

CANSOFCOM BATTLE LABORATORY

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE:

THE INVISIBLE HAND OF SOF IN AFGHANISTAN

COLONEL BERND HORN



THE CANSOFCOM BATTLE LABORATORY

MISSION

The mission of the Canadian Forces Special Operations Force Command (CANSOFCOM) Battle Laboratory is to assist with the development of Canadian Special Operations Forces (CANSOF) theory, doctrine, strategic analysis and special operations forces (SOF) best practices to enable CANSOF professional development, as well as to shape future CANSOF roles, tasks and capabilities.

VISION

The vision of the CANSOFCOM Battle Laboratory is to be a key enabler to headquarters, units and special operations task forces as an intellectual centre of excellence for SOF theory, doctrine, professional development, strategic analysis and SOF best practices.

ROLE

The CANSOFCOM Battle Laboratory is designed to provide additional capacity to:

1. develop the cognitive capacity of CANSOF personnel;
2. access subject matter advice on diverse subjects from the widest possible network of scholars, researchers, subject matter experts, institutions and organizations as required;
3. provide additional research capacity as required;
4. assist in the development of Command doctrine; and
5. assist with the research and implementation of SOF best practices and concepts to ensure that CANSOFCOM remains relevant and progressive so that CANSOF maintain their position as the domestic force of last resort and the international force of choice for the Government of Canada.

**MORE THAN
MEETS THE EYE**

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Canadian Defence Academy Press
PO Box 17000 Stn Forces
Kingston, Ontario K7K 7B4

Produced for the Canadian Defence Academy Press
by 17 Wing Winnipeg Publishing Office.
WPO30677

Monograph 1: More than Meets the Eye: The Invisible Hand of SOF in Afghanistan

CANSOFCOM Battle Laboratory Monograph Series Editor: Dr. Emily Spencer

CANSOFCOM Battle Laboratory Publications are produced in cooperation with CDA Press.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Horn, Bernd, 1959-
More than meets the eye : the invisible hand of SOF in Afghanistan / Bernd Horn.

Produced for the Canadian Defence Academy Press by 17 Wing Winnipeg Publishing Office.

Issued by: Canadian Defence Academy.

Available also on the Internet.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-100-18390-9

Cat. no.: D2-275/2011E

1. Canada. Canadian Special Operations Forces Command. 2. Canada--Armed Forces--Afghanistan. 3. Afghan War, 2001- --Participation, Canadian. 4. Special forces (Military science)--Canada. I. Canadian Defence Academy II. Canada. Canadian Armed Forces. Wing, 17 III. Title. IV. Title: Invisible hand of SOF in Afghanistan.

DS371.412 H67 2011

958.104'7

C2011-980054-3

Printed in Canada.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2



CANADIAN DEFENCE ACADEMY PRESS



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FOREWORD

I am delighted to introduce the first monograph produced by the Canadian Forces Special Operations Command (CANSOFCOM) Battle Laboratory, which is designed to act as an enabler to CANSOFCOM headquarters, units and Special Operations Task Forces as an intellectual centre of excellence for professional development and Special Operations Forces (SOF) theory. In addition, it also provides extra capacity to assist with strategic analysis and doctrine development when required. Its “virtual” nature represents our desire to harness external experts and thinkers to assist us in pushing the boundaries of our everyday focus, which out of necessity must deal with the realities of the world we live in day-to-day.

I have repeatedly stressed that the strength of SOF lies in the quality of their members. Therefore, we are committed to enabling their success. This entails devoting time and resources to the pursuit of professional development, which is the primary focus of the CANSOFCOM Battle Laboratory. Another key role is to assist with the cognitive development of CANSOFCOM personnel.

As such, monographs, such as this one, although they do not necessarily represent the views of the Canadian Forces or CANSOFCOM, do provide insights and perspectives on special operations forces in general, and from time to time, CANSOF in particular. They will become key to the development of a distinct Canadian SOF body of knowledge. They will also help to increase Canadian awareness and comprehension of special operations forces.

In closing, this pilot publication is an important step in the continuing evolution and maturation of CANSOFCOM. It is not only a vehicle for self-development of personnel within the Command, but it is also a means of informing decision-makers, military members and the Canadian public with regards to their CANSOF – a national capability that warrants understanding.

D. Michael Day
Brigadier-General
Commander
CANSOFCOM

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE: THE INVISIBLE HAND OF SOF IN AFGHANISTAN

The past three decades have not been kind to the concepts of trust and blind faith. A continuous stream of scandals and malfeasance by senior corporate executives and politicians, and a seeming abrogation of responsibility and accountability by such trusted vestiges/institutions as the church, police and military, to name a few, have left most citizens with a healthy dose of cynicism and scepticism. For most, the adage “I’ll believe it when I see it” rings true. But is it?

For special operations forces (SOF) in the Afghanistan theatre of operations (ATO) this concept is problematic as most of their operations are veiled in a cloak of secrecy.¹ Moreover, generally the only information that trickles out is negative, deals with allegations of wanton violence and huge collateral damage, and is often tinged with nuances of “black op” forces running wild with little oversight or control.

The truth about SOF, however, is far from the widespread speculation by those who in fact have little understanding of SOF roles or actions. Although their effects are not always readily apparent or publicly touted, SOF are an important enabler in the ATO.² SOF were among the first forces on the ground after the terrorist attack on 11 September 2001 (9/11) and were instrumental in driving the Taliban and Al-Qaeda (AQ) from Afghanistan in 2001/2002. They have continually adapted and evolved their roles since then, with great success, to meet the requirement of the theatre. Although not widely known, SOF act as the invisible hand that provides campaign winning results to the ATO.

SOF's pivotal influence in Afghanistan was apparent from the very beginning. On the morning of 11 September 2001, millions watched their television screens, mesmerized as events unfolded in New York City. In the early dawn hours, a passenger jet had ploughed into the top stories of the World Trade Center (WTC) in the financial core of the city. As most were still trying to absorb what had happened, a second large commercial airliner came into view and slammed into the twin tower of the WTC. It would only be a short time later that both towers collapsed and crumpled to the ground, killing almost 3,000 people. A third aircraft crashed into the Pentagon, killing and injuring hundreds more, while a fourth hijacked jetliner heading for Washington D.C. smashed into the ground in Pennsylvania short of its objective due to the bravery of its passengers.

Within days of 9/11, it was clear that the Americans would take military action to strike at the terrorists who were behind the well planned and coordinated attacks, and those that supported and abetted them. Osama Bin Laden and his AQ terrorist organization, sheltered in Afghanistan by Mullah Omar and his Taliban government, quickly became the centre of attention.³

On 7 October, after ensuring the necessary political groundwork was laid, the United States (U.S.) and the United Kingdom informed the United Nations (UN) Security Council that they were taking military action in self-defence, specifically that they were undertaking operations to strike at AQ and Taliban terrorist camps, as well as their training and military installations in Afghanistan. That day, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) commenced with the heavy bombing of Taliban bases and infrastructure throughout the country, as well as 50,000 Taliban troops outside of Kabul manning the frontlines against the Northern Alliance (NA), a loose coalition of Afghan forces that were opposed to the Taliban. In addition, the Americans deployed Central Intelligence Agency

(CIA) paramilitary forces and U.S. SOF, who, working in conjunction with the NA anti-Taliban resistance movement, quickly launched an offensive to oust the Taliban from Afghanistan and capture Bin Laden and his associates.

In an extremely short period of time, approximately 300 American Special Forces (SF) soldiers were on the ground in Afghanistan.⁴ These operators rallied and forged cohesive teams out of the unorganized anti-Taliban opposition groups and equally as important, using a small amount of high-tech targeting equipment, brought the weight of American airpower down on Taliban and AQ fighters. Approximately four weeks of bombing finally achieved the necessary effect. On 9 November 2001, the NA, who were supported by U.S. SF and CIA operatives, as well as American air support, broke through the Taliban lines at Mazar-e-Sharif. The Taliban collapsed and were totally routed.⁵

Within the next three days all of northern, western and eastern Afghanistan fell to the NA and their U.S. SF partners. The remaining Taliban forces fled south to Kandahar, the birth place and headquarters of their movement. Throughout their retreat they were harassed and pounded by U.S. air power.⁶ On 5 December, Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, surrendered Kandahar and fled to Pakistan.

In total, it took only 49 days from the insertion of the first SF teams assigned to NA forces to the fall of Kandahar. After the collapse of the Taliban regime small SOF teams, composed of about a dozen personnel each, established outposts deep in territory still infested with Taliban and AQ hold-outs and continued to work with Afghan units against them. For example, Bin Laden, his senior AQ leadership and a large number of his forces dug-in at the Tora Bora mountains in eastern Afghanistan. However, a concerted U.S. offensive with a heavy SOF involvement forced them to abandon

their positions and flee to eastern Pakistan. By early 2002, the Taliban and AQ in Afghanistan were largely defeated. Military estimates put the Taliban losses at 8,000-12,000 men, representing approximately 20 percent of their total force. Additionally, they had twice that number of wounded, with a further 7,000 taken prisoner.⁷ In total, the estimates placed the Taliban total casualties at over 70 percent of their strength.

It should be no surprise that SOF played a critical role in this outcome. Their ability to respond so quickly and effectively was no revelation to those who actually understood SOF. After all, small teams of highly trained SOF operators working with indigenous forces have proven effective before. The addition of precision effects just made a good capability that much better. Nonetheless, despite tremendous losses, the Taliban continued to fight and the war in Afghanistan seemingly carried on unabated. This persistent threat underscored the enduring importance of SOF.

After all, SOF provide a self-contained, versatile and unique capability, whether employed alone or when complementing other forces or agencies to attain military strategic or operational objectives. In contrast to conventional forces, SOF are generally small, precise, adaptable and innovative. As a result, they can conduct operations in a clandestine, covert or discreet manner.⁸ They are capable of organizing and deploying rapidly and can gain entry to and operate in hostile or denied areas without the necessity of secured ports, airfields or road networks. In addition, they can operate in austere and harsh environments, and communicate worldwide with integral equipment. Moreover, they deploy rapidly at relatively low cost, with a low profile and have a less intrusive presence than larger conventional forces.

To fully understand SOF's capability and role, it is important to understand some basic SOF theory and precepts beginning with its actual definition. Special Operations Forces are 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.⁹

The key factor to SOF effectiveness, however, is in fact their people. SOF equip the operator rather than man the equipment. Selection and screening are fundamental principles of all SOF organizations. And, the individuals who are attracted to SOF, who volunteer and who are ultimately chosen to serve in SOF as a result of highly refined selection procedures and standards, are what provide the SOF edge – that is the key element for mission success. Quite simply, SOF organizations seek individuals who are:

1. *Risk Accepting* – individuals who are not reckless, but rather who 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. *Agile Thinkers* – individuals who 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 they embrace change as an inherent and important dynamic element in the evolution of organizations, warfare and society.
5. *Self-Reliant* – individuals who exercise professional military judgement 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 define 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 it becomes 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 professionals 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. *Eager for Challenge* – 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. *Naturally Orientated to the Pursuit of Excellence* – individuals who 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 have an unremitting emphasis on continually adapting, innovating and learning to achieve the highest possible standards of personal, tactical and operational proficiency and effectiveness.
8. *Relentless in their Pursuit of Mission Success* – Individuals who 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.
9. *Culturally Attuned* – Individuals who are warrior-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 government 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.¹⁰

Armed with exceptional individuals, as well as cutting-edge technology and equipment, SOF bring a wide range of kinetic and non-kinetic options to pre-empt, disrupt, react or shape operational or strategic effects within theatre.¹¹ Simply put, they provide a force or theatre commander with a wide range of capabilities not resident in conventional forces. They can:

1. Conduct surgical precision operations with lethal or non-lethal effects;
2. Deploy specially configured SOF task forces that tailor organizational design and force structure to meet the specific need of a mission or task;
3. Operate seamlessly in combined, joint, or integrated environments or force structures;
4. Infiltrate and extract from hostile or denied areas, and operate within those designated areas in an overt or clandestine manner;
5. Survive and operate in a variety of harsh and hostile environments for extended periods of time;
6. Operate in a self-sufficient manner for extended periods of time;
7. Bring expertise and influence to an area due to their level of cultural awareness, training and operational methodologies; and

8. Bring a dominance in command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) to the battle, providing informational superiority, which in turn allows for rapid decisive action that can shape an area of operation (AO).

Given this theoretical backdrop one can fully appreciate the dramatic effect that SOF has had in the ATO since 2001. Although not much has been heard of SOF's contribution or role, with the exception of some negative publicity,¹² since the early days following 9/11, SOF have remained a critical enabler, akin to an invisible hand that continues to evolve and transform itself to best conduct those key tasks that assist conventional operations and shape the ATO. Quite simply, SOF are a vital enabler for conventional force operations by providing indigenous capacity, force protection through host nation engagement and direct operations, and the destruction of enemy capability.

SOF achieves these effects by conducting a number of their doctrinal roles. Although each discrete task on its own creates impressive impact on the ATO, most of the tasks are actually mutually reinforcing and create a synergistic effect of immense proportion. For the sake of clarity, however, each contribution will be examined individually.

The first way that SOF contribute to the fight in Afghanistan is through their unconventional warfare (UW) role, which is defined as "military and paramilitary operations, normally of long duration, predominately conducted by indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source." UW "includes guerrilla warfare and often direct offensive, low visibility, cover, or clandestine operations, as well as the indirect activities of subversion, sabotage, intelligence gathering and escape and evasion."¹³

The original work with the Northern Alliance by U.S. SF post 9/11 was a classic example of UW. However, SOF continued to work with indigenous forces to create specialized strike platoons, companies and even battalions. These forces were normally superior in training, equipment and capability than their Afghan National Army (ANA) counterparts and provided great impact.

Once the Taliban were overthrown and an interim government established, later replaced by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA), SOF evolved to a more Security Force Assistance (SFA) role as opposed to classic UW. This second major function has also made a tremendous contribution to operations in the ATO. SFA, in accordance with U.S. doctrine, refers to “the unified action to generate, employ, and sustain local, host-nation, or regional security forces in support of a legitimate authority.”¹⁴ It basically involves the conduct of action programs, such as developing capacity within security agencies, military and/or police of another country, to assist them in protecting their society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency. The SFA role is an evolution of the former task of Foreign Internal Defence (FID).¹⁵ Not only does SFA lead to improved employment of Host Nation (HN) forces, it also enables SOF to develop strong networks of influence that assist them in effectively creating the desired operational effects.

This critical role has allowed SOF to build a more effective internal Afghan security capability. For instance, SOF have created a number of highly effective counter-terrorist forces and have worked closely with the National Directorate of Security (NDS) in sharing intelligence to conduct operations, as well as developing the NDS ability to assist with the concept of governance by improving its evidentiary capability to bring suspected terrorists and insurgents to trial and successful prosecution.

SFA has also been instrumental in developing additional HN capacity that in turn can more effectively prosecute the counter-insurgency (COIN) effort, provide basic security, enhance force protection and free up coalition forces for other more complex operations. For example, since 2008, SOF have trained Pakistani Frontier Corps troops, which are locally recruited paramilitary militia in the volatile Taliban infested Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).¹⁶ Despite continuing limitations, this has created some capability where arguably none existed before.

During this time period, SOF have also taken a key role in training the 10,000-strong police force that was established in villages across Afghanistan as part of Afghan President Hamid Karzai's decision to enhance the delivery of security through locally recruited "community watch" forces under the local defence initiative (LDI). This village stability program was one of SOF's highest priorities in theatre. This initiative not only creates additional forces and presence for the COIN fight, it also serves to connect remote villages to the Afghan government, thereby achieving not only tactical results but also strategic effects.

The impact of these initiatives has become readily visible. In the Zerkho Valley, in Herat Province, for example, there is reportedly a greater presence of people out and about in the villages and fields. Tribes who had previously not spoken to one another now attend shuras together to solve village problems. Moreover, the accompanying economic development has meant that fewer people need to travel to nearby Iran to work. The SOF efforts have been so successful that other villages have asked to be included in the program.¹⁷

SOF were also tasked to provide additional training to 40 per cent of Afghanistan's elite police force, the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP). In fact, SOF trained eight ANCOP *kandaks*

(i.e. battalions) and is partnered with four of them. The training and partnership directly results in lower attrition rates and greater effectiveness of the Afghan forces.¹⁸

Arguably, there is no bigger success than the SOF Commando program. The U.S. SF have created and partnered with a force actually called Afghan Commandos. Over the past three years, this force has become known “as Afghanistan’s premier direct action force, specializing in air assault missions that kill or capture insurgents.”¹⁹ The effort has had great effect. The first commandos trained formed the Afghan training cadre. From that point, Afghan commandos have trained other aspiring commandos, thereby increasing internal capacity. In addition, the commandos provide the Afghan face to SOF missions. Colonel Don Bolduc, a former commander of Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A) stated, “We’re using them effectively to insert into an area and be that first presence.” He added, “People wake up and they have commandos talking to them about security governance and development.”²⁰

In fact, Afghans have come to revere the Afghan Commandos. “People know that if the commandos come in, they’re not going to tear up the place,” observed one SOF officer.²¹ It is their reputation of professionalism and tactical aggression on the battlefield that has allowed the Commandos to create a strategic effect. The enemy fear them, not only as fierce fighters but also as proud representatives of the Afghan nation. Their reputation is such that they are known and respected by Afghans across the ATO. “The Commandos just bring confidence to the people,” asserted Lieutenant-Colonel Matt McFarlane, a senior U.S. commander in Wardak province. He explained, “They have trained orators who talk about the future and how we’re all going to do this together ... and the people walk away more confident in their army and their government.”²² As one government official noted, “having

Afghan soldiers of that level of competence, that level of performance, is the kind of thing that affects national will.”²³ This has only been enhanced as commandos are trained to become “full-spectrum units,” meaning they can communicate effectively with village and tribal elders and conduct humanitarian assistance missions, which complements their reputation as fierce warriors.

To date, 5,300 commandos in nine *kandaks* have graduated. The Afghan government intends to deploy 72 Afghan SF teams around the country to secure the rural tribal population. They will partner with U.S. SF in “village stability operations,” which have been nicknamed “precision counter-insurgency” operations. This follows the directive by General David Petraeus, Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), to “live with the people.”

The benefits of the SFA program go deep. On one level, SOF have created a larger and more effective national security force, which is desperately needed. However, on a much deeper level, they have strengthened the relationship between Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the Coalition. “We are working like brothers,” confirmed one Afghan Commando.²⁴ Moreover and arguably more important in the larger COIN context, SOF have enhanced governance by providing a direct link between the population and government/coalition troops.

This linkage is crucial, since as noted by Colonel Chris Kolenda, special assistant to the ISAF commander, “All problems in Afghanistan, or at least all social local problems, are solved at the community level. And so enfranchising communities with ownership in local governance, local security, localized development, will help bring communities together and help create the pressure and attraction to bring young men back into peaceful existence.”²⁵ Notably, SOF have been on the forefront of the battle of building

internal governance and credibility. “Our biggest problem isn’t caves; it’s credibility,” conceded General Mike Mullen, “Our messages lack credibility because we haven’t invested enough in building trust and relationships, and we haven’t always delivered on promises.”²⁶ SOF, however, have done far more than their share in building relationships.

Nonetheless, SOF energy has not been focused exclusively on winning hearts and minds. It has also proven significant in its direct support to conventional operations. First, it enables the COIN mantra of “clear-hold-build.” SOF are able to penetrate denied areas and shape follow-on action by a larger conventional force. For example, prior to a conventional “clearance,” SOF infiltrate the designated areas and conduct surgically precise direct-action missions to target enemy leadership capacity, as well as improvised explosive device (IED) networks. Although it does not eliminate all resistance, this precision strike function disrupts command and control, thereby lessening the enemy network’s ability to respond effectively.²⁷

A number of examples provide insight into the impact SOF operations generate. In September 2006, ISAF was involved in a major operation to expel a large Taliban force that had dug-in and was contesting the Pashmul area near Kandahar City. The enemy intent was to seize the city itself. In turn, ISAF launched Operation Medusa to destroy the concentration of Taliban forces. The task fell to the Multi-National Brigade (MNB), which was deployed in Kandahar Province.²⁸ The operation was ultimately successful, but owed a great deal of its success to SOF participation.

In direct support of the conventional operation were SOF forward air control (FAC) parties to assist with delivering air support to the battlefield. In addition, British SOF operated in the Regestan Desert to cut off the Taliban supply lines, as well as to interdict any

reinforcements coming from, or retreating enemy attempting to escape to, Pakistan.

Furthermore, U.S. Task Force (TF) 31 had the responsibility for screening the MNB's western flank.²⁹ As the operation unfolded, the brigade commander, Brigadier-General David Fraser, ordered TF-31 to move north into Sperwan Ghar at the same time as the conventional forces started clearance operations. The mission of TF-31 now changed from one of flank security to the task of disrupting the Taliban command and control node in Sperwan Ghar. As such, TF-31 entered into a fight that lasted over three days. Against superior numbers, TF-31 seized a key mountain from the Taliban, then held the position against concentrated attack. The coalition now owned the vital ground for the whole area. From this position they could observe the entire AO. The SF effort prompted the MNB operations officer to state, "That was one of the most profound acts of bravery I've seen since I've been over here." He elaborated, "about 24 American Special Forces soldiers, reinforced by an American rifle company, and some ANA actually took that feature from about 200 Taliban."³⁰

That night the Taliban attempted to retake the hill. The ensuing sustained battle lasting approximately four to five hours. However, close air support, mortar and artillery fire pummelled the enemy and by the end of the battle the Taliban were forced to stay on the north side of the river. They had given up their attempts to recapture the strategic mountaintop. The MNB headquarters estimated enemy casualties at 200 dead and approximately 300 wounded. Lieutenant-Colonel Shane Schreiber noted, "TF-31 had done the disrupt. They had completely dislocated the Taliban from that area."³¹

Captain Chris Purdy, a Canadian intelligence officer, summarized, "We had a concern that the enemy would try to flank us. And

indeed, I think they would have, had TF-31 not been there [in Sperwan Ghar – the western flank].” He stated, “They inflicted a significant number of kills in that area and that was one of the main enemy command and control nodes as well.” He assessed, “they cut off the head while we were dealing with the main body of fighters. And when that command and control started to get a little skewed the enemy decided to suck back.”³²

Additionally, other SOF elements targeted the AO and provided so much pressure, according to an American intelligence officer, that ultimately the enemy leadership was forced “to step onto the battlefield to lead their fighters, exposing themselves in ways they typically avoid.”³³ In the end, during this brief two week time span, five Taliban commanders were killed in action.

In the summer of 2010, the same approach was taken as the Taliban once again contested control of the Kandahar area with the GIRoA and coalition forces. Predictably, SOF deployed first to shape the battlespace for conventional operations. The latest battle for Kandahar was described almost universally by journalists and defence analysts as “the make-or-break offensive of the eight-and-half-year war.”³⁴ It is for that reason that the offensive was deliberately initiated by SOF. Utilizing intelligence driven operations, SOF carried out an extremely effective campaign to identify, isolate and remove local insurgent commanders. In a period of four months, SOF eliminated up to 70 mid-level commanders in order to shape the battlefield for conventional forces.³⁵

SOF also assist during actual operations. On a number of occasions SOF forces have been used to insert into blocking positions once Taliban forces have been engaged and fixed in order to prevent their escape.³⁶ Moreover, SOF assistance extends to better coordinating the efforts of conventional forces as well. In Shinkay District in Zabul province, a SF A-Team deployed to help in bringing

security to a population of 15,000 to 25,000 people spread out between 25 towns and villages where 300 ANA, an Afghan National Police (ANP) element and a company from the 82nd Airborne division were deployed. The SF team worked at knitting the disparate coalition forces together. They took over some of the training of the ANA and ANP allowing 82nd Airborne Division more freedom of movement to carry out operations. Additionally, they were successful in bringing the military elements and civilian components together. As a result, they built up cohesion, trust and confidence within the different players with remarkable results. One intelligence sergeant noted that the Taliban held little sway in the district since the SOF effort and "Now we're seeing the Taliban commanders fighting each other."³⁷

SOF also perform the necessary task of sanctuary disruption. Not surprisingly, insurgents who survive clearance operations escape to safe areas where they are able to refit, plan and train for future operations. Although it is not always possible to occupy these safe areas, SOF can effectively disrupt sanctuaries and deny the enemy the ability to prepare for future action unmolested. This sanctuary disruption function provides time and space for conventional forces to conduct their clear-build-hold operations.³⁸ For example, the 3 September 2008 Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) Angor Adda cross-border raid into Pakistan's FATA was the third such attack into a safe area.³⁹

Finally, Remote Area Operations (RAO) are yet another means of supporting conventional forces. In accordance with U.S. FM 3-05.202 *Foreign Internal Defense 2007*, RAO are operations undertaken in insurgent-controlled or contested areas to establish islands of popular support for the HN government and deny support to the insurgents. They are not designed to establish permanent HN government control over the area, since remote areas may be populated by ethnic, religious, or other isolated minority

groups, which may be located in the interior of the HN or near border areas where major infiltration routes exist. However, the intent is to deny the enemy freedom of movement and action. As such, RAO normally involve the use of specially trained paramilitary or irregular forces, which are supported by SOF teams with the aim of interdicting insurgent activity, destroying insurgent base areas in the remote area, and demonstrating to local populations that the HN government has not conceded control to the insurgents. RAO are also important for collecting and reporting information concerning insurgent intentions in more populated areas. These operations indirectly support conventional forces by providing intelligence, force protection and destruction of enemy capacity.

Another critical SOF contribution has been in the realm of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR). Although technology has increased exponentially in its capability and reach, even the newest most dynamic systems have their limitations. For example, during Operation Anaconda in March 2002, American and Afghan forces went into the Shah-i-Kot valley in Afghanistan ill-prepared and without the proper force structure because they had focused their available surveillance and target acquisition capabilities, including satellite imagery, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and signals intelligence, to develop the enemy situation. The failure of the technology to actually find and define the enemy positions meant that the light infantry forces that were inserted into the mountains were surprised. The Americans discovered that "a motivated and capable enemy had eluded detection requiring the force to develop the situation in close contact."⁴⁰ In fact, they had failed to detect the majority of the most important enemy fighting positions until the first arriving forces got out of their helicopters.⁴¹

Four years later, not much had changed. The MNB Commander, Brigadier-General Fraser, still lamented, "You don't ever have 100 per cent intelligence. Metaphorically speaking on a good day I would get 20 per cent."⁴² Moreover, the xenophobic, tribal nature of Afghan culture, compounded by fear of ruthless Taliban retaliation and language barriers makes generating human intelligence (HUMINT) difficult.

A further role SOF play in theatre to assist in developing the intelligence picture is that of "crime scene investigator." SOF comb for evidence after capturing or killing their targets and bring the data back to intelligence analysts who work with interrogators questioning the suspects. "Their teamwork," officials said, "speeds up the targeting of new terror suspects."⁴³

As such, SOF have become a critical enabler in assisting with filling in the intelligence gaps and thereby shaping operations across the ATO. This is critically important in a Contemporary Operating Environment (COE) that is almost entirely dependent on intelligence-driven operations. General David Petraeus has repeatedly underscored how SOF have assisted operations in the COE. "JSOC played a hugely significant role by killing or capturing many high-value targets as well as collecting valuable intelligence," he insisted.⁴⁴

In the end, SOF seriously degrade the effectiveness of the enemy, thereby assisting conventional forces in achieving their missions with less risk and fewer casualties as a result of their contribution to developing the intelligence profile. They achieve this through the efforts of small SOF teams conducting special reconnaissance and reporting on enemy movement, activities and/or dispositions. In addition, Special Operations Intelligence Cells that fuse information from multiple sources to provide actionable intelligence, as well as direct action teams that strike targets and immediately exploit information and leads that fall out of those missions, all

contribute to building and enhancing the overall intelligence picture of the enemy.

The final SOF contribution to be discussed is arguably the most important in outright impact on the ATO. It is direct action (DA), which is defined as “short duration strikes and other precise small-scale offensive actions conducted by special operation forces to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover or damage designated targets. Direct action differs from conventional offensive actions in the level of physical and political risk, operational techniques, and the degree of discriminate and precise use of force to achieve specific objectives.”⁴⁵

Not surprisingly, a U.S. Department of Defense official stated that SOF has become “the instrument of choice for kinetic activity.”⁴⁶ After all, SOF can effectively execute small surgical strikes over a vast geographical area, even in hostile or denied areas. In fact, the number of missions SOF have conducted has seen a spike in operation of 40 to 50 percent. “We’ve gone from 30-35 targeted operations a month in June 2009 now to about 1,000 a month,” asserted one NATO spokeswoman.⁴⁷ She went on to affirm that “more than 80 percent result in capture, and more than 80 percent of the time we capture a targeted individual or someone with a direct connection.”⁴⁸

The statistics are impressive and indicate the reliance on SOF, as well as the success. Between May and August 2010, SOF were operating at their highest tempo since entering the ATO, conducting approximately 3,000 missions.⁴⁹ From June to August 2010, JSOC alone has conducted over 500 missions. One senior official said that during this timeframe SOF “killed or captured 235 insurgent leaders, killed 1,066 insurgents and captured another 1,673.”⁵⁰ Similarly, according to NATO, from mid-September to mid-December 2010, SOF “launched 1,784 missions that killed or captured 880 insurgent leaders in Afghanistan” and “the raids also killed

384 lower-level fighters and captured 2,361 more insurgents.”⁵¹ Undeniably, this degree of devastation of an enemy’s command and control network has a tremendous impact on the ATO.

The actual DA missions, however, have several distinct purposes. DA strikes can be critical to conducting hostage rescue and/or combat search and rescue missions, among others. To date a large number of reporters, aid workers, businessmen and even some soldiers have been kidnapped or captured. The resultant recovery action often falls heavily to SOF. For example on 20 August 2008, as they were on their way back from a funeral, an American businessman and his Afghan partner were kidnapped in Wardak Province. They were taken and held in a mud hut in a remote mountain range in Afghanistan and moved around frequently. The American was held for two months by members of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar of the Hezb-i-Islami militant group.

The SOF task force was able to locate the hostage by using a variety of information collection measures, but rescue had to be conducted in very “treacherous terrain.” Nonetheless, on the night of 14/15 October 2008, three Chinook helicopters flew approximately 30 soldiers into the remote mountains and dropped them approximately three miles from the objective. They successfully rescued the hostage. According to one ISAF official, “It was an overwhelming success.”⁵²

Another case was Linda Norgrove, the British NGO aid worker who was kidnapped on 26 September 2010, when her car was forced off the road in Kunar Province near the Pakistan border. She too was taken to a stronghold in a steep-sided valley 8,000 feet up in the mountains. Her attempted rescue was done by SOF who fast-roped right onto the objective. Unfortunately, she was killed in the rescue attempt.⁵³

These are just two examples. SOF have had their hand in many more missions that were planned and/or conducted. In short, only SOF have the expertise, skills and capabilities to exercise such high risk operations in hostile, denied and treacherous terrain.

Although hostage rescue and combat search and rescue are important roles for demonstrating governmental and national control and governance, as well as providing support to one's citizens and soldiers, all which are important for morale and national pride, no DA task is more important to operations in the ATO than capture or kill missions targeting enemy commanders. As such, there is a SOF philosophy that tries to maintain pressure on enemy commanders to the point that they have no rest or respite, thereby forcing them to constantly be on the move, to sleep in a different location every night, and to bed down in fields or other inhospitable areas to avoid detection and capture.

This intent is based on command direction. For instance former Canadian Chief of the Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier, declared, "What we want to do is take out the commanders who are engaged in orchestrating, facilitating, paying, leading, planning and driving folks to attack us or attack the Afghans or attack the innocent." He added, "And our special forces are focused very much on that. ... I said, during a recent speech, that we had removed from the battlefield six commanders who were responsible for the deaths of 21 Canadian soldiers." Hillier explained, "Well that's changed. We've removed seven commanders who have been responsible for the deaths of 27 soldiers."⁵⁴

Similarly, one senior NATO official explained, "If you hit a network hard enough, you'll wind up taking out the mid-level leaders. The senior leaders who are sitting across the border [in Pakistan] are now faced with a choice: how do they reconstruct what's been

taken apart and motivate those who are left?"⁵⁵ A senior SOF officer echoed those sentiments. "The mid-level leaders' arrival in Afghanistan presents us with targets," he observed, "What you really want to do is you want the network to start eating itself from within, you want the dissension, you want folks deciding, 'Hey, this just isn't worth it.'"⁵⁶

There is reason to believe SOF have had this effect. Canadian scholars studying counter-insurgency operations in Kandahar have noted that SOF operations targeting Taliban leadership in 2007 created a lack of cohesion, coordination and planning in enemy activities, which resulted in poor command and control. Not surprisingly, enemy operations were therefore less effective.

The SOF pressure has been maintained ever since. For instance, SOF have hit the Haqqani network very hard. Some mid-level Haqqani leaders are abandoning what had been their Pakistani safe haven and returning to Afghanistan, in part out of a desire to throw the CIA and its lethal drones off their trail but also "because their networks are taking a battering over in Afghanistan, and other folks need to come in and start fixing that or dealing with gaps that have been created by folks that have been detained or folks that have been killed."⁵⁷

The effect has been wide ranging. In Kabul, one NATO official proclaimed, "The ISAF SOF has just ripped them [Kabul Attack Network] apart. There have been very, very few attacks inside of Kabul because of ISAF SOF."⁵⁸ To the south in Kandahar Province, a Canadian battle group commander noted the impressive effect SOF had on his area of operations. "The SOF strikes had a chilling effect on the Taliban. In one strike they killed an important leader and 16 of his fighters. The Taliban leadership in Kandahar City felt a lot of pressure from SOF. They were moving every day so we saw a reduction in activity. They were being disrupted – they were

on the move, on the run.”⁵⁹ Moreover, a group of scholars who studied the Canadian sector determined:

*Insurgent operations in 2007 were increasingly characterized by lack of co-ordination and poor planning, which could be attributed to the growing effectiveness of ISAF's Special Operations Forces (SOF). SOF units from all ISAF contributor nations in the south were pooled for the task of arresting known bombmaking cell leaders, drug lords, and a legal case prepared for their arrest, Canadian (and other ISAF) SOF troops would be deployed to apprehend the suspect. As often as not, if the target was a Tier 1 Taliban leader, he would try to shoot his way out, with predictable results. Consequently, Taliban command-and-control capacity in the south in 2007 was less effective than the previous fall.*⁶⁰

Finally, increased operational tempo by SOF over the past year has begun to bite into the insurgent network in the central part of Helmand province as well. U.S. intelligence has tracked a breakdown in regular communications between local commanders in Helmand and their leadership in Quetta.⁶¹

There is also anecdotal evidence according to officials that “resentment is building in the midlevel ranks of the Taliban, aimed at the top commanders who are safely ensconced in Quetta or in the North Waziristan area of Pakistan.”⁶² Additionally, Nick Vickers, the assistant secretary of defense for special operations/low intensity conflict, revealed that over the last year although “al-Qaeda’s senior leadership is reconstituted, to some degree, in Pakistan, they have suffered significant setbacks.” He explained, “if you look at the number of al-Qaeda leadership and, more importantly, operatives, part of its network, that have been lost to the organization in the past year, I think it could be characterized

as a pretty significant disruption to their ability to plan and operate.”⁶³ This was direct result of SOF action.

Another Pentagon official, while not providing numbers of AQ killed, conceded “it is significant.” With regard to insurgent losses, he added, “It is having an effect on direct [AQ] operatives, it is altering behaviour and we’re certain that it impacts direct AQ operatives or those that are immediately involved in facilitating their operations or their safe havens.” He reinforced that “there is an altered pattern of behaviours that is being tracked through multiple other organizations in the government.”⁶⁴

The Australian perspective is comparable. Major-General Jim Molan expressed that Australian SOF contribution to the ATO is concentrated mainly on anti-leadership operations in the area where most of the population lives and where most of the Taliban activity occurs. He reported that the disruptive effect is reportedly “huge.”⁶⁵

To provide a final level of granularity to the issue, on 9 October 2009, SOF killed Ghulam Yahya Akbari the so-called “Tajik Taliban” commander who, together with his two sons, had carried out a reign of terror across parts of western Afghanistan. After his two sons were killed, Yahya became even more relentless in his prosecution of suicide and rocket attacks into the Herat Airfield. One journalist noted SOF conducted “a very effective man-hunting campaign against him, and it eventually paid off. When he was killed it was like the weight of the world was taken off a couple of fairly large swaths of people. The prices of foodstuffs went down in certain bazaars and markets out there because Yahya was jacking them up...More bazaars opened up. And then, of course, once this sort of weight of intimidation came off of the shoulders of these people, many of the fighters said ‘I’m done.’ As a result of the coalition killing a guy who acted as though

he was invincible ...somewhere between a hundred and 200 fighters [have given up].”⁶⁶ By anyone’s account, that is very significant.

Finally, the last DA function, which is equally as important as capturing or killing enemy commanders, and is often intertwined with that task, is the disruption of IED networks.⁶⁷ SOF DA raids targeting IED networks, whether their leadership, facilitators, financiers, logistical coordinators or bomb makers also make a significant contribution to the COIN fight in the ATO. For that reason, General Petraeus, has made SOF the “pointy end” of the anti-IED fight. “Certainly you want to protect the force,” he noted, “by killing or capturing those at the point of planting the IED, but what you really want to do is go after the network.”⁶⁸ Their effect, as described above, has been significant. In the end, for every DA precision strike that nets commanders, facilitators, financiers, logistic coordinators or bomb makers, SOF have taken a bite out of the insurgency and saved lives.

And so, although seldom trumpeted or even acknowledged, SOF have been, and continue to be, the invisible hand in Afghanistan that conduct a war in the shadows, but one that has a significant impact on force protection, increase in HN governance and security, as well as destruction of enemy capability. Moreover, SOF are a vital contributor to the successful fight for the hearts and minds of the population. It is for this reason that General Petraeus has begun to speak openly, “turning aside years of keeping the SOF capability in the shadows, to try and convince sceptics that the war could be won.” In fact, he has repeatedly emphasized SOF missions to kill or capture key insurgents.⁶⁹

It is also the reason why ISAF SOF have tripled in number and why, despite fiscal restraint everywhere, SOF budgets have remained untouched and in some instances have even grown. For instance,

the U.S. will add 2,800 SOF troops to their inventory over the next six years. This represents a five percent increase.⁷⁰ In sum, as has often been said, SOF have become the force of choice. As one defence analyst noted, "In many ways, SOF are now serving as both a nucleus of action and as the center for a community of practice, frequently driving interagency discussions on operations and activities against al Qaeda and its affiliates as well as other national security threats and challenges."⁷¹

Nowhere has this leadership role been greater displayed than in Afghanistan. The invisible hand of SOF has influenced and shaped the Afghan theatre of operations in a significant way, saving lives, strengthening the counter-insurgency and destroying enemy capability and capacity. They are a classic example of the adage "there may be more than meets the eye."

Colonel Bernd Horn, OMM, MSM, CD, PhD is an experienced infantry officer and former deputy commander of the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command. Dr. Horn is also an adjunct professor of history at the Royal Military College of Canada and the Director of the CANSOFCOM Battle Laboratory.

NOTES

1 This is somewhat understandable as operational security is a fundamental prerequisite for special operations forces. It underscores everything SOF, as individuals, units or as formations do. Its importance is rooted in two essential pillars. The first is based on a moral obligation to do everything possible to ensure the protection and safety of their personnel, particularly in the context of the type of operations that they conduct, the environments they conduct them in, and the nature of the enemy they face. The second pillar is the need to guarantee mission success. As the force of last resort entrusted with “no fail” tasks, there is no margin for error. Important to note is that the significance of operational security extends to the protection of allies as well, for the same two reasons as already given. Moreover, failure to do so also jeopardizes the relationship with others complete with dramatic consequences such as the withdrawal of support such as intelligence, research and development (R&D), the provision of enablers (e.g. aviation, air, Intelligence Surveillance, Target Acquisition, Reconnaissance (ISTAR)) for operations and support in general. Clearly, degradation in this realm could often have significant impact on the ability to achieve mission success.

2 In this monograph SOF refers to international SOF, that is SOF elements from all coalition countries. Specific nationality is identified when referring to a specific SOF element.

3 The history between the Americans and Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda (AQ) is long standing. They had tracked Bin Laden from Sudan to Afghanistan. On 28 August 1998, the Americans were able to convince the Security Council to pass UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) that 1193 demanded that “Afghan factions ... refrain from harboring and training terrorists and their organizations.” More specific UNSCR 214, passed on 8 December 1998, affirmed that the Security Council was “deeply disturbed by the continuing use of Afghan territory, especially areas controlled by the Taliban, for the sheltering and training of

terrorists and the planning of terrorist acts” and reiterated that “the suppression of international terrorism is essential for the maintenance of international peace and security.” The Americans continued their UN offensive. On 15 October 1999, the US secured the adoption of UNSCR 1267, which expressed concerns about the “continuing violations of international humanitarian law and of human rights [in Afghanistan], particularly discrimination against women and girls,” as well as “the significant rise in the illicit production of opium.” Importantly, the Resolution specifically criticized the Taliban for offering “safe haven to Osama bin Laden and to allow him and others associated with him to operate a network of terrorist training camps ... and to use Afghanistan as a base from which to sponsor international terrorist operations.” As such the Security Council demanded “that the Taliban turn over Osama bin Laden without further delay” so that he could be “effectively brought to justice.” The council also instituted the same economic and financial sanctions on the Taliban regime that had been recently imposed by the United States. The Taliban failed to comply and on 12 October 2000, Al-Qaeda attacked the USS Cole in the harbour at Aden, killing 17 US sailors and wounding 39. To exacerbate the looming showdown Bin Laden took full credit for the operation, prompting the Security Council to pass UNSCR 1333 on 19 December 2000. This resolution reaffirmed the charges made just a year earlier and added the stipulation that the Taliban were to ensure the closing “of all camps where terrorists are trained.” In addition, economic sanctions were strengthened, Taliban offices were to be closed in the territory of member states, landing rights for Afghan national airways were revoked and all assets linked to Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda were frozen. Once again, the Taliban regime did nothing. As a result, yet another UNSCR was passed on 30 July 2001, which described “the situation in Afghanistan as a threat to international peace and security in the region.” As such, in the weeks leading up to 9/11 Afghanistan had already been identified as a major threat centre for American national interest. See *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1193*, 28 August 1998; *Resolution 1214*, 8 December 1998; *Resolution 1267*, 15 October 1999; *Resolution 1333*, 19 December 2000; *Resolution 1363*, 30 July 2001; and Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New

Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 80; Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (New York: Random House, 2002), xiii and 289. See also Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004) for a comprehensive account of the US / Bin Laden / AQ inter-relationship.

4 According to one official source only “110 CIA officers and 316 Special Operations Forces personnel were initially deployed.” Thomas H. Henriksen, *Afghanistan, Counterinsurgency, and the Indirect Approach*, Joint Special Operations University Report 10-3, April 2010, 39.

5 The air campaign had a great impact. For example, air strikes brought down by one of the first SF teams in country, aided by a lone Air Force combat controller, are credited with killing as many as 3,500 fighters and destroying up to 450 vehicles. Glenn Goodman, “Tip of the Spear,” *Armed Forces Journal International*, June 2002, 35; Michael Ware, “On the Mop-Up Patrol,” *Time*, 25 March 2002, 36-37; Thomas E. Ricks, “Troops in Afghanistan to take political role Officials say remaining fights to be taken by Special Forces, CIA,” *Duluth News Tribune*, 7 July 2002, 1: and Massimo Calabresi and Romesh Ratnesar, “Can we Stop the Next Attack?” *Time*, 11 March 2002, 18.

6 Maulvi Mohammad Haqqani, a Taliban fighter at the time conceded, “I never thought the Taliban would collapse so quickly and cruelly under U.S. bombs.” He lamented, “The bombs cut down our men like a reaper harvesting wheat.” Maulvi Abdul Rehman Akhundzada cited in Sami Yousafzai and Ron Moreau, “The Taliban in their Own Words,” *Newsweek.com*, 5 October 2009, 36.

7 Rashid, 220.

8 “Chapter 11 – Special Operations,” *NATO Publication AJP-1 (A)*, Third Draft, March 1998, 11-1.

9 This is the official Canadian Special Operations Forces Command doctrinal definition. Special operations differ from conventional operations in the degree of physical and political risk, operational techniques,

modes of employment, independence from friendly support and dependence on detailed operational intelligence. Canada, *CANSOFCOM Capstone Concept for Special Operations 2009* (Ottawa: DND, 2009), 4.

10 *CANSOFCOM Capstone Concept for Special Operations 2009*, 4.

11 “Non-Kinetic” options refer to a wide range of skills and task sets that include provision of strategic advisory teams, security force assistance, information operations, psychological operations, and support to other military, paramilitary or law enforcement agencies.

12 The negative publicity is largely based on civilian deaths and collateral damage that results from alleged air strikes during SOF missions and night raids that are viewed negatively by Afghans. Other perceptions are reflected in the view of one Afghan official at the Presidential Palace who insisted, “Nobody has an idea what they [SOF] are doing there because they don’t share anything with the Afghans.” He added, SOF “arrest people and they raid houses without keeping the Afghans in the loop.” Matthew Rosenberg, “US Special Operations Ordered Deadly Afghan Strike,” *Dow Jones Reprints*, 22 February 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/SB1000142405274870405760457508060203691352.html?mod=WAJ_World_LEFTSecondNews>, accessed 22 February 2010. The sharing of information is a sensitive issue because information shared with Afghans often, if not invariably, leaks out.

13 Department of Defense, *Special Operations Forces Reference Manual*, 2nd ed. (Tampa, FL: JSOU, 2008), 1-5. The U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center hosted a conference at which a new definition was developed. The new recommended doctrinal definition for UW is, “activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary and guerrilla force in a denied area.” Quoted in Robert Haddick, “Do We Still Need Special Ops?” *Small Wars Journal*, <<http://smallwarsjournal.com>>, accessed 23 April 2010.

14 Department of Defense, *Security Force Assistance FM3-07.1* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army, May 2009), v.

15 The U.S. doctrinal definition for FID is, “participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency. SOF’s primary contribution in this interagency activity is to organize, train, advise, and assist host nation (HN) military and paramilitary forces. The generic capabilities required for FID include instructional skills; foreign language proficiency; area and cultural orientation; tactical skills; advanced medical skills; rudimentary construction and engineering skills; familiarity with a wide variety of demolitions, weapons, weapon systems, and communications equipment; and basic PSYOP [Psychological Operations] and CA [Civil Affairs] skills.” Department of Defense, *Special Operations Forces Reference Manual, 2nd ed.* (Tampa, FL: JSOU, 2008), 1-5. The similar Canadian concept is known as Defence, Diplomacy, and Military Assistance (DDMA), which refers to operations that contribute to nation building through assistance to select states through the provision of specialized military advice, training and assistance. *CANSOFCOM Capstone Concept for Special Operations 2009*, 10.

16 Sean D. Naylor, “Visa Roadblock,” *Army Times*, 22 March 2010, 18.

17 Sean D. Naylor, “Afghans at the Forefront,” *Army Times*, 26 July 2010, 22. Colonel Don Bolduc acknowledged that the SOF focus evolved from earlier years when the emphasis was on kinetic operations. He explained his theory has transitioned from “pressure, pursue, punish” to “presence, patience and persistence.” *Ibid.*

18 Sean D. Naylor, “Special Partnership,” *Army Times*, 14 June 2010, 16.

19 Sean D. Naylor, “The Jewel in the Afghan Army,” *Army Times*, 31 May 2010, 28.

20 Naylor, “The Jewel in the Afghan Army,” 28.

21 James Gordon Meek, “Afghan Tribesman Going Commando,” *New York Daily News*, August 8, 2010, 10.

22 Naylor, "The Jewel in the Afghan Army," 28. An Afghan team sergeant explained the professionalism and SOF approach to commandos. He stated, "The Commandos have three words: bravery, speed and power." However he explained, "But in Special Forces, before you show your power, your bravery or anything else, you've got to think about it. You've got to use your mind. You've got to think through the ramifications." He continued, "Most missions in the commandos were aggressive: go after a bad guy and detain him if possible; if not, just shoot him. This was a killing game. When I came to Special Forces, I learned there were other ways to solve problems. In Special Forces I can learn so many other ways besides fighting the bad guys." Sean D. Naylor, "Afghan Special Forces," *Army Times*, 24 May 2010, 20.

23 Naylor, "The Jewel in the Afghan Army," 28.

24 Meek, "Afghan Tribesman Going Commando," 10.

25 Sean D. Naylor, "Making bad guys good guys," *Army Times*, 9 November 2009, 20.

26 Michael G. Mullen, "From the Chairman: Strategic Communication: Getting Back to Basics," *Joint Force Quarterly*, 4th Quarter, 2009, <<http://www.jcs.mil/newsarticle.aspx?ID=142>>. He also observed, "That's the essence of good communication: having the right intent up front and letting our actions speak for themselves. We shouldn't care if people don't like us; that isn't the goal. The goal is credibility. And we earn that over time." General David Petraeus, stated, "This effort is a contest of wills. We must never forget that the center of gravity in this struggle is the Afghan people; it is they who will ultimately determine the future of Afghanistan." ISAF News Release, "General Petraeus Issues Updated Tactical Directive," 2010-08-CA-004, issued 1 August 2010.

27 See Mark Schafer and Chris Fussell, "The Role of SOF Direct Action in Counterinsurgency," *2010 JSOU and NDIA SO/LIC Division Essays* (Hurburt Field: JSOU Report 10-4, 2010), 85.

28 See Bernd Horn, *No Lack of Courage: Operation Medusa, Afghanistan 2006* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2010) for a detailed account of Operation Medusa.

29 TF-31 was a sub-unit from the 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (3 SFG) or “Desert Eagles.” The unit, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Donald Bolduc, was starting its fifth rotation in Afghanistan. Major Jamie Hall, the Officer Commanding (OC) of the American SF “C” Company (Coy), which consisted of six Operational Detachment – Alpha (ODA) teams, was responsible for the Kandahar area, therefore, he was assigned to Operation Medusa. Each of his six ODAs also had a 30-man ANA company attached to it.

30 Lieutenant-Colonel Shane Schreiber, interview with author, 18 October 2006.

31 Ibid.

32 Captain C. Purdy, interview with author, 17 October 2006.

33 Captain Michael Irwin, “Integrating Intelligence With Operations,” *Special Warfare*, Vol. 21, Issue 1, Jan-Feb 2008, 16.

34 Thom Shanker, Helene Cooper and Richard A. Opiel Jr. “Elite U.S. Units Step Up Effort in Afghan City Before Attack,” *New York Times* online, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/26/world/asia/26kandahar.html?emc=eta1>>, accessed 1 May 2010.

35 Peter Goodspeed, “Battle for Kandahar: Success or failure of Obama’s troops to surge lies in Kandahar City,” *National Post*, 27 May 2010, <<http://www.nationalpost.com/news/world/story.html?id=3084975>>, accessed 4 June 2010; and Shanker, “Elite U.S. Units...”.

36 See Lee Winsor, David Charters and Brent Wilson, *Kandahar Tour: The Turning Point in Canada’s Afghan Mission* (Mississauga: John Wiley & Sons Canada, Ltd., 2008), 198 for just one example. As they describe, “Boomer’s tank-infantry force fought into the midst of the Taliban

position, fixing the enemy to a wild gunfight to their front. That was when U.S. Army Blackhawk helicopters swept in to land the Special Forces teams behind the enemy to prevent their escape.”

37 Sean D. Naylor, “A-Team in Afghanistan,” *Army Times*, 21 June 2010, 16.

38 Schafer and Fussell, “The Role of SOF Direct Action in Counterinsurgency,” 85.

39 Sean D. Naylor, “U.S. Stops Spec Ops raids into Pakistan tribal areas,” *Army Times*, 6 October 2008, 10. JSOC has been pushing hard for years to increase raids into the tribal safe areas along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border. As one JSOC officer stated, “we got to hit where their sanctuaries are.” The 3 September 2010 raid was a direct result of the 13 July 2008 Taliban attack on a U.S. outpost in the Konen-gal Valley. In addition, to the raids, Predator drones have been used on numerous occasions to target Taliban commanders in the FATA.

40 *The Army Capstone Concept. Operational Adaptability: Operating under Conditions of Uncertainty and Complexity in an Era of Persistent Conflict 2016-2028*. TRADOC Pam 525-3-0, 21 December 2009, 13. The deployed forces did not bring artillery based on the assumption that surveillance and precision fires from the air could destroy any targets. However, they experienced severe limitations due to difficulties with determining target locations.

41 Justin Kelly and Mike Brennan, *Distributed Manoeuvre 21st Century Offensive Tactics*, Land Warfare Studies Centre Working Papers Series, The Australian Army, June 2009, 25.

42 Quoted in Adam Day, *Witness to War* (Ottawa: Magic Light/CDA Press, 2010), 130.

43 Kimberly Dozier (Associated Press Intelligence Writer), “AO Exclusive: Building a network to hit militants,” accessed through PLANLST – Forum to Discuss Warfare Planning Concepts, 6 January 2011. The gathering of evidence also assists with Afghan governance

in assisting the NDS to build the necessary legal case to convict those captured of insurgent activities.

44 Sean D. Naylor, "Beyond Bin Laden Petraeus: Success in Afghanistan," *Army Times*, 27 October 2008, 28.

45 *CANSOFCOM Capstone Concept for Special Operations 2009*, 10.

46 Sean D. Naylor, "U.S. Spec Ops Unit Hits Haqqanis," *Army Times*, 13 September 2010, 22.

47 The "now" timeframe referred to January 2011. Dozier, "AO Exclusive: Building a network to hit militants."

48 Ibid.

49 Kimberly Dozier, "Analysis: Gen. Petraeus promotes special-ops success to show part of Afghan war US is winning," <<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2010/09/03analysis-gen-petraeus-promotes-special-ops-success-afghan-war-winning/>>, accessed 7 September 2010.

50 Naylor, "U.S. Spec Ops Unit Hits Haqqanis," 22. It is important to note that on two thirds of our targets there are no shots fired. The ratio for Canadian SOF is even higher in this regard. Sean D. Naylor, "The Deadliest Insurgents," *Army Times*, 20 September 2010, 18.

51 Tom Vanden Brook, "Special Ops Forces Vital in War," *USA Today*, 27 December 2010, 6.

52 Sean D. Naylor, "Inside a U.S. hostage rescue spec ops soldiers conduct night raid in Afghanistan mountains," *Army Times*, 17 November 2008, 8. According to one SOF operator, "the rescue sends a very clear message to any extremist group that [kidnapping Americans] will be handled with vigilance and unrelenting persecution."

53 Rick Hillier cited in Julian Borger, "Linda Norgrove: US navy SEAL faces disciplinary action over grenade death," *Guardian.co.uk*, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/oct/13/linda-norgrove-us-commando-disciplinary?INTCMP=SRCH>>, accessed 13 October 2010.

54 Paul Robinson, "We can't just take them out; It's tempting to simply fire a missile or sniper bullet and be done with suspected terrorist leaders – but it's a lot more complicated than that", *The Ottawa Citizen*, 27 May 2008.

55 Naylor, "The Deadliest Insurgents," 18.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Lieutenant-Colonel Rob Walker, interview with author, 5 October 2008.

60 Lee Winsor, David Charters and Brent Wilson, *Kandahar Tour: The Turning Point in Canada's Afghan Mission* (Mississauga: John Wiley & Sons Canada, Ltd., 2008), 167.

61 Dozier, "Analysis: Gen. Petraeus promotes special-ops success to show part of Afghan war US is winning."

62 Ibid.

63 Sean D. Naylor, "Officials: Al-Qaida forces in Pakistan battered but resilient," *Army Times*, 3 August 2009, 21.

64 Ibid.

65 Major-General Jim Molan, "How Much is Enough in Afghanistan," *Australian Army Journal*, (winter 2009), 21.

66 Naylor, "Making bad guys good guys," 20.

67 An IED is a device placed or fabricated in an improvised manner incorporating destructive, lethal, noxious, pyrotechnic or incendiary chemicals and designed to destroy or incapacitate, harass or distract. It may incorporate military stores but is normally devised from non-military components. NATO unclassified Releasable to Partnership for

Peace (PfP) and ISAF, *Joint Operational Guideline for Counter Improvised Explosive Devices Activities*, Version 3.0, August 2008, 5.

68 Spencer Ackerman, "Drones Surge, Special Ops Strike in Petraeus Campaign Plan," <<http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2010/08/petraeus-campaign-plan/#more-29588>>, accessed 18 August 2010. The Key to Adversary's success is vested in highly organized IED cells operating in isolation and in small numbers. Typically each cell has a variety of members who specialize in different tasks. At the tactical level, the organisation is base on local leaders, bomb makers, bomb couriers, bomb layers, triggermen (ambush team) and exploitation team (video recording of incident and first responders for future analysis). At the strategic level the focus is funding, planning, training, logistics and resource allocation. Defeating the IED System requires the targeting of the opposition's political, social and cultural systems. It involves activity undertaken simultaneously at the political, strategic, operational and tactical level intended to disrupt the network. The aim of defeating the system is to undermine the ability and will to construct and employ IEDs. Such operations will certainly take longer to initiate and apply but, overall, will have a more penetrating effect on the IED system. Activities may include deterrence, information operations campaigns, law enforcement, interdicting the IED re-supply apparatus, apprehending belligerents, and encouraging external pressure to stop the use of IEDs. NATO unclassified Releasable to PfP and ISAF, *Joint Operational Guideline for Counter Improvised Explosive Devices Activities*, Version 3.0, August 2008, 7-10.

69 Dozier, "AO Exclusive: Building a network to hit militants."

70 Sean D. Naylor, "Gates plans for 2,800 more spec-ops personnel," *Army Times*, 20 April 2009, 16.

71 Michelle L. Malvesti, *To Serve the Nation: U.S. Special Operations Forces in an Era of Persistent Conflict* (Center for a New American Security, June 2010), 4.



ISBN 978-1-100-18390-9



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