it provided the teams with insights into which aspects of the model they should focus on first. All three design teams decided to focus on system direction first, specifically on command identity, to anchor the redesign process.

Figure 2: Roberts Organizational systems Framework
Prototype Development and Integration. In large-scale system redesigns, multiple prototypes are likely to surface. Rather than treat them as stand-alone exercises, the prototypes need to be integrated into an overall design intervention. In all three design projects, CA 2025, NORSOF 2025, and SOCPAC 2030, the whole design team would reconvene periodically to update all members on sub-group activities and prototypes. They understood that generating innovative ideas and building prototypes was the first step in their design work. They also knew their ideas and their prototypes had to complement one another to ensure a fully integrated strategic design.

For example, prototypes of the NORSOF’s structure were deemed too hierarchical and a “misfit” with some of the new ideas and prototypes that were emerging from the other design sub groups. Additional prototyping led to a network-like structure that was deemed to be more compatible with the network-based prototypes other groups were developing. Thus, the Organizational Systems Framework not only guided the idea generation and prototyping, it helped designers find a configurational “fit” among the ideas and their prototypes.

Prototype Implementation. Design Thinking creates an innovative prototype and tests it among stakeholders. But testing is only the first step in introducing the prototype into a very large, complex ecosystem. Ideally, members of the design team agree to be champions of the design prototypes and work with others in their system to fully implement them. But as prototypes become more complex and require changes in other sub-systems to be fully operational, more care and attention needs to be given to the implementation process. As Brown and Martin (2015) caution, new large-scale designs “are intimidating.” It is not surprising that “many genuinely innovative strategies and systems end up on a shelf somewhere—never acted on in any way. However, if you approach a large-scale change as two simultaneous and parallel challenges—the design of the artifact in question and the design of the intervention that brings it to life—you can increase the chances that it will take hold” (Brown & Martin, p. 4).

The design teams for CA 2025, NORSOF 2025 and SOCPAC 2030 were successful in designing and testing the prototypes (artifacts). With an eye toward implementation, all three projects carefully constructed handoffs to organizational members. Individuals on the design team agreed to carry forward prototypes in the CA 2025 project. The follow-on sessions they led to introduce the prototypes to the CA Command gained high-level support.
and led to immediate implementation of two prototypes and a commitment to continue working on the others.

For the NORSOF 2025 project, we had the good fortune to have a Visiting Research Scientist from the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), Mr. Espen Berg-Knutsen, as co-leader of the project. He worked with the head of NORSOF COM, the sponsor, on four different occasions: first, to establish the design challenge, the guidelines and the design constraints; second, to update the Commander on the team’s progress through the Discovery and Problem Definition phases; third, to brief him on the status the emerging prototypes; and finally to set up an international seminar at NPS. The seminar was part of the testing phase to receive feedback not only from the sponsor’s team but also from other senior NATO SOF representatives.

For the SOCPAC 2030 design project, SOCPAC agreed to establish a cross-functional “community of interest” led by the SOJ5 who assumed responsibility for implementation of SOCPAC’s prototypes. In all three projects, the design teams worked diligently to facilitate prototype handoffs to the sponsoring commands. However, control of the second parallel change process, the “design of the intervention” as Brown and Martin (2015) describe it, was beyond the limits of the teams’ time and portfolios. They did not have the change agent’s charge to actually oversee the organizational intervention that introduced the new prototypes to the organizations and realigned the larger system with the prototypes. The transition from design to implementation is a critical juncture in the innovation process. To the extent there is a smooth connection between the two phases, the greater the probability that an innovative design will be accepted into practice.

**Design Evaluations.** Aware of the importance of evaluation, design projects build in sponsor and stakeholder feedback in all phases of the design process described as *formative evaluation* in the literature (Spaulding, 2008). In addition, NORSOF sponsored a *summative evaluation—a goal-based assessment* (Spaulding, 2008) to ascertain whether the NORSOF 2025 project achieved its intended goals—the generation and design of creative ideas. The summative evaluation also included a study comparing the results of the Design Approach to the results of a Traditional Strategic Planning Approach that was run independently and concurrently in Norway. The Norwegian sponsor and stakeholders who assessed both projects scored the Design Approach higher than the Traditional Approach on all indicators and rated its results “more innovative than the Traditional Approach.”
results of this exploratory field study led evaluators to observe that “Design Thinking appears to encourage creativity and innovation more than the Traditional Planning approach does.” These results lend support to Tim Brown’s claims (2009, pp. 66-67) that “convergent thinking is a practical way of deciding among existing alternatives. What convergent thinking is not so good at, however, is probing the future and creating new possibilities.”

Conclusion
The three strategic design projects summarized in this paper have been important opportunities to learn about Design and Design Thinking as they apply to SOF, but they offer much more. Ever since my involvement in the United Nations project for the Reconstruction of Afghanistan in the late ‘90s (Roberts, 2001), I have been searching for a “way in” to wicked problem territory that offers more than a one-off attempt to tame wicked problems by reducing them to simplified and manageable problem statements. I believe the strategic design approach summarized herein has the potential to help SOF navigate through wicked-problem terrain, but it is only the beginning of a much-needed transformation in how SOF organizations “find” their problems and generate their solutions.

To launch this transformation, the spotlight needs to shine on our SOF educational and training programs that, from my perspective, currently do not provide graduates with the Design knowledge, skills, and competencies that will enable them to address design challenges such as those described in this paper. As our world is being reshaped by dynamic technological, political, economic, and social forces, the strategic design/redesign of SOF organizations and systems becomes even more imperative. But SOF design expertise is limited at the strategic level. The challenge for SOF is to build a design culture beginning with its educational and training institutions that invite design praxis and also welcome and support the strategic adaptation and redesign of SOF in an ever-changing world.

Having developed design space, created design courses and helped build a design culture at the Naval Postgraduate School over the past ten years, I know full well how difficult this transformational path can be. Even in applied programs like those at the Naval Postgraduate School, a culture of “scientific research” still dominates university life. Universities build their identities, attract their funding, and maintain their legitimacy based on

(49) Espen Berg-Knutsen, Personal communication. September 2015.
“scientific research”, even when the “research” dollars they attract often support non-research activities such as teaching, program and course development. Research routines continue to dominate the student experience (e.g., research questions, research design; research methods; and thesis research) while faculty are promoted largely on the basis of their “scientific research.” Design is not viewed as central to the university’s mission. If it is introduced, design is often treated as tangential to the university’s primary mission—scientific research.

Design is an honored tradition of human inquiry and action. It stands on its own ontological and epistemological foundations on par with but separate from the traditions of science and art (Nelson and Stolterman, 2012). It can and should be judged on its own terms and merits. Attempting to defend or justify its existence based on the tools drawn from science, art, or engineering mistakes methods for purpose. I believe Design needs to be a central part of SOF’s educational and training experiences and a legitimate pathway for learning and problem-solving. SOF confront a very complex and uncertain world and need to improve their creative problem-solving mind sets and skill sets to deal with the challenges they face. I offer Design and Design Thinking as important vehicles to enhance their creative problem-solving abilities. My experiences with the SOF strategic design projects have taught me that most officers can and do emerge from design experiences thinking and acting differently. They are more adept in viewing wicked problems in systems terms, participating effectively on problem-solving teams, and generating creative and innovative solutions to deal with the challenges they confront. The command evaluations of the three SOF strategic design projects and my own experiences as the designer and facilitator of the design projects give me confidence in recommending Design and Design Thinking to SOF organizations, especially those devoted to the important mission of educating and training SOF.
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Topic:

Political and popular perceptions of SOF

"Risky Business": A conceptual inquiry of special operations and risk
- What explains the paradox between "risk societies" and their continuous use of the risky means of special operations?

Dr. James D. Kiras

'Scalpel' or 'Easy Button'? Neither - and some further considerations
- What are the political risk implications of special operations forces?

Dr. Anna Simons

Danish politicians’ views on Special Operations: Acceptable and unacceptable uses
- What will Danish politicians accept about the use of Special Operations, and what will they not accept? Which tasks do they prioritize? Do they prefer preventive actions or reactive actions?

Major Lars H. Ehrensvård Jensen
Chapter 8

“Risky Business”: A conceptual inquiry of special operations and risk

Dr. James D. Kiras

**Research question:** What explains the increased use of special operations, which are often characterized as highly risky endeavors, given the apparent risk aversion of political decision makers?

**Argument:** Risk is not problematic per se, given its subjective and temporal nature. How risk is communicated and understood, especially in more continuous uses of special operations over time, however, has potential implications for policy, strategy, and civil-military relations.

**Conclusion:** The logic behind decisions to the use special operations forces, as well as discussions and calculations of risk surrounding them, is anything but clear. Specific explanations, such as rational choice, risk aversion, and the contemporary context of decision-making as risk management, are insufficient to reveal this logic, particularly as it relates to continuous decisions to employ special operations. As this chapter suggests, risk considerations are shaped by unique factors at each of the four levels in the framework, or hierarchy of risk identified: physical or tactical; operational or campaign; strategic; and political.
Abstract
Risk is appealing as an explanation for the contemporary Western restraint in the use of force. Diffuse threats are to be managed instead of decisively defeated. While the relationship between special operations and risk is understood intuitively, the concept of risk as it applies to special operations has only rarely been explored analytically. This chapter has two objectives: exploring rigorously and systematically risk and special operations at various levels of analysis; and, in doing so, to explain the paradox mentioned above. A systematic evaluation of risk and special operations begins first with an explanation to reveal that different types of risk are often confused or conflated with one another. Next, the chapter identifies and discusses different levels and types of risk related to special operations. The discussion suggests risk for special operations has both vertical dimensions as well as horizontal ones. Finally, the chapter concludes with an exploration of the longer-term implications of the various dimensions of risk on decision-making on the sustained use of special operations over time.
Western decision makers are faced with diffuse, evolving, and ever-changing threats. The nature of threats is changing and, empowered by information and access, gives sub-state actors reach and influence that was previously the purview of sovereign states. Put simply, modern Western societies and the leaders who represent them are hesitant to jeopardize the benefits they receive from globalization through drastic policy action. Diffuse threats are seemingly managed from event to event, or crisis to crisis, as opposed to being decisively defeated through the application of power including military force.

The watchword for Western intervention has been “limited” and this trend has become even more apparent over the past decade. Such interventions use limited forces exposed to limited risks to inflict limited damage to achieve limited aims. Western nations no longer unleash the dogs of war, but rather seek to muzzle and self-limit their own exposure to and conduct within them. As a result, Western leaders rarely consider employing large numbers of ground forces in response to crisis, for fear of casualties or escalating and extended over-engagement. Western nations intervene primarily through a combination of air and naval power, precision strike, and special operations often in conjunction with local proxy forces.

The current reliance of Western leaders on special operations as a form of preferred response, however, seems somewhat contradictory given their general risk aversion. What special operations lack in scale, they often make up for in degree of risk. The risk inherent in most special operations can be offset by three factors: extensive training and pre-mission rehearsal; unorthodox problem solving to mitigate the effects of friction; and, the potential strategic payoff of such actions. Yet these reasons are insufficient, individually or in combination, to explain the contradiction between risk adverse decision-making and their continuous use of the risky means of special operations.

While the relationship between special operations and risk is understood intuitively for the reasons mentioned above, the concept of risk as it applies

(50) Special operations are defined here as: Unconventional actions against enemy vulnerabilities in a sustained campaign, undertaken by specially designated, selected, trained, equipped, and supported units [special forces], often in conjunction with other actions, to resolve economically politico-military problems at the operational or strategic level that are difficult or impossible to accomplish with more conventional approaches and actions alone.
to special operations only rarely has been explored analytically. This chapter has two objectives: exploring rigorously and systematically risk and special operations at various levels of analysis; and, in doing so, to explore the contradiction mentioned above. A systematic evaluation of risk and special operations begins first with an explanation to reveal different types of risk are often confused or conflated with one another. Next the chapter identifies and discusses different levels and types of risk related to special operations. The discussion suggests risk for special operations has both vertical dimensions as well as horizontal ones. Finally, the chapter concludes with an examination of the longer-term implications of the various dimensions of risk on decision-making on the sustained use of special operations over time. Risk is not problematic per se, given its subjective and temporal nature. How risk is communicated and understood, especially in more continuous uses of special operations over time, however, has implications for policy, strategy, and civil-military relations.

Risk Associated with Special Operations

Special operations are defined according to several qualifiers including risk. These qualifiers often include the visibility of the missions (covert, clandestine, or overt), the use of specialized tactics or equipment, the operating environment or actors within it, as well as other attributes. One attribute frequently associated with special operations is risk. American doctrine suggests risk within special operations is relative. In this case, the risk inherent in special operations is higher relative to comparable conventional military options. Such risk occurs in three categories: physical, strategic, and political/diplomatic (JP 3-05, 2014, p. I-1).

Physical risk within special operations is the easiest to comprehend and illustrate. Charters and Tugwell define special operations according to high levels of risk associated with the activities themselves (1984, p. 35). Hostage rescue missions have high levels of inherent risk and their outcomes are anything but assured. Recent examples include the successful rescue of Captain Richard Phillips from a lifeboat of the Maersk Alabama at sea as well as Jessica Buchanan and Poul Hagen Thisted, who were held captive in Somalia. Unsuccessful attempts include Linda Norgrove, who died during the clearing actions to rescue her from a hillside compound in Afghanistan (Naylor, 2015, pp. 371-3; 403-7; 425-7). Others connect risk in special operations to the forces that conduct them. In particular, some emphasize the drastic outcomes for those conducting special operations should the
mission fail (Gray, 1996, p. 146-7). Such risks are well understood and accepted by the operators conducting the missions (Votel, 2014, p. 38).

Strategic risks associated with special operations are connected to the expected outcome. Most frequently, the outcome is justified in terms of a highly disproportionate result relative to the investment made in forces. Rouleau and a number of his fellow contributors characterize outcomes as a function of special operations comprising an “economy of force” option for decision makers (Spencer, 2011). Gray acknowledges such an economy, which is one of his master claims for the strategic utility of special operations, but he goes one step further. He writes, “in conflict with a competent foe the achievement of great strategic returns will require the expenditure of great effort. Special operations represent an attempt to circumvent this principle” (1996, p. 147). The high risks of special operations, in other words, are appealing because of their potential for high strategic payoff. The weighing of costs versus benefits serves as the theoretical departure point for Malvesti’s explorations of risk and special operations in countering terrorism. From a theoretical starting point in rational choice, she uses prospect theory as the basis for her framework to assess risk calculations in decision-making in three cases of American special operations and covert action in the 1980s. Malvesti concludes decision makers will authorize special operations when operating from a position of losses, particularly internationally, as opposed to gains (2002, pp. 269-70).

The realm of political risks is the most elusive of the three categories related to special operations. Physical risk is intuitively relatable to personal danger, and the missions themselves are well understood as unorthodox and inherently risky ventures. Strategic risk is translatable into the rational weighing of costs versus benefits, an action most conduct on a daily basis. Political risk, however, is more problematic for a number of reasons. First, political risk can be conflated with strategic risk. Second, political risk associated with national security decisions can be confused for politics, which can have a highly negative connotation for military action. Americans in particular, but Westerners in general, view politics as unnecessary and informed meddling with military courses of action to secure domestic politic advantage (Huntington, 1959). Such popular perceptions are often reinforced in the memoirs of senior special operators (Boykin, 2008; Waltz, 2014). The assumption behind such perceptions is that political leaders are uninformed at best, or ignorant and dismissive of military advice at worst. A causal logic chain connecting this assumption to the politics of decision-
making and different types of risks associated with special operations is best illustrated in the following quote:

“Politicians will thus have a tendency to discount the risks inherent in special operations in hopes of achieving their policy objectives on the political cheap.... The ‘cheapness’ of SOF appears to lower the political risk of using them. Yet, an inability to understand the operational risks involved in their use leads politicians to underestimate the chance of operational failure and hence to underestimate the political risk they run by using special forces. In other words, when civilians direct the use of SOF, civilian preferences and prejudices paradoxically may create precisely the political risks that politicians think they are avoiding” (Tucker and Lamb, 2007, p. 230).

If Tucker and Lamb’s assertion holds true, one would expect misunderstanding of risk as well as high profile failure given the almost continuous use of special operations over the past decade. In addition, the unintended and paradoxical creation of political risk should threaten the sustained use of special operations. Yet there is little evidence of the fallout of such political risk when special operations fail. To search for possible answers for why this is not the case, this chapter explores characterizations of risk beyond the realm of special operations.

**Risk in a Broader Context**

The challenges associated with deciphering different types of risk stem from the central concept itself. Risk is frequently confused with the related concepts of danger and uncertainty. In its most common definition, risk is best understood as an understanding or judgment of the likely outcome of a series of events, after weighing probabilities, of means and the environment, of desired outcomes (Vertzberger, 1998, p. 19). Risk assessment, however, is more just than a best guess. Within a number of different fields, including life insurance and finance, understanding of levels and degrees of risk result from a careful weighing of all available information and probabilities within a closed system. For example, in actuarial calculations, the risk of paying out a life insurance is balanced against a number of demographic factors including life style, life expectancy, family health history, and geographic location, among others. In this case, the level of risk is offset by the premium charged to the policyholder: the greater the risk, the higher the premium.
Clarifying risk is further complicated when assigning probabilities to outcomes in an open system such as foreign policy or national security decision-making. Problems in this realm are dynamic and more complex, the result of a range of factors. Such factors include inadequate and incomplete information, the impact of human and organizational preferences, and behavior within the decision-making process, as well as actions against a thinking, active, and willful opponent seeking to deny or thwart your goals (Clausewitz, 1976, pp. 90-121). According to Vertzberger, different types of risk inherent in national security decisions must be parsed out and understood individually. He identifies three types of risk in the national security decision-making process: real, perceived, and acceptable (Vertzberger, 1998, pp. 18-19). Perceptions of risk is “a scientific question … affected by non-scientific considerations (e.g., cognitive biases)” whereas acceptability of risk “is a political question that is affected by non-political considerations (e.g., the nature of risk)” (Vertzberger, 1998, p. 25). To evaluate the range of factors associated with risk in decision-making related specifically to interventions, Vertzberger develops a complex socio-cognitive approach that includes contextual factors, problem framing, social and group impacts on decision-making, as well as organizational factors and their impact on risk assessment and risk acceptability preferences (Vertzberger, 1998, p. 110).

Complex models of risk in decision-making such as Vertzberger’s provide detail at the expense of simplicity and clarity. Critics of this approach counter the key insight of such models, why a risky decision was made, is better understood through the lens of rational choice (McDermott and Crowden, 1999, p. 125). Rational choice examinations of decision-making privilege the decision of the ultimate arbiter, the executive, at the expense of the rich detail inherent in debates advisors have about risk. To put this point in a special operations perspective, the alleged divergent opinions represented by Vice President Joseph Biden on one hand, and Secretaries Robert Gates and Hillary Clinton on the other, are largely irrelevant to President Barack Obama’s approval for the special operation against Osama bin Laden in 2011 (Schmidle, 2011; Sanger, 2012, pp. 77-80; 85-100). Prospect theory, employed by McDermott, Malvesti, and others, offers “a theory of decision-making under risk that permits a systematic explanation and prediction of risk propensity” based on expected gains or losses (Malvesti, 2002, p. 47).

Simple and complex models that explore risk in decision-making mistake the symptom for the cause according to other scholars. In their estimation, risk is not simply a consideration or part of a process. Instead, risk is the
context shaping all decision-making. Scholarship espousing this view of risk has sociologist Ulrich Beck’s “risk society” as its conceptual starting point. Beck, originally writing in 1986, suggests “the social production of wealth is systematically accompanied by the social production of risks” (Beck, 1992, p. 3). The nature of modern economies and technologies, or globalization, leads to an awareness that it creates its own problems, or risks, that can and should be mitigated. Beck labels this awareness “reflexive modernity.” Put simply the solution for wealth generation in modern societies creates its own problems, and an awareness of them, that must be addressed through self-limiting behavior to sustain progress. The net effect is that “politics must catch up with the self-limitation that has been carried out historically” (Beck, 1992, p. 233). Politics will inevitably give way to sub-politics—a new openness—as groups within societies are increasingly aware and empowered. Writing in advance of the widespread adoption of the Internet, Beck’s theory appeared to many scholars to be highly prophetic and his ideas applicable to a range of social issues, including genetics and cybernetics, among others (Adam, Beck, and Van Loon, 2000).

Other social scientists, including those in political science and international relations, have embraced the “risk society” as an explanation for conduct in modern war. War between states has lost its former utility and appeal. The interconnectedness of states also means they have more to lose by going to war than they have to gain. Stability, in other words, has trumped conquest. Technology and interconnectedness that provides benefits also breeds its own challenges or risks. Such risks include refugee migration, pandemics, and violent extremism, among others. In other words, risks come from non-state groups at the level of sub-politics, which draws upon anxiety and individual security over collective fear. Traditional military force has limited utility against such a diffuse and kaleidoscopic variety of risks. In consequence, the risks created by the environment must be managed instead. As Coker suggests, the very concept of war is changing from threats to risks and from war as defense against threats to war as security against risks (Coker, 2009, p. 63). War is not an exercise in decisively changing outcomes so much as it is limiting the costs of responses while managing risks. The analogy to describe contemporary risk management is policing, Heng argues, where areas are surveilled, monitored, and patrolled with only intermittent and hopefully preventative or preemptive intervention (2006; Janowitz, 1960).

The “risk society” does more than provide a macro-level explanation of the security environment and the utility. One scholar has connected the “risk
society” directly to special operations. Rasmussen begins his analysis from a similar set of assumptions and conditions as Coker and Heng outlined above. He departs in his analysis, however, by looking at war through conceptual, as opposed to contextual or case study lenses. The three lenses Rasmussen chooses are technology, doctrine, and agents that comprise the realm of strategy (2006, p. 6). While the first two lenses are self-explanatory, the third is not. Agents, in this case, refer to the UN and violent extremism. The former has bureaucratized and constrained state-based aggression and war to the point of disutility. Violent extremism, embodied by al-Qaeda, is the sub-state reaction to contemporary technology, society, and culture (i.e., the risk to be managed).

Special operations, and more specifically special forces,51 are an integral part of Rasmussen’s risk management approach. Special forces represent an empowered, sub-political response to the non-state threat posed by al-Qaeda and, more recently, Daesh. Rasmussen argues that special forces are not part of the traditional bureaucratic hierarchy of the military and therefore not beholden to its ways of thinking or its rule sets. The political and systemic risk of non-state threats is offset by the personal risk special operators are willing to assume for a greater purpose. Rasmussen’s characterization of the motivation of other sub-political response to non-state threats, members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), could equally apply to special operators: “They felt that they could influence world events and do the right thing, and only the risks that they took proved worthwhile” (2006, p. 180). He deduces that special forces and NGOs increasingly will work together to manage the risks posed by non-state actors based on a shared understanding of personal risk as well as their ability to perform “edgework,” the “skilled performance of the dangerous activity, involving the ability to maintain control over a situation that verges on complete chaos that requires, above all, ‘mental toughness,’ the ability not to give in to fear” (Lupton, quoted in Rasmussen, 2006, p. 179). Calls within the Department of Defense to shift away from traditional combat operations, to so-called “Phase 0” or “shaping” operations, with special forces providing monitoring, early warning, and preemption through a Global Special Operations Forces Network, suggest

51 The common American usage is “special operations forces,” as “Special Forces” refers to a specific unit and group within the U.S. Army. Western Europeans and the British use the term “special forces” as a general term for those units organized, trained, equipped, and designated to conduct special operations.
Rasmussen’s theoretical strategy of risk management may become a reality (Petit, 2013; Szayna and Welser, 2013; Brailey, 2009, p. 89).

At first glance both the concepts of the “risk society” and risk management either completely or tenuously explicate the political risk associated with the contemporary use of special operations. Both concepts suggest political risk is the product of the current global security environment. As is the case with strategic culture, context is an explanation for behavior and outcome but cannot be the only explanation (Gray, 1999). Other explanations likewise fall short. Prospect theory abstracts away too many variables within the risk assessment and decision-making process and is best suited for discrete, episodic events in response to crises and not the sustained use of special operations that have become the norm. While prospect theory may be too abstract, the socio-cognitive approach demands a high fidelity of information relative to the power of its explanatory return. Obtaining sufficient information to achieve the fidelity needed to satisfy this approach is unlikely for reasons well known to researchers of special operations, given their sensitive nature (Finlan, 2008). To connect physical, strategic, and political/diplomatic risk a different approach is needed.

A Framework for Understanding Risk for Special Operations

There are almost as many frameworks for assessing risk, with an eye towards managing it, as there are definitions. Such frameworks reflect different national or institutional calculations of risk. This section explores a framework for understanding risk with detail drawn specifically primarily from the American context as illustrations. The American context serves as an initial test case of the framework. Future research will explore the extent to which risk calculations between Danish, Canadian, and the special operators of other nationalities differ from those of policymakers. Such explorations, however, are outside of this initial scope of this enquiry. According to risk management training for its personnel, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) considers any possible contingency, from a flat tire to a lack of supplies, as a risk to the mission no matter how trivial or banal. At the programmatic level, however, the DoD perspective on risk shifts away from the local and environmental, or daily hazards and events, to broader concerns. Such concerns include the ability of the Department as a whole to prepare and maintain its readiness to address military contingencies through to its ability to acquire and maintain sufficient resources in the future. Risk perceptions are driven by different considerations of what is
crucial at different levels. In other words, no one set of risk variables is sufficient for risk in special operations from the tactical to the political.

A framework for examining risk for special operations need not be created out of whole cloth. Scholarship on and official documents for special operations contain useful insights. As mentioned above, joint doctrine offers three broad categories of risk: physical, strategic, and political/diplomatic. These categories can roughly be equated to an existing hierarchical framework, the levels of military activity or war. It is therefore possible to equate physical risk to the tactical level, or special operations at the point of execution. The leap from physical to strategic risk, however, is too large of a one. Doctrine identifies actors and command levels, and specifies command relationships, between the tactical and strategic but does not specify risk considerations. For the contemporary norm of sustained use of special operations, the intervening level, the operational or campaign level, should have its own risk considerations. The next hierarchical level is that of strategic risk. Risk at this level can shutter the “guiding light” that ensures adequate means are used to generate the strategic effect to achieve policy goals (Gray, 2010, p. 124). The last level in the hierarchy of risks for special operations is the political/diplomatic. For reasons explained below, as the risks at each level are discussed in detail, diplomatic risks are incorporated in this framework into the political.

**Physical or tactical risks.** The small-scale of special operations relative to comparable conventional ones, combined with selective manning and specialized equipment and training, grants greater flexibility at the cost of increased physical or tactical risks. Special operations are often conducted with small forces at long ranges, in hostile or contested territory, without the security of large numbers or inherent combat support functions. If compromised or should forces lose surprise, mobility, and/or initiative, the personnel conducting special operations are vulnerable to capture or death, as a number of historical and more recent actions such as Roberts Ridge in 2002 suggest (McRaven, 1995; Naylor and Drew, 2016). Malvesti terms such risk “casualties” (Faint, 2012, p. 95). Given the relatively small size of the forces committed to special operations, the first set of tactical risks focus on the sufficiency of the resources assigned to conduct the mission according to the task, and in the vicinity of the immediate object, as well as the anticipated resistance in or around the specific objective. In other words, the specific threats in the operating area allow for the identification of fairly concrete risk to forces.
The next dimension of physical risk beyond the forces themselves deals with the mission they have been assigned: risk to mission. Mission can be understood in two different ways. The first refers to the type of activity being undertaken. Special operations missions vary in their level of risk depending on their specific type. For example, raids or direct action missions and working through proxy forces, or unconventional warfare both occur in hostile or denied areas and incur higher levels of mission risk due to the overall qualities of the operating environment (JP 3-05, 2014, p. II-5; p. II-9). The training and equipping of host nation security forces, or foreign internal defense, as well as civil affairs activities, are missions that happen in relative permissive environments and therefore incur lower levels of risk as a mission.

The second way risk can be characterized in terms of mission is the specific environmental and support factors that could potentially adversely affect mission success at the point of enemy contact. Such factors include tangible ones such as weather, enemy reinforcements, and the terrain to intangibles such as enemy morale, resistance, or courses of action, among others. At the tactical level, functional experts from various organizations (weather, logistics, etc.) provide information that manifests itself in the development of plans, or courses of action, which contain requested levels of support from other special operations or conventional forces passed up to the operational level. Different levels of force visibility, for some or all of the forces committed to the mission, which range from overt through to clandestine and covert, can mitigate some mission risk. Missions at the tactical level are limited in scope, duration, and investment of forces. A setback tactically can be disastrous or fatal for those involved, but its impacts, particularly when the tactical mission is part of an ongoing campaign and is not a response to a national-level crisis, are unlikely to have significant strategic or political consequences. Two examples include the downing of two special operations helicopters, Turbine 33 (July 2005) and Extortion 17 (August 2011), with heavy loss of life but no impact politically or strategically (Luttrell, 2007; Darack, 2009; Naylor, 2015).

Risk calculations between the force and the mission can overlap and become blurry. To mitigate physical risk, and improve the odds of the mission success if time allows, forces conducting special operations can conduct extensive and realistic pre-mission rehearsals of concepts that exploit the experience, in training, exercises, and operations, of the operators. Problems, however, can result from overlapping risk calculations. One is repeating previously
successful mission templates with inadequate alteration, or modified risk
calculation, of changing circumstances such as an enemy who is adapting.
These circumstances allegedly contributed to the casualties suffered during
the special operation more commonly known as “Blackhawk Down” in
Mogadishu, Somalia in October 1993 (Stevenson, 1995, p. 94; Bowden, 1999,
p. 22). Another is the growth of the forces assigned to the mission, including
operators and support forces, to reduce risk to negligible levels. Such forces
including intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft, fire support
assets, and perimeter security forces, among others. As an answer to mitigate
physical risk, the growth of forces for special operations to large levels can
jeopardize their operational, strategic, or political appeal in terms of low
visibility. As one operator depicts the problem, “One way we tend to think
we mitigate risk is by adding more capabilities for this contingency and
that contingency” because, from the standpoint of decreasing physical risk,
“more is better” (Shultz, Jr., 2004, p. 32).

**Operational or campaign risks.** At the operational or campaign level there
is an increased scope and scale of special operations activities compared
to the tactical level. The increase in scope and scale is accompanied by an
exponential growth in the range of factors to account for, which increases
overall complexity and places emphasis on a different kind of risk. Physi-
cal risk, in terms of risk to forces, is a consideration but less so as a lower
percentage of forces conducting special operations are in direct contact
with the enemy. Risks at the operational level are a function of the need to
conduct numerous actions over prolonged periods of time cumulatively
and/or sequentially to achieve objectives as part of a campaign (Wylie,
24-5). More often than not, a combined joint special operations task force
commander (CJSOTF), combined forces special operations component
commander, or joint task force commander is responsible for identifying
and managing risks at the operational or campaign level.

Risk to forces is present at the operational or campaign level but they
reflect different considerations. The threat posed by the enemy in general
terms is a function of their capability and reach and environmental factors
contribute to vulnerabilities and uncertainty, which create perceptions
of risk. The risk calculations of commanders for forces at operational or
campaign level, however, have more to do with their health, morale, sup-
port, and sustainability. As a result, supply and logistics, as well as basing,
become key considerations that drive risk calculations. Risks at this level,
once identified, are mitigated through integration with conventional and host nation chains of command.

To assist tactical forces in mitigating risk, operational level commanders aid in the planning, integration, and coordination of a number of internal and external resources. Such planning and coordination, as well as commitment of supporting resources, can be extensive. For example, a single tactical operation in Afghanistan in 2015, Operation ZUMMARI 241, had the following requirements:

…communications, protective air cap (Coalition Air Force fighters overhead), fire support coordination (Coalition Air Force close air support [CAS] and Army attack helicopters), anti-aircraft artillery (AAA), communications jamming during ingress, holding and egress along pre-planned routes, selecting alternate landing zones and ‘catch up’ loiter positions, combat search and rescue (CSAR), casualty evacuation (CASEVAC), downed aircraft situation and subsequent ‘bump’ plans for ground forces and aircrews, and refueling—aerial and ground (Briscoe, 2016, p. 56).

Such risks also include “friendly fire incidents” from failing to integrate with conventional forces, and they can be mitigated at the operational level through coordination or separation, in the form of unique geographic area designated as a Joint Special Operations Area (JP 3-05, 2014, p. III-11).

Risk to mission considerations at the operational level relates to overall campaign objectives. Insufficient familiarity with the mission, method of operations, and operating environment can create risk to mission. To ensure a degree of “stability and cohesion,” and to mitigate organizational risk, a number of commanders and senior enlisted advisors repeated tours in CJSOTF-Afghanistan from 2002 to 2014 (Krivda, 2016, p. 9; 13a). Other risk to mission at the campaign level is “operational failure” (Faint, 2012, p. 95). For example, operational failure throughout 2004 and 2005 at the campaign level for special operations in Iraq would be the expansion of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s networked Sunni insurgency, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). AQI leaders developed a highly effective and distributed organization that exploited ethnic, religious, and tribal ties in a cohesive network. The strength and cohesion of its network also contained the source of its downfall, its inability to adapt to change (Serena, 2014, pp. 16-21). To accomplish the campaign objective, General Stanley McChrystal struck a
compromise. To decrease risk to mission, he radically altered his special operations organization, Task Force 714, as well as its method of planning and executing actions (Shultz, 2016). Innovation and adaptation occurred as a result of leadership, sufficient resources including personnel, as well as tactical latitude and functional authorities. In the process of innovating, the risk to force for Task Force 714 increased while the risk to mission decreased. The level of physical risk went up tactically with increased contact with the enemy while the development of a special operations network at the operational level, conducting relentless actions against an insurgent network, decreased risk to mission (McChrystal, 2013, pp. 147-9). In this example, the primary risk to mission was not the competence of AQI, but rather the inability of Task Force 714 to innovate and adapt.

Operational level special operations solutions to accomplish objectives, however, can also generate wider risk to mission. One such problem existed in Afghanistan. Local village security has been a problem for more than a decade. Tribal leaders and villages were vulnerable to Taliban forces on one hand, or warlord militias on the other. One approach to help solve this problem was the embedding of special operations personnel in specific villages in Konar province (Gant, 2009). While this approach had some tactical success, it needed to be conducted on a much wider operational scale to achieve a campaign goal. The creation of the Village Stability Operations/Afghan Local Police concept in 2010 was a widespread special operations operational effort to create a “local defense program aimed at increasing its chance of success and decreasing the risk that it would spawn out-of-control militias” (Robinson, 2013, p. 24). A more refined set of variables within operational or campaign level risks would assist in providing the framework with greater depth and fidelity.

A final risk associated with special operations at the operational or campaign level relates to a different dimension of risk to mission: the inflation of the mission set to the level of strategy. Put simply, the repetitive authorization and use of special operations, either out of routine or towards a definable goal, can confuse the means and ways of strategy for the ends (Peritz and Rosenbach, 2012, pp. 231-3). For example, direct action missions that characterize counterterrorism missions run the risk of becoming an endless series of “tit-for-tat” exchanges, or action and reaction, between special operations forces and terrorist groups, which may or may not lead to success (Byman, 2011, p. 365). Counterterrorism and special operations direct action missions have become at times the strategy against terrorism instead
of an operational approach (Simpson, 2012, pp. 131-2). Direct action missions are only one of the means available to address terrorist threats. Given the responsiveness, flexibility, and tactical effectiveness of such missions, however, they have great appeal at the political level. Devoid of meaningful direction and dialogue, special operations at the campaign level run the risk of realizing the risk management solution characteristic of risk societies.

**Strategic level risks.** A common problem in parsing out the strategic level, and separating it sufficiently from the operational and political, is determining where political considerations end, strategy is developed and translates this into action, and operations end. For reasons that will become clear, this problem can be even more acute in special operations. Strategy is, “[t]he direction and use made of means by chosen ways in order to achieve desired ends” (Gray, 2010, p. 18). More than just a plan, strategy should seek continuing advantage and not focus on the current challenge but anticipate subsequent ones (Dolman, 2005, pp. 4-6). The political level sets the objectives, or desired ends, while the strategic directs through plans how resources are managed and used.

Determining specifically where in the national security apparatus strategy is developed and managed can be challenging. Commonly, strategy is owned at the national level by advisors who work for the senior executive, the President of the United States. One element of strategy is military strategy, which is the responsibility of the military and civilians leaders of the DoD. Within the DoD, the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), and its policy arm, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (OASD SO/LIC), identify and mitigate the military strategic level risks related to special operations. At this level, the risks for special operations become more opaque, are primarily organizational, and include bureaucratic politics.

Risks at the level of military strategy for special operations reflect two different sets of responsibilities. The first is the current use of military resources to achieve national objectives. The second set of responsibilities is institutional in nature. In both cases, those developing and implementing military strategy should look beyond the use of force with an eye towards the future. Mazarr identifies a DoD framework that accomplishes this. This framework consists of four elements:
1. “Force management risk, which the report defined as threats to ‘the ability to recruit, retain, train, and equip sufficient numbers of quality personnel and sustain the readiness of the force while accomplishing its many operational tasks’;
2. “Operational risk, dangers to the capacity to achieve military objectives in conflict;
3. “Future challenges risk, threats to an ability to ‘invest in new capabilities and develop new operational concepts needed to dissuade or defeat mid- to long-term challenges’; and
4. “Institutional risk, threats to the ability to manage defense resources efficiently” (2016, p. 36).

Strategic level risks reflect these two different responsibilities but are nevertheless connected. Both are concerned with achieving national level objectives. The first element, current use of military resources, drives organizations such as USSOCOM and OASD SO/LIC to ensure sufficiency of resources and freedom of maneuver through authorizations, legislation, and presentation of preferred operations and courses of action. In short, these organizations connect policy to operations and tactics through administration, advocacy, and lobbying. Evidence of such connections includes the introduction of specific authorities into Congress, such as Section 1208 funding authorities for special operations to assist proxy forces, to classified plans.

The second set of responsibilities reflects organizational risks that relate to the management, stewardship, and long-term health and readiness of the special operations community. USSOCOM and OASD SO/LIC staff and leaders identify the specific risks, force management, future challenges, and institutional, and incorporate into their plans proposed actions to mitigate them. The mitigation of such organizational risks also occurs at this level through administration, advocacy, and lobbying. Organizational risk mitigation, however, creates additional risk, primarily as a reflection of institutional self-image, identity, and history, as well as relative rank and prestige with comparable, competing organizations such as the Armed Services (the Army, Navy, Air Force, etc.) or other agencies (the Central Intelligence Agency). Risk within this set of responsibilities mirrors special operations organizational preferences and culture.

Special operations leaders at the strategic level address risk to current military operations and institutional challenges by shaping political calculations
through their lobbying and advocacy. How risk is communicated to decision-makers is central to such shaping. The risk generated here is not strategic but rather political. To prevent the recurrence of past misuse or non-use, to extend the current political preference to rely on special operations, and to expand special operations resources, authorities, prestige, and influence, special operations leaders and staffs may view instruments of government, both civilian and military, as a threat the growth, primacy, and long-term health of the organization. Special operations address threats at the tactical and operational level through extensive training, preparation, and planning, using unorthodox approaches and unconventional tactics. Special operations risk at the strategic level echo how risks and threats are addressed at the tactical and operational level. Understanding strategic level risks for special operations is further complicated by their very nature. In short, the line between operational, strategic, and political can be compressed or obscured depending on the type of special operation conducted and the character of the political authority (Cockburn, 2015, p.191). Hostage rescues and other direct action missions where opportunities are both golden and fleeting, such as the strikes against Anwar al-Awlaki and Osama bin Laden, render the dividing lines between political, strategic, operational, and tactical moot. The danger for special operations at the strategic level is in the conceptualizing of risks not as strategic challenges but rather political ones as a result of both their nature and their degree of agency (Kiras, 2015).

**Political risks.** Given the sizeable literature on decision-making, there is a robust set of factors already identified on political risks. Some of these political risks have been connected already to special operations. Prospect theory, as utilized by Malvesti for example, offers one set of insights on political risks and risk tolerance. When viewed as a function of perceived gains and losses, political leaders are more likely to accept the risks of special operations, and authorize them, when operating from a position of perceived losses (Malvesti, 2002, pp. 269-70). Eschewing the rational choice approach, Vertzberger looks at decision-making for intervention primarily through lenses of social constructivism. While his model is too onerous to provide meaningful insights for the political risks of special operations, his exploration of the concept of risk is valuable. Vertzberger separates out two crucial aspects of political risk: risk texture and risk taste. He offers eight textures of risk: risk transparency, risk severity, risk certainty, risk horizon, risk complexity, risk reversibility, risk controllability and containability, and risk accountability (Vertzberger, 1998, pp. 26-7). These textures of risk offer a useful departure point for interview questions for civilian national
security leaders, and in particular, how textures may shape perceptions of the effectiveness and utility of one military response over another; for example, special operations as opposed to airpower or specific forms of precision strike.

Risk calculation, as a reflection of risk texture, shapes risk taking at the political level. Vertzberger identifies three response patterns based on the texture and taste for risk. The first is deliberative risk taking, which most closely aligns with Malvesti’s model of relative losses and gains. The second pattern, dispositional risk taking, reflects the impact of personality on the likelihood of the decision maker to embrace risk or not. Some individuals are more inclined to take risks than others. The third pattern, socially driven risk taking, is a function of group preferences and dynamics and includes collective psychological and behavioral pathologies such as groupthink and cognitive closure (Vertzberger 1998, pp. 29-30).

Both the texture of risk and response patterns raise more questions than they answer at this stage in terms of the sustained use of special operations. Previous studies of special operations responses to specific crises or incidents have favored one pattern over another; for example, the adverse impact of groupthink on risk calculations and decision-making during the ultimately unsuccessful special operations hostage rescue mission in Iran in 1980 (Smith, 1985). Others favor explanations of a relative position of losses internationally (Malvesti, 2002) or other deliberative criteria, such as noncompensatory decision dimensions, or concerns about reelection (Brulé, 2005). Monocausal explanations relating to preferences, however, are insufficient to answer questions about a series of decisions. For example, President Bill Clinton was notoriously reticent to commit to certain types of special operations, such as counterterrorism missions, but readily approved others for humanitarian missions in Haiti or enforcing international norms, such as seizing Persons Indicted for War Crimes (PIFWCs), during his tenure (Shultz, 2004; Kretchik, et al, 1998; Blaber, 2008). In addition, setting the risks related to decisions to employ special operations in the spectrum of political challenges that confront decision makers might prove or disprove the notion of risk management inherent in the concept of the “risk society.”

Risk calculations at the political level are influenced by risk communication from all other levels up: tactical, operational, and strategic. Such communication is noticeably absent in studies that discuss decision-making about special operations. Although the dialogue between civil and military
leaders, or principles and agents, may be an unequal one, most of the considerations of risk occur as a result of such communication of options and their risks (Cohen, 2002; Feaver, 2003). The extent to which risks are reformulated or repackaged when they are communicated at the political level might offer interesting insights. The author can recall one anecdotal example from his experience. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, a key advisor to President George W. Bush, had a map in his office in the Pentagon in 2002 with pins indicating the locations of special operations units. Special operations staff officers were reticent to discuss unnecessary or unprofitable missions. They preferred to let the Secretary believe detachments were actively engaged everywhere and mitigating the risk of future terrorist actions, rather than passing along “bad news” of failure. Better understanding how and why special operations leaders frame and communicate risk to political leaders, or avoid it, might ameliorate some of the problems identified in the previous section.

Conclusion
The solutions to decision-making for special operations, including risk, appear to be self-evident. They include advice such as: “leaders must understand the ways in which their forces may be used, because policymakers lack sufficient knowledge” and “Special operations forces will gain credibility if they develop criteria that help policymakers evaluate and weigh options for their use” (Robinson, 2013, p. 266). Such advice, however, is based on several key assumptions that this chapter challenges. The first assumption is that special operators at the strategic level sufficiently understand the dynamics that occur from the political level down to the strategic to identify such criteria and options. The second is that special operators will provide altruistic advice devoid of organizational or political considerations of their own. While these solutions and others are well-intentioned, they overlook the fluid dimensions and vexing challenges that accompany translating policy from strategy down to action and back up again over time in an iterative, dynamic process. To paraphrase Luttwak, they focus on achieving harmony in strategy by minimizing or ignoring the inevitable disharmony of the process (2001, pp. 234-57).

While the appeal of the “force of choice,” special operations forces, is clear, the logic behind decisions to use them, as well as discussions and calculations of risk surrounding them, is anything but. Specific explanations, such as rational choice, risk aversion, and the contemporary context of decision-making as risk management, are insufficient to reveal this logic particularly
as it relates to continuous decisions to employ special operations. As this chapter suggests, risk considerations are shaped by unique factors at each of the four levels in the framework, or hierarchy of risk identified: physical or tactical; operational or campaign; strategic; and political. This chapter identified unique aspects of risk that occur horizontally within each level, as well as some of the challenges and issues that might arise vertically as risks are considered and communicated that affect the logic behind the decision to use special operations.

One observation is that the interactions that occur between the different levels of risk deserve further study. No matter how effective special operations are tactically, the point is moot if decision makers view them as too risky and they are not authorized for use. In addition, this chapter suggests that bureaucratic politics can shape how risks are communicated to political leaders. In consequence this chapter identified a number of useful questions for future research, which include the following: To what extent do special operations leaders influence decision makers’ taste for risk and if so, how? How is special operations risk “packaged” and communicated to decision makers? To what degree do some or all of the textures of risk shape such communication? Are risks downplayed and if so, how and why? At what level does risk tolerance converge or diverge and why? How are risk calculations and communications influenced by differences in the type of mission, its visibility, the stakes involved, and the time horizon? Is violent extremism considered nothing more than an open-ended, environmental risk to be managed or is it considered a closed, substantive threat to be defeated—and if so, by whom and is it a shared belief? Such answers merit further study.

An implication from this inquiry is the impact different risk calculations can have on strategy, policy, and civil–military relations. Too often, the military agents charged with executing strategy are seen as undertaking their actions as servants of the state. As this chapter suggests, however, the dialogue between special operations leaders and their political masters may be richer and less unequal due to communication about different types of risk. Put simply, interactions over and overlapping interests of risk, particularly at the level of politics and strategy, may give special operators leaders greater latitude, or agency, to pursue the interests of their community. In addition, the trust that builds over time between policy makers and special operations organizations, due to the ability of the latter to deliver operational results, may translate into the desired for expanded special operations resources and authorities and the reduced monitoring and oversight mechanisms.
The net result can be special operations organizations greatly exceeding the aims of policy in pursuit of battlefield success. In this sense, Tucker and Lamb are correct, but for the wrong reason. SOF preferences and prejudices, rather than those of policymakers, may create unnecessary problems due to misunderstandings related to risk at different levels.
References


Chapter 9

‘Scalpel’ or ‘Easy Button’? Neither – And Some Further Considerations

Dr. Anna Simons

OPINION PIECE

Research question: ‘Scalpel’ or ‘easy button’: what are the political risk implications of special operations forces?

Argument: This chapter questions current conventional wisdom and common assumptions about political risk and the prudent use of SOF. It draws distinctions between rescue missions and counter-leadership targeting, and contends that expeditionary Military Assistance (MA) rather than expeditionary Direct Action (DA) may prove the better expeditionary bet – but only under certain conditions. Also, rather than look to the U.S., it may be more useful to look to other countries (like Norway) for sensible concepts for how SOF can be put to better strategic, and less risky, operational use, particularly in the realm of MA.

Conclusion:
• Expeditionary DA is never as nice, neat, or tidy as is assumed.
• Expeditionary MA requires more strategic forethought than it has received, but any SOF should be able to be turned into a strategic-level asset through the strategic use of MA. However, this requires creative thinking by senior leaders, as well as more honest assessments of what SOF is (or is not) capable of.
Abstract
When examining the political risk implications of using SOF, it is important to acknowledge that political risks may be impossible to accurately calculate, since whether an operation or mission proves worthwhile will depend on who is doing the assessing, at what moment in time, and for what ends. Indeed, some missions may yield results whose value degrade rather than increase over time. This seems truer of expeditionary Direct Action (DA) missions than is commonly recognized. Expeditionary Military Assistance (MA) missions, on the other hand, can have a long-lasting strategic impact, but only if careful thought is given to how to employ MA and SOF strategically.
To be able to adequately answer the question – “‘scalpel’ or ‘easy button’: what are the political risk implications of special operations forces?” – requires posing a series of additional questions. Among these are:

1. Political risk – to whom or to what?
2. What type of SOF are we talking about (Army, Navy, special mission, covert, direct action-oriented, military assistance-capable, etc.)?
3. And, under what circumstances, or to address what problems, are SOF being deployed?

A cascade of further questions flows from each of these. For instance:

- Are SOF being used defensively or offensively?
- On behalf of fellow citizens or foreigners?
- Foreigners next door, or foreigners half a world away?
- In response to treaty obligations, or out of mercy – or for some other set of reasons?
- And, can those reasons be made public – or not?

Answering each of these questions matters because decision makers risk significantly different equities than do service members or their family members whenever SOF are deployed. The same can also be said for the military as an institution. All militaries face perennial retention, recruitment, and quality control challenges. The clarity, duration, and literal riskiness of operations inevitably impact who stays in, who gets out, and who does (or does not) sign up. Also worth bearing in mind is that risk can be alluring to some – especially to young males, and to ambitious professionals, whose tolerance levels may be much higher than those of their more cautious fellow citizens.

Meanwhile, once forces are publicly committed to an operation, so is the nation’s image. This can make the political risks seem even greater, which can lead some policy makers to prefer secrecy. Yet, secrecy may prove increasingly short-lived, as disclosures by Julian Assange, Eric Snowden, and state-sponsored hackers suggest.

Consequently, if there is a Bottom Line Up Front to my paper it is twofold: 1) To assume that political risks are calculable may be a pipe dream. This does not mean that SOF should not be used. But for those who worry about political risk, it does mean 2) there needs to be a far greater appreciation
for which types of missions are likely to yield results whose value will not degrade over time. For example, despite the apparent ease with which targeting operations can be launched, conducting unilateral direct action (DA) in someone else’s country is especially problematic. Although such missions promise something neat, tidy, and “one-off,” they are rarely neat and tidy because they are seldom “one-off.”

Expeditionary Direct Action
It is important, too, to distinguish between using SOF as a scalpel for surgical rescues and applying it to targeting. Even when rescues fail, the blowback is minimal. This is in part because rescue operations consist of a well-defined beginning, middle, and end, something that is hardly the case with surgical strikes aimed at counter-leadership targeting (CLT).

Take, for instance, the ‘deck of cards’ targeting approach adopted by the U.S. post-9/11. It has been both reactive and opportunistic. SOF elements continually react to seize or eliminate targets as they pop up. Even today, bad actors are eliminated whenever and wherever they can be found and whenever the circumstances favor a strike (to include whenever there is little risk of civilian collateral damage). Unfortunately, this means that very little entrapment and no sequencing can be done. Thus, no deliberate shaping or strategic undermining of the adversary’s future bench is – or can be – achieved.

More significantly, precision rarely if ever delivers game-changing effects. This is because by avoiding collateral damage, precision strikes have little impact on the populations among whom insurgents, terrorists, and others find willing support; the targeting of individuals does not change collective behavior. But also, if targeting did have a sufficiently strategic effect, SOF missions would not now be expanding – from Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Horn of Africa (Somalia and Yemen) to Libya, the Sahel, and beyond.

Of course, there are other factors contributing to the spread of jihadism. Yet, if one reflects on a key argument used to justify the need for surgical strikes – to buy ‘time’ for inept governments to become more responsive

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(52) Unfortunately, both fall under ‘surgical strike’ in the new vocabulary US Army SOF has adopted.
(53) This is the partial focus of a “Strategic Ambush” project undertaken for the Office of Net Assessment (OSD) at the Naval Postgraduate School in Spring 2015.
to and/or legitimate in the eyes of their populations – the last 15 years should have made it amply clear that more than just time, or time + space + money + outside expertise (and other inputs) are required to achieve significant, let alone lasting effects. For state-building to work, people in the country where the targeting is done have to want to both accept a common social contract and a government. To want to share a government generally requires that people first share certain key sensibilities – which is not something the presence of non-Muslim foreign soldiers typically assists with in most Muslim countries (except to the extent that outsiders become a force to rally against).\textsuperscript{54}

However, my intent here is not to critique current counter-insurgency (COIN) or foreign internal defense (FID) practices. Instead, my aim is to underscore that when SOF operators lack sufficient insider/local knowledge, when civilian and military leaders provide wavering commitment (read: no clear strategy), and so long as Western publics remain ambivalent about assassinations, such that complicit state sponsors in places like Qatar, Karachi, and Tehran, or individuals who serve as facilitators and ‘fixers’ in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and elsewhere, remain untouched, then the use of SOF to eliminate targets in warzones is likely to continue to remain marginally productive at best.\textsuperscript{55}

Still worse is that using SOF in this catch-as-catch-can/reactive fashion renders it a wasted asset. It also has a warping effect on SOF operators. Thus, for reasons to be elaborated on below, my contention is that expeditionary MA, rather than expeditionary DA may prove the better expeditionary bet for all involved – but, only under certain conditions and with eyes wide open.

The Significance of Perspective – and Other Caveats
I stress expeditionary in this paper on the presumption that DANSOF’s top priority should be to protect Danes and Danish national interests in and near Denmark. To be sure, commerce, humanitarianism, and tourism

\textsuperscript{54} Case in point: support for al Shabaab in the face of Ethiopia’s invasion and occupation of Somalia.

\textsuperscript{55} To be clear, I am not advocating the assassination of anyone. However, if you push the intent behind counter-leadership targeting to its logical conclusion, then why do we limit ourselves to only eliminating operators and their immediate facilitators in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and the Sahel? Why shouldn’t we go after financiers in Dubai? Why shouldn’t we go after heads of state when those heads of state are clearly implicated in supporting those bent on attacking us? These are third rail questions, all.
complicate where Danes and Danish national interests now extend. Likewise, decisions about how best to choose and then invest in reliable partnerships in a multipolar and increasingly protectionist world seem likely to grow ever more challenging. Even so, I would submit that the overriding caveat – one that should hold for any expeditionary use of any SOF – requires recognizing that as soon as SOF forces are inserted into other people’s problems, decision makers lose control over where those problems can take them, to include unanticipated blowback they and their country might experience. Nor is it possible to successfully predict which of those problems will prove most intractable – or for how long adversaries and interested others will be able to make use of them.

Take, for instance, Operation Restore Hope in Somalia during the early 1990s and the incident everyone refers to as ‘Blackhawk Down’ [aka Task Force Ranger]. The raid conducted by U.S. Army Rangers and other USSOF elements failed spectacularly even if the soldiers and pilots involved performed heroically. Not only was General Aideed (the Somali ‘warlord’) not captured, but American bodies were dragged through Mogadishu’s streets and the images were then broadcast worldwide. In the raid’s aftermath, U.S. President Bill Clinton faced considerable criticism and a number of choices: commit more troops to what seemed to be a losing proposition, or cut U.S. losses and withdraw. He chose to withdraw.

At the time, some in the SOF community condemned this decision since, in their view, if the mission wasn’t important enough to risk further sacrifice, why had the U.S. committed to it in the first place? Plus, didn’t withdrawal signal defeat – and defeat by ragtag Somali fighters, no less?

Or that, at any rate, is how things looked from one perspective. Fast forward in time and examine the raid’s aftereffects from another perspective, and no matter how tragic the ‘battle of Mogadishu’ was for participants, they did learn valuable tactical and operational lessons, which led to significant changes in tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs). In the realm of battlefield medicine alone, these TTPs have saved numerous lives in Afghanistan and Iraq. Nor could lessons learned about tourniquets or the import of turning soldiers into their own first responders have been acquired through any other means except failure and trial by fire, which is what TF Ranger provided.
If, then, we step back and try to assess the overall costs incurred by using SOF in Somalia we might conclude that risks that seemed justifiable when the mission only appeared to be a humanitarian effort to feed the starving became unjustifiable once establishing a modicum of new world order proved too difficult. Yet, those same risks have since proved sadly worthwhile. Of course, shift perspectives yet again, and the argument can be made that the U.S. retreat from Somalia also helped embolden Usama bin Laden (UBL), without whom 9/11 might never have occurred, and so, SOF advances in battlefield medicine would not have been required in either Afghanistan or Iraq because neither Afghanistan nor Iraq would have merited invasion.

Worth noting, too, is that in the immediate aftermath of the ‘Battle of Mogadishu,’ Task Force Ranger affected more than just changes in tactics. It impacted international decision-making about how to respond to contemporaneous events in Rwanda, Bosnia, Liberia, and Haiti (among other places). Indeed, the remainder of this chapter could be devoted to cataloging all of the myriad downstream effects from just this one failed SOF raid – which leads to the takeaway that whether an operation or mission proves worthwhile will always depend on who is doing the assessing, at what moment in time, and for what ends. This is a takeaway that should be familiar to anyone who appreciates history.

Yet, the notion that perspective is always contingent is rarely mentioned in relation to assessing risk. Instead, one hears two tropes over and over in military circles. One has to do with the need to think in terms of second and third order effects. The second involves ‘end states.’ Both aphorisms are problematic because both presume a linear ‘C’ follows ‘B’ follows ‘A’ approach.

For instance, as the Task Force Ranger example illustrates, one problem with trying to think in terms of second and third order effects (or branches and sequels) is that there are fourth and fifth order effects, as well as second order effects of second order effects, etc. To map all possible contingencies accurately would yield something that looks like a cross between a Gorgon’s head and a Hydra’s head – a giant tangle.

(56) For example, fear of another ‘Mogadishu’ is said to have kept the UN from acting to stop the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, while 11 Belgian peacekeepers were purposely murdered in Kigali in order to get the Belgians to pull out, pace the Americans in Mogadishu.
This is why a simpler alternative for risk assessment would be to instead jump straight to worst case scenarios: what are the worst possible outcomes should X mission fail, or succeed? Is it possible to live with, or mitigate, those worst possible outcomes or consequences? If not, then X should probably not be executed, not with a scalpel or with a sledgehammer.

Risk: Take Two
Of course, adept politicians should be able to weather even the riskiest policy decisions in much the same way the military must, by adapting and overcoming, or, in current political parlance, by being able to pivot and ideally turn mistakes and mishaps to advantage somehow. For example, in the wake of Task Force Ranger, President Clinton could have invoked sacrifice, national honor, and the fact that the U.S. had staked its reputation on assisting in Somalia. Had he done so, he might have avoided withdrawing troops, and maybe Somalia would have avoided its fate as the world’s longest-lived ‘failed state.’ Again, some people did suggest that the President double down at the time, though for Clinton to have done so would have required him to have done a better job of managing the public’s (and Congress’s) expectations from the outset regarding what the military had been sent to Somalia to accomplish, which in turn would have required his being able to identify concrete and thus potentially attainable (not nebulous) objectives – which brings me back to the idea of ‘end states.’

Despite the popularity of the term ‘end state’ in national security circles today, the truth is that when policy makers commit forces abroad without having first issued a clear declaration of war, then the only ‘ends’ that can be achieved will invariably be incomplete. Also, no matter what the term ‘end state’ might imply, no situation stays frozen and closure never lasts. Even when a mission seems cut-and-dry, even when an operation succeeds, pitfalls lurk.

By way of illustration, consider the much celebrated Abbottabad raid and the killing of UBL in 2011. Unlike Task Force Ranger, the Abbottabad

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(57) As further proof that perspectives change, all depending: in the early 1990s, I argued that Operation Restore Hope was misguided. Thanks to additional mistaken efforts in Somalia since then, the U.S. has become a harbor for a sizable population of Somalis; many, but certainly not all of whom, feel no allegiance to the U.S. In retrospect, I would probably now argue that Washington should not have tried to wash its hands of Somalia – any more than it did of Afghanistan in the early 1990s. But nor should the U.S. have granted asylum to hundreds of thousands of people disinterested in assimilating or acculturating.
operation was a tactical and operational triumph. But how should it be judged strategically – how lasting or successful have its effects proven to be?

For instance, consider the tremendous amount of time, money, and effort devoted to hunting down UBL over a 10+ year period. This couldn't help but divert resources from other investigations. As with Plan Colombia (and the United States' 'war on drugs'), squeezing the balloon so hard in one location inevitably opens opportunities for others elsewhere. Meanwhile, UBL's death has not halted others' efforts to achieve his strategic objectives. Nor has his death impacted jihadism in any lasting way. At best we might say his demise delivered a sense of justice to those directly affected by the terrorism he sponsored. But – beyond this?

Arguably, the U.S. had little choice but to hunt down UBL in order to stop him from orchestrating further attacks. Yet, hard questions can still be asked about what was really gained and/or lost by killing versus capturing him. Similar questions can be asked about what was won or lost by publicizing information about the operation.

Immediately after the raid, political and military benefits certainly seemed significant. Thanks to sensitive site exploitation (SSE) important documents could be fed back into the Find, Fix, Finish, Exploit, Analyze, and Disseminate (F3EAD) process. The U.S. also showcased capabilities that had to have had a sobering effect on other adversaries and/or those willing to harbor adversaries. However, the helicopter tail rotor left behind did reportedly get passed along to China, and the Pakistani doctor who helped pinpoint UBL's location remains in a Pakistani jail cell. This means that while the ruse he used to confirm UBL's presence may still be able to be re-used, vaccination drives in the region will likely be fraught in the future, which may not seem significant now, but could be deadly the next time influenza or some other epidemic sweeps from east to west.

As for the raid's further repercussions, two U.S. Navy SEALs have each come forward claiming to have been the man to shoot bin Laden. Not only has each divulged operational practices that should have stayed under wraps,

(58) Publicly, it is hard to gauge exactly how the raid has affected Pakistani-U.S. relations, or how allusions to the raid (violations of sovereignty from the Pakistani perspective; the tacit harboring of UBL from the U.S. perspective) will play out in future Pakistani-U.S., or U.S.-Indian/Pakistani, or Pakistani-Chinese/U.S. relations. Of course, too, the raid will have impacted CIA-ISI, mil-to-mil, and other relations in various ways.
but their quest for publicity has only further intensified public interest in SEALs, and in SOF in general. Attention of this sort might be considered beneficial for expanding budgets and boosting recruitment into SOF. But one question it raises is: does braggadocio attract the right kind of SOF operator?

Another problem created by ongoing publicity about SOF capabilities is that this may over-inflate expectations. The fact that fewer and fewer members of the policy-making American elite have any prior experience with or around the military makes today’s decision-makers especially prone to placing confidence in and wanting to rely on SOF. Academics who concentrate on civil-military issues have been concerned about a widening expectation/reality gap for years. But I would submit there is also another set of factors, self-inflicted by the military, that contributes to the view that SOF are hyper-capable and thereby meet government’s desire for a neat, clean, push-and-they-can-solve-any-problem ‘easy button.’

**What Policymakers See – and Don’t See**

Like all good military units, SOF units generally go out of their way whenever they host visitors. It stands to reason they would especially want to impress politicians and their advisers who control budgets and purse strings. Not surprisingly then, decision-makers and their advisors come away from their visits to military installations, forward operating bases, and other venues enamored with SOF’s tactical and operational capabilities. They do so for a couple of reasons. First, to most civilians, what operators do is novel. Second, operators’ performance is impressive – as in neat and ‘cool’. Subliminally (or maybe not so subliminally), the message that SOF’s feats of technical and physical prowess drive home is that the military can perform.

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(59) And, as Matt Bissonette, one of the men who ‘killed bin Laden, and others have argued, Naval Special Warfare Command itself set the precedent for publicizing SEAL exploits and capabilities by participating in the making of the Hollywood movie Act of Valor. From Bissonette’s perspective, all he and others did was follow in the Command’s slipstream. For more on this and related issues, see Crowell (2015).

(60) This is akin to SOF creating its own ‘CSI effect.’ Thanks to what members of the public see on television, many now believe that all crimes are eminently solvable, and that guilt or innocence is easy to prove through forensic science. Expectations of SOF may likewise be heading into the realm of the unrealizable. However, in contrast to the criminal justice system, where those who put criminals on trial still understand the limitations of criminal science, it is not clear that those responsible for helping the President devise and shape policy sufficiently appreciate the military’s, never mind SOF’s, limitations. For more on misconceptions by young policy types, see Brooks (2016).
Unfortunately, such displays of what SOF can do do nothing to redress the in-built bias that many civilians have about doers versus thinkers, with the military responsible for doing and civilians responsible for thinking. Add to this the civil-military relations rubric that dictates that it is civilian leaders’ job to direct, and the military’s duty to execute, and there is little impetus for already biased civilians to change their minds about who is generally smarter, as in who is better able to grasp the intricacies of national security strategy. One sees evidence of this bias in, for instance, the crafting of national security strategy documents. While members of the military may be asked to help inform policy, their views rarely carry the same weight as do those of political appointees, career bureaucrats, or think tanks consultants. When the attitude that “they do operations; we think strategically” is then reinforced by what policy makers and their understudies (from the National Security Council, the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and Congressional staffs) ‘see’ that SOF can do during, say, a field demonstration, a culminating event for an exercise, or in some other display, this only deepens or widens the unspoken status differential and the expectation-reality gap.

Here is why: civilians are seldom privy to the effort that goes into preparing for an operation, or even for a visit. Conceptualizing, planning, training, and rehearsing are done off-stage, and the hours devoted to preparing are never tallied or discussed. Instead, the only thing visitors or onlookers see is impressive action and activity.63

(61) No finer summary of the way members of the policy-making elite believe the system should work exists than in the arguments Eliot Cohen makes in Supreme Command – about who should be in supreme command. From Cohen’s perspective, it is decisively not the generals.
(62) Also, there remains an education gap. Numerous individuals on the National Security Council staff will be younger than those they interact with on military staffs. But nonetheless, these civilians might have PhDs. Also, despite the fact that more and more officers are earning master’s degrees, civilians typically attend more prestigious universities. Given the fact that ‘foreign policy’ and ‘national security’ are thought to be a thinking person’s game (and heavily weighted toward political science on top of that), officers without their civilian peers’ intellectual polish become that much easier to dismiss as strategists – though not as operators. Compounding this is that leaders in USSOF generally play up their operator image, both for public and internal consumption (for a host of legacy and, I would say, increasingly outdated reasons).
(63) Another way to think about this: the military excels at putting on shows in much the same spirit as Hollywood makes movies, with outtakes left on the cutting room floor.
A decade ago, SOF operators used the term “feel the magic” to describe what drew journalists, civilians in the Pentagon, the White House, and elsewhere to want to visit SOF units and installations – and magic is a good description for what everyone was shown and continues to be shown. Otherwise, unless outsiders have the time and/or are granted the access to sit through days of tedious planning and training, it is difficult (and quite likely impossible) to appreciate how much effort is required to make the magic happen. Small wonder, then, that when policy makers think about risks, they typically fixate on repercussions should there be a performance glitch – should the operation become compromised and/or should something go wrong at the moment of execution. From what they see, nothing would impel them to have to consider more systemic risks, such as those that might inhere in flawed or incoherent strategy.

**Risk: Take Three**

The combination of operational security concerns that limit full awareness on the one hand, and confidence in SOF operators’ ability to accomplish whatever task they are given on the other, makes it easy to miss or overlook risks generated by incoherent strategy, a vague end-state masquerading as strategy, or overly complicated operations consisting of too many moving pieces and parts. Even when operators themselves raise objections these can be easy to downplay, whether on an operation like Operation Red Wings, made famous by Marc Luttrell, or in coalition warfare when countries operate under vastly different caveats and the whole adds up to less than the sum of the parts.

Here, too, policy makers are culpable without realizing it since nothing in the U.S. civil-military arrangement encourages officers at any level to want to say “no” to a mission or tasking. Worse, even when officers object to missions that are too dangerous and make no sense, that does not prevent other groups of SOF operators from volunteering to take on the mission instead, which is what happened after a Special Forces team rejected what ended up becoming the operation that made Marc Luttrell famous as a ‘lone survivor.’

Arguably, operators like Luttrell *need* to be wired to think (nay, believe) they can do the impossible; we should all want them to *want* to take daring risks. However, this means that they, and we, need some entity to serve as a reality check on their unbridled enthusiasm. Presumably this is what echelons of command exist to do – and sometimes they do. For instance,
whenever the number of U.S. casualties in Afghanistan (or Iraq) reached politically critical thresholds, commanders from the top-down became far more casualty averse; the political pressure to reduce casualties resulted in commanders reining in operators and tying their hands.64 Tellingly, however, one rarely hears of the obverse, as in commanders’ willingness to back up their subordinates’ willingness to say “no” to policy makers, as in “no – what you are asking us to do is not executable.”

To be sure, commanders’ reluctance to say “no” to those above them in the chain of command reflects both the reality of life in a hierarchy and the status differential embedded in the civil-military relationship which subordinates the military to civilian authority. But senior leaders’ unwillingness to say “no” to their civilian overseers may also reveal more. For instance, cynics often contend that generals who reach three and four star rank in the U.S. do not just possess political skills, but are themselves politicians. Some further describe the military’s senior-most leaders as political ‘yes men.’ Again, the nature of hierarchy helps explain why senior leaders would be prone to say “yes”, since 30+ years in uniform is bound to condition them to want to be as agreeable as possible to their superiors: how often in any hierarchy do successful subordinates ever say “no” to their bosses? But also, competition among the Services, and among branches within each Service, will often lead general officers to say “yes, we can accomplish the task,” knowing that if they do not say “yes,” others will (which is the Operations Red Wings problem writ larger).

Thus far, little that I have described can be considered unique to the military. But something that is peculiar to it (though perhaps this is only true of the U.S. military) is that for all the prominence the military accords ‘strategy,’ to include its investment in developing strong strategic thinkers – ergo the war colleges – the military does not do a particularly good job of taking the operator out of those it is grooming to be strategic-minded. Nor does it do a very good of impelling those it considers to be its strategic thinkers – namely, colonels and generals – to want to exorcise rather than exercise their

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64 Casualty aversion also waxed and waned under different commanding generals, and at different points in the arc of both conflicts.
inner operator. Thus, the habit of liking to ‘do’ never really gets replaced by the habit of liking to think.

In other words, it is not just civilians who are set up to misperceive military capabilities. The military is itself shot through with mixed messages.

This, I would submit, poses yet another problem when it comes to triangulating between risk and how SOF can be used to strategic effect in the 21st century. For reasons that may well be beyond their control, many of SOF’s most senior leaders seem to lack the time, inclination, and/or unfettered ability to think sufficiently creatively at the strategic level. To be sure, USSOF’s operational tempo since 9/11 has been unforgiving – though perhaps this, too, is a by-product of no one ever wanting to say “no”.

Without question, USSOF operators think creatively when it comes to all of the devious, clever things they could do to adversaries if only they were allowed to. But this is tactically and operationally-oriented thinking, often geared to egress and exit from dangerous DA situations. What remains less well scrutinized is the extent to which expeditionary DA itself can help strategically alter the broader fight – which is not to suggest that expeditionary DA is never needed. Rather, it is to suggest that many more hard questions should be asked about its usefulness as an ‘easy button,’ a scalpel, or a silver bullet.

**Expeditionary Military Assistance**

For reasons described above, the U.S. is probably not the example other SOFs should follow when it comes to determining how SOF could be put to better

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(65) Or inner tactician – ergo the lament about micromanagement by ‘tactical generals.’ Note: in the U.S. Professional Military Education (PME) system, the War Colleges teach ‘strategy’ to those selected to become colonels (Army, Air Force, Marines) and commanders (Navy).

(66) It would require another paper to explicate the reasons for this, which range from the pernicious effects of attempting to codify the unconventional via doctrine, to the antiquated personnel management system and dreadful talent management, to too many people in organizations that have grown too large, too top heavy, and too bureaucratized. Meanwhile, top SOF leaders might well be capable of creative strategic thinking – but this is not evident; it is not what they display during visits with subordinates, when they speak at PME institutions, etc.

(67) At the moment, in USSOF, there is puzzling revisionism underway at the highest levels, as if the U.S. really will be able to help orchestrate an updated version of WWII-style unconventional warfare in other people’s countries without internal security services either knowing or being able to turn the tables on us.
long-term strategic use. So, let me instead turn to another country’s SOF: Norway, and here I am drawing on discussions with two Norwegian officers who recently completed a project in which they addressed how NORSOF can improve its military assistance capabilities in order to “increase the strategic utility of both NORSOF and MA” (Kristiansen and Hedenstrom, 2015).

Like many small countries with security concerns, Norway worries that it might not be able to defend itself without assistance. What, then, can it offer allies? How can it make itself indispensably useful to others so that they have a vested stake in Norway’s security?

In their capstone, Marius and Andreas spun out three scenarios. First, NORSOF could serve as the link between U.S. Army Special Forces and the Norwegian territorial Home Guards. By inviting USSF to train the Home Guard, NORSOF could help 10th Special Forces Group gain valuable experience training in the Arctic; USSF’s presence would signal to the Russians that the Norwegian-U.S. alliance is alive and thriving; the Home Guard would learn new TTPs; and Norway’s “threshold defense” would be visibly strengthened.

In their second course of action, Marius and Andreas discuss ways in which NORSOF and RUSOF could engage in confidence-building exchanges and joint exercises. Norway maintains closer relations with Russia than does any other NATO country, and already conducts joint exercises with Russia (though neither NORSOF nor RUSOF participate). Scenarios in which both SOFs might find themselves needing to work together in the future include counter-terrorism and hostage rescue. If a partnership could be fostered on the basis of these, then over time the NORSOF-RUSOF relationship might be used as a bridge not just between Norway and Russia, but between Russia and NATO.

Finally, NORSOF could be used in an MA capacity to assist with Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs abroad, as well as with preparing the environment prior to humanitarian relief operations (HRO), to include escape and evasion (E & E) plans for participants involved in high risk conflict resolution and peace talk negotiations. By using NOR-SOF in this way, Norway’s Ministry of Defense would be lending critical support to its Foreign Ministry, thereby furthering one of the Norwegians’ most prized roles – to broker peace and resolve conflict.
In putting together these three nominal courses of action, Marius and Andreas sought to illustrate how NORSOF could help Norway capitalize on its core strengths and unique Norwegian capabilities. Clearly, what NORSOF would use to make itself indispensably useful to its global SOF, NATO, and Scandinavian partners would have to be based on both its inherent comparative advantages and whatever it might need to do to enhance its own security. Consequently, how a country like Estonia might make itself more obviously toxic so that Russia would not be tempted to think about re-absorbing it in the future would have to be grounded in Estonian realities. Likewise, because NORSOF’s role in DDR and HRO ties directly into Norway’s facilitation of peace deals in conflict zones, other SOFs could not duplicate Norway’s exact approach. Instead, they would need to identify their own comparative advantages and unique capabilities – but, in theory, any SOF should be able to be turned into a strategic asset through the strategic use of MA. Though to do so requires making very careful choices.

For instance, two of the most salient criteria for deciding how to invest in MA are to build on ties that already exist and to identify which among these will produce a clear security dividend. Ties worth building on include historic, commercial, and/or diaspora/immigrant ties since any other basis for a relationship is likely to prove too shallow, as well as suspect in the eyes of those receiving the attention, who will ask: “why us? Why now?”

While it might seem tautological to suggest that MA relationships must endure if they are to have a lasting impact, one-off or episodic MA not only tends to fail over time but can have deleterious effects. Take Mali as a case in point. The U.S. helped train three different units in Mali post-9/11. The only one of the three to have performed well under fire during the most recent Tuareg revolt and AQIM ‘invasion’ in 2012 was the unit that received the most consistent attention. As Simon Powelson makes clear when he documents the recent history of USSF-Malian relations, episodic engagement is antithetical to building partner capacity. It is also shortsighted to expect trust to be rebuilt quickly in instances when relations have been previously abandoned or when new units and new people serially

(68) For more on toxicity as a method of deterrence (and preemptive self-defense), see Simons (2014).
(69) Maybe expedience is sufficient during the midst of war, but it invariably seeds problems for the future, which alliances with warlords (Afghanistan, Syria) should reflect in spades. For a related argument, see Rubin (2014).
try to re-initiate them. Instead, continuity and return visits by the same (trusted) personnel are key, particularly in those areas of the world where trust is hard to earn.

An additional reason to commit to persistent, enduring relationships when undertaking MA is to ensure that the assistance actually ‘sticks.’ This matters in a technical, or literal ‘crawl, walk, run,’ and then ‘train the trainer’ sense. It is especially essential when the technology and the processes being transferred (e.g., logistics) are not just complex, but culturally alien.

A less obvious, but perhaps more pressing reason to ensure that MA is done via a persistent presence is to help host nation counterparts keep their system honest. No question: corruption and willful neglect of equipment, salaries, maintenance, records, etc. hollow out any system. But regimes often also misuse or abuse SOF training (Spera, 2015). Sometimes the units SOF trains are re-flagged and used as praetorian guards. Or counter-terrorism forces are thrown into conventional fights. Alternatively, leaders will sometimes disband units they fear have become too proficient in order to coup-proof their regimes. When MA liaisons can remain in-country for years, host nation sleight-of-hand not only becomes easier to detect, but also (ideally) easier to deter.

**Expeditionary MA: Concerns**

If one impetus for SOF MA is to ‘build partner capacity,’ thereby helping countries shrink the spaces in which bad actors find sanctuary, another is to help them advance from being dependent recipients to bona fide partners. The question I want to raise in this section is whether the creation of partner SOFs is the right tool for these endeavors?

Given the prominence special operations have received over the past 15 years, it should be no surprise that leaders around the world now want their own SOFs, especially since having a national mission unit like SOF satisfies numerous needs. For one, SOF is a high prestige good; having one lends a regime an aura of military fierceness and sophistication. But also,

(70) Pakistani-U.S. relations offer an especially vivid example of rampant mutual mistrust despite decades of ‘partnership.’
(71) One clear, easy indicator of trust, but one that is exceedingly difficult to secure, is the voluntary sharing of sensitive intelligence.
(72) SOF presence should be neither large nor high profile, which is another argument for liaisons.
SOF forces can be put to myriad domestic uses as a praetorian guard, as light infantry, and so on.

However, if building partner capacity is to be taken seriously – and is not just window-dressing – it should build partners that can be relied on in a crisis. Here is where one sees a disconnect today. Despite the rate at which NATO SOFs are building partner SOFs in Africa, Central Asia, and elsewhere, it is not clear that the global proliferation of SOFs is yielding SOFs that can be relied on.

For instance, if we were to fast-forward a few years to the next mall attack, gas plant seizure, or hotel hostage crisis, here is how the scenario might unfold: *Let us assume dozens of casualties and hundreds of foreign hostages in Country X. And let us stipulate that Country X has its own NATO-trained SOF unit (or units) about which the president of Country X has routinely boasted. One reason he has had to boast is to justify their cost to parliamentarians, the public, and political opponents, among others.*

As the crisis intensifies, imagine the quandary the president of Country X finds himself in: can he afford to call on more proficient, Western SOFs for assistance? On the one hand, time might militate against this. But so too might his political situation – especially if he continues to believe, because he has been led to believe, that his SOF forces are more proficient than they are. After all, it hasn’t only been his SOF commander who has reassured him of this, but so have NATO SOF trainers and all sorts of visiting NATO generals with all of their praise. As for his SOF commander, can he now admit, at the height of the crisis, that he had been lying about or exaggerating his forces’ capabilities all along?

As for Western partners’ options during such a crisis, individuals who had previously worked to help build up Country X’s SOF might think they still maintain good personal relations with their host nation counterparts. But at a distance and without being on the ground, how much leverage will they actually have? And what can they really do to prevent the SOF they ‘trained’ from turning chaos into a debacle?

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(73) For a 1979 foreshadowing and variation on this theme, see Trofimov (2007). Saudi Arabia did not have an effective hostage rescue force, but could not call on the Jordanians (who had the most effective SOF in the region). Instead, the government eventually turned to France for assistance.
For more reasons than I can allude to here, the global proliferation of SOFs does not seem particularly prudent. Yet, without policy makers pausing to think about the long-term implications, this trend in MA is likely to continue – in which case it would behove Western SOFs at a minimum to embed full-time liaisons so that they can at least monitor as well as maintain and deepen relations. Anything less risks wasting whatever assistance has been provided – or worse.

Caveat Emptor – and Conclusion

While expeditionary MA should be a more risk-free option than expeditio-
nary DA, more forethought will be required if it is to be made strategically worthwhile, especially since it is a relatively new NATO SOF ‘mission.’ Among other things, it requires a different orientation in terms of who is selected to serve on MA missions. Just because someone has made it through SOF selection and is a superlative assaulter does not mean he has the temperament or maturity to be a good military advisor (Kristiansen and Hedenstrom, 2016).

Also, while military advising is inherently difficult under any circumstances, it is especially challenging in permissive and post-conflict environments. Such an assertion may seem counter-intuitive. But combat creates its own incentives for wanting to learn to ‘shoot, move, and communicate’ more effectively. In contrast, there is nothing immediately rewarding about learning better staff functions. Nevertheless, higher level staff functions, like learning how to plan, and mastering personnel and logistics systems, are essential to modern militaries being able to self-sustain. At the same time, processes and procedures have to be tailored to suit local conditions, which cannot be accomplished via drive-by, or episodic, advising. Instead, deep familiarity with local conditions, to include the political lay of the land both inside and outside the military, is paramount. Again, this is why it is critical to keep advisors in place long enough to earn trust, allay suspicions of ulterior motives, and move both partners beyond superficial.

In the end, nothing is likely to force multiply security better, or more firmly, than carefully considered, expeditionary MA. Indeed, sending the right SOF

(74) Even if the intent is to primarily secure ‘placement and access’ in order to be able to stop threats at their source ‘over there,’ I would contend that the long-term costs are still not worth the expedient benefit.

(75) For more on why the political matters so much, see Giustozzi (2016) or Phillips (2008).
personnel to the right place(s) represents the most pro-actively preventive use of SOF there is since once a country’s security forces prove capable, incorruptible, and apolitical (the iron triangle), that country should then be able to self-police. Self-policing matters because without a more concerted effort to compel governments elsewhere to live up to their sovereign obligations of being responsive to, and not just fitfully responsible for the populations they govern, Western governments will be left with little choice but to have to keep launching SOF units on expeditionary DA and rescue operations around the world. And though young operators might relish the risks associated with such missions, the rest of us should hope that politicians and senior military leaders will bear in mind the truism that the good that comes from serial, unilateral expeditionary actions seldom lasts.
References


Chapter 10

**Danish Politicians’ Views on Special Operations: Acceptable and Unacceptable Uses**

*Major Lars H. Ehrensvärd Jensen*

**TEASER**

**Research questions:** What are Danish politicians willing to accept concerning the use of Special Operations, and what are they unwilling to accept? Which mission tasks do they prioritize? Do they prefer preventive actions or reactive ones?

**Argument:** Too little is known about the wishes and willingness of Danish politicians regarding the use of special operations. This may indicate a difference between the potential opportunities for employing special operations and what the politicians believe these to be and are willing to promote or allow.

**Conclusion:** Pending further analysis of the data presented in this article. Findings to be presented in forthcoming article.
Abstract
Disclaimer: this paper describes the focus and initial considerations concerning a survey of how Danish politicians view special operations and Special Operations Forces. The survey was carried out during the spring and early summer of 2016. The results and findings are being analyzed at the time of writing and will be published as a peer-reviewed paper, hopefully during the first half of 2017, with Dr. Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen as co-author.
With the Danish defense agreement from 2013, the Danish Parliament decided that Denmark should follow most other NATO countries and establish a Special Operations Command. The rationale behind this decision was the following: “The starting point is also in the future to target the special operations forces to the strategic challenges, rather than the present tactical focus” (Danish Defence Agreement 2013-2017, p. 11).

Given that many future strategic challenges may comprise irregular, dynamic, and complex threats and risks, including insurgencies, along with fragile states’ inability to exercise population control or prevent massive exoduses, and transnational crime being inseparably mixed with terrorism, the proposed “focus on the strategic challenges” may require a much more participatory role at the political level in orchestrating all the instruments of state power. There is normally no simple military solution to most of these irregular risks and threats. Instead, the military must be able to cooperate seamlessly with, for example, political, diplomatic, economic, or legal efforts by the state, the UN, or coalitions (Schadlow p. 12). All this was recently emphasized in an op-ed by the Danish prime minister (Rasmussen 2015).

Thus, in order to curb these irregular threats, many states view special operations as an attractive alternative to costly large-scale conventional interventions. This is so because special operations normally provide a discreet and subtle instrument that allows for military action at a relatively low cost and political risk, combined with a reduced risk of a prolonged war from which it can be hard to extract one’s forces (Finlan, 2008, p. 111; NATO SOF Study, 2012, p. V).

This potential, however, has not always been permitted to unfold. A lack of understanding of the uniqueness of Special Operations Forces (SOF) and of the limits and possibilities of special operations on part of military commanders socialized in conventional armed forces has, according to some observers, frequently caused SOF to be deployed in conventional roles for which they are ill suited (Finlan, 2008, p. 130, Gray, 1998, pp. 151 & 191). Colin Gray has pointed out that the effectiveness of SOF depends as much on the “competence and imagination” of their military and political leadership as on their tactical effectiveness (Gray 1998, p. 149; Dalgaard-Nielsen 2015, p. 1). However, apart from the political decision to establish a Special Operations Command, very little is known about the wishes and willingness of Danish politicians regarding the use of special operations. Do
their perceptions mirror the existing research on how one might imagine special forces being employed? How do they perceive this new strategic instrument; how will they use it; and do they consider themselves capable of exercising “competent and imaginative leadership”? Do the politicians view themselves as the entrepreneurs in developing this new Danish capability, or do they expect others (e.g., researchers or the Special Operations Command) to provide options from which they may choose? If the latter is the case, there may be a difference between the potential opportunities of special operations and what the politicians believe these to be and are willing to promote or allow.

Thus, this paper aims to answer the following questions:

*What are Danish politicians willing to accept concerning the use of Special Operations, and what are they unwilling to accept? Which mission tasks do they prioritize? Do they prefer preventive actions or reactive ones?*

These questions narrow the scope of this paper to provide empirical data on what Danish politicians will accept and not accept concerning the use of special operations and Special Operations Forces.76

**Survey Methodology**

The survey methodology chosen is a combination of an exercise in prioritization and a qualitative interview approach. The choice of personal, face-to-face interviews adds further empirical value and gains quality in comparison with an impersonal written group-questionnaire. In order to enhance honesty and straightforwardness, all respondents were promised anonymity. Respondents are thus designated as Rx, where x is a random number.

(76) A comparable study exists on the same issue. In 2003-4 Stephanie Mullen conducted a survey with the title “Political Leadership for Special Operations” concerning Canada's Special Operations capacity and the political leadership (Mullen 2005). This study revolves around almost identical themes to those of this project, which adds a considerable comparative value to this project, especially because the Canadian study emphasizes that “Canadian policy has been to support a rule-based international order” (Horn et al., p. 119). This is in line with Denmark's policy. In order to provide a basis for comparison with the Canadian study, the questions in the Danish questionnaire drew inspiration from the Canadian ones. However, the Danish survey was a personal face-to-face interview, whereas the Canadian one was a paper questionnaire. Also, the methods differ, as this study uses a qualitative interview method that presses the individual respondent into deselection and prioritization, thus enhancing a deeper qualitative understanding of the respondent's beliefs and values.
The core of the survey is formed by 28 potential special operations tasks, which were chosen with inspiration from a Canadian survey\(^ {77}\), complemented with others that have been carried out historically. The latter such survey took place on the backdrop of the Australian and Dutch effort in 2014 to gain access to the MH-17 aircraft shot down over Eastern Ukraine.\(^ {78}\) Mission tasks were neutrally presented in a random sequence, on 10x15 cm white carton cards. The tasks were all selected so as to be in accordance with Danish foreign policy, strategy, and capabilities. Some tasks were deliberately made extreme in order to provoke the respondent to reveal his or her acceptance limits or thresholds. The 28 mission tasks were organized into four groups of seven, which can be found in table 1. These groups relate to the diagram (Figure 2) explained in detail further below.

Quadrant 1 – Reactive with weight on state security/state matters

| **Assist civilians to handle a chemical, biological, and radiological/atomic attack on a Danish city.** |
| **Evacuate Danish state employees from dangerous situation abroad (war-torn country or another dangerous situation).** |
| **Free Danish state employees taken hostage in a foreign country.** |
| **Free a Danish state-owned ship or aircraft hijacked by terrorists in international waters or airspace.** |
| **Destroy strategic targets in a hostile state, which is attacking Denmark.** |
| **Capture and transport a war criminal out of a country that acts hostile against Denmark, without the consent of said country.** |
| **Find and capture criminals who perpetrate economic crimes against the state of Denmark.** |

\(^ {77}\) See note 7

\(^ {78}\) According to a number of unclassified media sources, Holland and Australia used special operations forces to secure the bodies of dead citizens, their belongings, and forensic evidence in an operation after the plane was shot down. See, among others: [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10992799/Australian-and-Dutch-forces-prevented-from-taking-control-of-MH17-crash-site.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10992799/Australian-and-Dutch-forces-prevented-from-taking-control-of-MH17-crash-site.html)
**Quadrant 2 – Reactive with the weight on security/matters of individual/companies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Find and capture criminals who perpetrate economic crimes against Danish civilians (individual persons or companies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find and transport kidnapped children with Danish citizenship home from countries outside of Europe (e.g., from mixed marriages, where fathers kidnap their children to a Muslim majority country without the consent of the mother).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free hostages in Denmark taken by terrorists (support to Police).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evacuate Danish civilians from a dangerous situation abroad (from a war-torn country or another dangerous situation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Danes taken hostage in a foreign country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free a civilian Danish ship or aircraft (e.g., a privately owned vessel) hijacked by terrorists in international waters or airspace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute with humanitarian support in case of a natural disaster outside of Europe.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Quadrant 3 – Preventive with weight on the security/matters of individuals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deploy a joint multi-agency contingency to an area of crisis, including health service personnel, emergency relief experts and/or security advisers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement of the security of Danish commercial companies operating in a war-torn or unstable country by supporting with advice, training, or supervision/surveillance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capture and extract a person/criminal at the request of a civilian company (e.g., hackers or others committing serious crimes against Danish companies from a hiding place in countries that purposely fail to intervene with such activity).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locate and destroy training camps abroad, used to radicalize Danish citizens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to stop a genocide or the like under provision of the UN’s Responsibility to Protect principle/obligation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Securing evidence, bringing home dead citizens, their belongings, etc., from an aircraft downed in a country unwilling to cooperate with Denmark.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deployment of a task force standing by in a cooperative neighboring country, ready to evacuate Danish citizens from an area of crisis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quadrant 4 – Preventive with the weight on security of the state

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in a multinational team to neutralize or destroy larger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facilities/assets that pose a threat to Denmark or other democratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covert entry to and neutralization/destruction of an IT installation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in a foreign country as part of protecting Danish IT infrastructure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to a preventive and joint multi_agency stabilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effort in a fragile state threatened by breakdown (e.g., Tunisia).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support to a fragile state to fight terror organizations such as ISIL,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boko Haram, or Al Shabaab.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support to the diplomacy, e.g., with protection or by creating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preconditions for meetings/negotiations between key people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompany a minister as a special adviser, e.g., in connection with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stabilization operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhance the security of Danish state employees, working in a war-torn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or unstable country, e.g., with advice, training, or supervision/surveillance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in Table 1, the mission tasks are divided into groups of seven, which relate to the four quadrants shown in the diagram of Figure 2. This diagram is defined by two continua. The X-axis continuum is defined by the two extremes: exclusive focus on reactive measures and focus on preventive measures, respectively. The Y-axis continuum is defined by the upper extreme: exclusive focus on state security/matters exclusively; and the lower extreme: focus on individual citizens or commercial companies’ security matters exclusively.
Figure 2:

This shows the organization of the 28 mission tasks. The tasks were divided into groups of seven, which relate to the four quadrants that are defined by the two shown continuums. The upper-right seven questions are defined by a preference to prioritize state security/matters reactively, whereas the upper-left are defined by a preference to prioritize state security/matters, but preventively. The two lower quadrants are defined by the same criteria, but here the individual/company security/matters are prioritized. (“The stupid sailor” refers to a Danish tourist sailor who, with his wife and children, entered pirate-infested waters near Somalia and deliberately neglected official warnings – and who was subsequently hijacked.)

The aim of this division was to find the respondents’ preferences, whether they preferred preventive or reactive employment of SOF, and whether they focused on state security or the security of the individual citizen.

The upper right seven questions are defined by a preference to prioritize state security/matters reactively, whereas the ones in the upper left are defined by a preference to prioritize state security/matters, but preventively. The two lower quadrants are defined by the same criteria, but here the individual...
citizen and/or company’s security matters are prioritized. Each mission task’s affiliation with its respective quadrant was shown on each card, but none of the respondents was told this ahead of the deselection, and none figured the groupings out.

A special remark should be made about the mission tasks in Quadrant 3: “Preventive actions with focus on the individual”. Some of the questions can be understood as relating to reactive actions. This could be the case for a large, powerful state that may feel compelled to react (e.g., in order not to lose face). But the questions should be seen as relating to a small state’s (namely, Denmark’s) perspective, where none of the seven situations alluded to represents a clear and immediate threat to the existence of the state; no matter how much some politicians may assert the contrary. Thus, for a small state, without the capability to change international outcomes on its own, all of the questions in Quadrant 3, are to be seen as actions of choice, not imminent imperatives due to, for example, superpower obligations. These actions are therefore accordingly viewed as preventive in character.

Finally, a number of questions were asked about the respondents’ opinions on specific issues concerning special operations. These questions were aimed at examining the general personal and political lenses they utilized in their decision processes. The aim of this was to qualify their priorities of deselection further. This questionnaire can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You are a member of the Foreign Policy Committee/ Defence Committee (name the appropriate term). How many years have you been engaged in foreign policy/defense matters, (i.e., has this been an area of interest formally or informally)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which roles/positions of a foreign/defense policy character have you held in your party?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to your opinion, are there any mission tasks which have not been mentioned and which you would add, when considering the use of SOF, either domestically or abroad?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Now, I would like to talk about the knowledge that you think should be available to you and your peers before you can reach decisions in foreign/defense policy matters related to special operations. What kind of information do you need; are you able to obtain it and how do you do so?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you consider special operations as an instrument with special</td>
<td></td>
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<td>circumstances/requirements regarding legitimacy or legality?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Are special operations more difficult to use than other (military) tools</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>when it comes to international law and conventions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>If one establishes a distinction between criminals and terrorists, does</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>that change your views?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you see a difference between operations legitimized by the UN/OSCE –</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>and a “coalition of the willing”, where a super power or a great power</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>decides to take action?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A non-governmental organization (NGO) – where would you place them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the vertical axis?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>If Denmark is to employ special operations, as some of the mission</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>tasks/roles indicate, it will require a real-time, actively strategic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leadership. Do you see yourself and/or your peers capable of exercising</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>competent and active strategic leadership?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Execution of Interviews

The interviews generally lasted 45-90 minutes. The longest interviews occurred when respondents took their time or were uncertain of the particular deselection of a task, or in a few cases, where the respondent showed particular interest in the topic and wanted more information about special operations from the interviewer.

The interviews were conducted strictly in adherence to the same scheme. First, the interviewer introduced the background for the survey; then, the respondent was asked to deselect half of the 28 possible special operation tasks according to how relevant he/she considered them. Then the respondent was asked to deselect half of the remaining 14 tasks according to the same rule. Finally, the respondent was asked to prioritize the remaining seven tasks according to their level of importance. Some respondents tried to seek advice or support for their considerations; this was expressly but diplomatically refused or averted with non-committal answers.

Then the interview returned to the first 14 deselected mission tasks and the respondent was asked to select those he/she would not accept, regardless of any imaginable circumstance. The respondent was then asked to explain his/her choices.

This was repeated with the second group of deselected mission tasks. In this case, all respondents saw these tasks as some they would support, and they were then asked to comment on why they saw these as less important.
than the final group of seven tasks, and, if possible, whether they could imagine circumstances where these would rise to the highest prioritized mission tasks.

Subsequently, the group of the seven highest priorities was discussed. At this stage of the interview, the respondents were told about the quadrants and were asked to explain their preferences.

Finally, a number of questions were asked about the respondents’ opinions on specific issues concerning special operations. The questions can be found in table Z.

The Danish Political Landscape – Selection of Respondents
In order to explain and contextualize the survey data, the Danish political landscape has to be examined briefly. The use of strategic special operations is new in Danish policy; as special operations have mostly been used tactically as part of the Army’s or Navy’s operations. Thus, an official Danish policy in this context is yet to be considered and formed. This fact indicates that individual politicians should be preferred as respondents rather than asking the respective political parties, so as to obtain an adequate survey foundation. According to the constitution, all members of parliament are to be bound by their personal beliefs and not by any directive from their voters – and in extension of this, not by their party membership.

Power Distribution in the Danish Political System and Current Parliamentary Setting
Of essential relevance to the survey is Section 19 of the Danish constitution, which explicates that the use of military force against any foreign state, except for the defense of Danish territory or Danish Forces, is not allowed without the consent of the parliament: the “Folketinget”. If the Folketinget is not in session, it must forthwith be recalled.

The parliamentary foundation for this paper is based on the 2015 general elections (June 18, 2015). Unless the current minority government is voted down, the next general elections are due no later than the June 17,

(79) All interviews were recorded on Dictaphone and transcribed to written Danish by an intern, who was otherwise not involved in the project. All citations come from this transcription. The intern also recorded all choices from the respondents.
(80) Section 56 of the Constitution (in Danish: Grundloven).
2019, which defines a stable parliamentary foundation for this particular survey. The current Folketinget consists of 179 members in nine parties from continental Denmark, two members from the Faroe Islands, and two members from Greenland.\textsuperscript{81}

The Folketinget chooses MPs to form a Foreign Policy Committee, which normally includes representation from all political parties, and with which the Government must seek council before any major foreign and defense policy decision. This committee is the key forum in which discussions about the specific use of special operations outside of Denmark take place.

In the contemporary parliamentary setting, the Foreign Policy Committee consists of 17 permanent members from all nine parties. Thus, the members of this Committee are essential respondents for this survey. Due to this committee’s central role in national crisis management, all members have an appointed alternate. The central role of this committee is underlined by the fact that all parties’ top leaders are members of it.

Another of the Folketinget’s 31 committees is of central importance for this project: The Defence Committee, which currently consists of 29 permanent members from all nine parties. The Defence Committee is the body in which the long-term development of the specific Defence capacity, including the future development of the Special Operations Command, is determined. The Defence Committee does not use alternates.

\textbf{Specific Objects of Analysis}

Summing up the previous section, these two committees amount to a total of 46 potential respondents, not including alternates. Within the resources available for the survey, 46 potential interviews were not manageable, even though this representation would be optimal. Another adequate respondent selection has to be chosen.

\textsuperscript{81} Members from the Faroe Islands and Greenland normally do not participate in international policy discussions, as their countries have extensive state-like autonomy. They are not included in this survey.
In addition to the above-mentioned representation in the two key committees, all political parties have appointed a subject-matter spokesperson. All of these are represented in each of the two committees, meaning there are 18 (2x9) in all. Two members are their party’s spokesperson in both committees, which cuts down the number of potential respondents to 16. These two spokespersons are counted in with double weighting in accordance with their explicit statements that they would give identical answers in both committees.

Out of the 16 respondents, two declined to participate, citing time constraints, but 14 made themselves available.

It can be ascertained that 88.9% of the key political players of the two key committees determining the possible use of Danish SOF participated in the survey. The only key foreign and defense policy players missing were the prime minister and his foreign affairs and defense ministers, who were not approached, as they were deemed inaccessible.

Outcome and Findings
As mentioned in the beginning, the result and findings are currently being analyzed. The intention is to produce a peer-reviewed article, which hopefully will be published in an appropriate publication in the first half of 2017. Dr. Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen has offered her assistance and will co-author the paper.

Our effort to convert the data into a universally useful article appears very promising, as we want to make the Danish case useful to other nations, and make our survey design open for others to utilize, thereby hopefully gaining a broader international understanding of the political masters’ opinions and views on special operations.

(82) The members of respectively the Foreign Policy Committee and the Defence Committee are normally representatives of their respective political parties. If they should be in disagreement with their parties in vital matters, the parties are free to replace them with another member. This means that interviews with these committee members would be representative of the individual parties in the entire Folketinget, thus possibly also representative for the outcome of a given discussion about the use of special operations.
References
NSHQ (NATO Special Operations Headquarters) (2012), Special Operations Forces Study.
Closing remarks

Major General Jørgen Høll
Commander of the Danish Special Operations Command

I wish to make one important point: during a long career as a military professional, you occasionally meet people, who distinguish sharply between “thinkers” and “doers.”

To me this distinction is false. For SOF, in particular, thinking and doing should go hand in hand.

A high level of tactical skill is indispensable. But so is mental agility and flexibility, and these ideas have been part of the inspiration for the theme of the conference and its proceedings presented in this anthology.

We need to continuously challenge ourselves to think of new means and methods to stay ahead of complex and dynamic threats to our security and democracy. We need to expose ourselves to people who think differently and people who bring different experiences to the table. Once we get stuck in a specific way of doing things, we become transparent, predictable, and much less effective than we ought.

Our collaboration with RDDC, in the research project previously described, is one way in which we try to challenge ourselves to keep on our toes.

This conference and its proceedings, which provide many interesting perspectives from partner nations and from individuals from outside of the SOF community, serves the same goal.
Special operations forces have been characterized as uniquely suited to match the current security environment of increasingly diverse, complex, and dynamic threats. With the Danish Defense Agreement of 2014, Denmark joined the ranks of some of its closest allies and established a Special Operations Command to oversee the development and deployment of Danish special operations. Yet, how exactly should Western special operations develop to stay abreast with evolving threats and which possibilities and challenges come with the establishment of dedicated special operations commands?

This anthology is the result of a research project providing international interdisciplinary perspectives on special operations forces, based on three main themes:

- Leading and organizing for strategic effect
- Professional entrepreneurship and self-perceptions in special operations forces
- Political and popular perceptions of special operations forces

About the editor
Gitte Højstrup Christensen holds a bachelor’s degree in Global studies and Cultural Encounters and a MSc in Global Studies from Roskilde University, specializing in international security, global private security, security politics and military interventions. She is a project coordinator and consultant at the Institute for Strategy at the Royal Danish Defence College (RDDC). Her work at RDDC focuses on analyzing the strategic effect of special operations and special operations forces, and she is involved in research projects and publications, developed in close cooperation with international partners and the Danish Special Operations Command.