

# Special operation forces (sof): the war on terrorism thesis sample

[Law](#), [Security](#)



## **Abstract**

US Special Operation Forces (SOF) are elite military units affiliated to the United States of America with the ability to conduct a wide range of land, water and air missions behind the enemy lines under the U. S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) commandant. Currently USSOCOM has deployed over 12000 of its 33000 special operators across the world half of whom are in Afghanistan and the remaining in 70 odd countries.

The US SOF has the following strategic roles as mandated by congress and the department of defense in the fight against the war on terror. Foreign internal defense which enables nations to attain the capacity required to provide their own internal security. Counterinsurgency which neutralizes insurgents by influencing the hearts and minds of the population. Counter terrorism which involves the offensive mission to “ prevent, deter, preempt and respond to terrorism”. Unconventional warfare which is the use of irregular forces to secure a nation’s interests in a region.

Conventional forces are still relevant because they are not only a necessity in the new world order but also a crucial component of natural disaster management.

- Introduction

US Special Operation Forces (SOF) are elite military units affiliated to the United States of America with the ability to conduct a wide range of land, water and air missions behind the enemy lines. Special Forces are relatively new in the military doctrine and with the emerging security threats in the 21st these units are clearly still in the defining themselves. In the year 1987, Congress brought together all the special operations units under the banner

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of a newly formed U. S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) at the chagrin of many within the military. In addition to this, Congress also created a new posing in Pentagon meant to provide policy and resource support to SOF; assistant secretary of defense for special operations/low-intensity conflict. Currently, the US SOF boasts 66, 594 civilian and uniformed personnel. Of the aforementioned number, over thirty-three thousand are special operators. At any particular time, over 12, 000 special operators are usually in deployment; half of them in Afghanistan and the randomly deployed in 70 countries across the globe. USSOCOM plans to have about 71, 000 SOF personnel under its command by 2015. This of course is subject to budgetary allocations.

Under U. S. law (Title 10, Section 167) and military doctrine (Joint publication 3-05), SOF are mandated to conduct a wide variety of operations spanning from counter terrorism to intelligence and civil affairs missions. Due to the classified nature of their missions, most Americans and the rest of the world are only aware of a couple of high profile missions conducted by the Special Forces. At any particular time, the SOF should be prepared to conduct missions that involve the following core eleven activities: counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, counter proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, foreign internal defense, security force assistance, unconventional warfare, direct action, special reconnaissance, information operations, military information support operations, and civil affairs operations. These operations can be broadly categorized into either surgical strikes (direct unilateral operations) or special warfare (indirect joint operations) missions.

- Special Operation Forces: Strategic Roles

The strategic roles of the US SOF can be broadly categorized into two; surgical strikes and special warfare operations. Surgical strikes can be defined as direct approach missions that involve unilateral, precise and lethal operations based on focused intelligence and interagency cooperation. Special warfare on the other hand refers to joint missions involving empowering of allied nations, providing support to aid agencies and engaging the general population. Whilst surgical strikes have immediate results, they are often supported by special warfare whose long-term objective is to increase allies' support. It must be mentioned that the strategic roles of the SOF span persuasion, influence and lethal operations. The eleven core activities and operations that the SOF are mandated to conduct include counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, counter proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, foreign internal defense, security force assistance, unconventional warfare, direct action, special reconnaissance, information operations, military information support operations, and civil affairs operations.

#### - Foreign Internal Defense (FID)

Foreign Internal Defense (FID) simply refers to the participation of US military and civilian agencies in the action programs of its allies to protect its citizenry from insurgency, terrorism and other latent threats to national security. These programs are aimed at ensuring that host nations develop comprehensive internal defense and development (IDAD) strategies to protect themselves from security threats. His concept emerged post the Vietnam War. The major objectives of SOF in FID are to organize, train, advise, assist, and improve the tactical and technical proficiency of the HN

forces. As a matter fact due to its superior specialized skills and capacity, USSOCOM is the only legislatively mandated combat commandant to conduct FID missions. SOF FID missions enable ally nations to attain the capacity required to provide their own internal security.

#### - Counterinsurgency (COIN)

Counterinsurgency is the concerted and collaborative effort by both civilian and military forces to restore normalcy to a political region by neutralizing an insurgency and its root causes. The aim of COIN is to reinforce the legitimacy and effectiveness of a government via political, economic and informational apparatuses while minimizing the grasp of the insurgency on the general populace. Equipped with military, paramilitary and civilian skills, the SOF are best placed to influence the hearts and minds in hostile nations plagued by insurgents thereby restoring the legitimacy of a government. This is in line with the shift in military doctrine towards a leaner and meaner force. In addition to neutralizing insurgents, SOF personnel are also involved in future stability operations post COIN.

#### - Combating Terrorism

These refer to offensive missions to “ prevent, deter, preempt and respond to terrorism”. Some of the missions that the SOF conduct to combat terrorism involve but are not limited to intelligence operations; systematic and coordinated attacks against terror cells and their infrastructure; hostage rescue operations; the recovery of sensitive material, information and weaponry from terrorist networks; and information and psychological operations aimed at neutralizing terrorist organizations and their ideologies by advancing attitudes and behaviors that are pro US interests.

### - Unconventional Warfare (UW)

Unconventional warfare refers to military operations conducted by, with or through unorthodox forces in support of a resistance movement, an insurgency or even regular military operations. This involves a wide range of military and paramilitary operations. Some of these operations include the following: guerrilla warfare, subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities, and unconventional assisted hostage rescue among others. Conventionally, UW missions are usually used to overthrow hostile regimes however in modern times; these operations have also been instrumental in neutralizing international terrorist organizations and non-state actors.

### - Rethinking the Strategy of using Conventional Forces

With regards to the complex nature of emerging security threats and their dynamic nature, it is clear that Special Operations Forces are the future. This does not however imply that conventional forces have become obsolete. Despite the fact conventional war is obsolete, conventional forces still remain relevant. This is because they core principals of war have remained static; forcing one side to succumb to another's interests. This implies that the changing characteristics of war based on historical and social circumstances aren't enough to render conventional forces irrelevant for the following reasons.

Most opponents of conventional forces insist the threats to national security have changed radically from aggression to nonaggression. This doesn't eliminate the need of conventional forces in any way. This is so mainly because enforcement of the nonaggressive rules of war requires a conventional force ready for decisive military action against the opposing

forces. This is especially the case given the battlespace is expanding exponentially by the day. It is however clear that for conventional forces to survive the future wave of security threats, they must embrace sophisticated technologies, rapid response and they must be lean and highly mobile. In addition to this, gone are the days when global security issues were dealt with independently. Regional integration and global interdependence are growing by the day. This has created conflict resolution as an alternative to war. Global peacekeeping and peacemaking efforts require a conventional force as opposed to SOF. This is because security, political and economic issues are becoming increasingly shared. The diffusion rates of democracy and democratic rights, free market capitalism, and human rights activism among other transnational issues has been phenomenal. True the conventional forces on their own are insufficient in combating challenges posed by a global community but nevertheless they are still a necessity. Finally one of the leading threats to national security today is natural disasters. Conventional forces have proved handy especially in the field of natural disaster management and preparedness. Involvement of the conventional forces in disaster management and especially relief efforts has grown over the past two decades. The increasing involvement of conventional forces in disaster management is partly due to the prevalence in natural catastrophic events and partly due to the dynamic shift in threats to national security. The involvement of conventional forces in disaster management is bound to increase over the years if the current trends are anything to go by.

- COIN vs. FID

The use of COIN in the fight against terrorism makes more sense compared to the use of FID. This is because COIN incorporates every aspect of FID in addition to being based on the philosophy of infiltrating the hearts and the minds of the host nation's population. Institutionalizing American interests in ally and hostile nation is not enough to guarantee victory against the war on terrorism and emerging security threats. Institutional capacity must be complimented by social capacity. Failure to do so the ultimate result shall be having a scenario whereby world class hardware is powered by inferior software. Based on this premise it's clear the COIN has upper hand over FID. However the best case scenario involves the use of both approached to secure US interests as it was done in Iraq and Afghanistan.

#### - Conclusions

Despite the fact most of current and future security threats shall best be dealt with by the SOF, conventional forces are still a necessity to the US. However it's imperative that the conventional forces be structured so that they are astride with the dynamic nature of emerging security threats. Finally the US military doctrine should lean towards COIN rather than FID because the latter targets the weakest link in the fight against terrorism; the hearts and the minds of the people.

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