ANNEX 3-05 SPECIAL OPERATIONS

INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL OPERATIONS

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This annex captures the fundamental principles by which Air Force special operations forces (AFSOF) guide their actions to support national objectives. It articulates AFSOF warfighting principles, lessons learned, and best practices for conducting Air Force special operations (SO).

This document has three primary objectives. First, it describes Air Force guidance on the proper use of AFSOF in military operations; second, it discusses AFSOF's role in planning and executing SO; and third, it explains AFSOF's unique command relationships that, left unexplained, could introduce confusion in the proper employment of this important Air Force capability. It is highly unlikely SO would be conducted as a single Service operation; therefore, SO planning should consider joint support and coordination, to include Air Force forces.

As a contributor to the SO force, AFSOF conduct and support specific US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) core activities. The SO core activities, and the AFSOF core missions, which support those activities, will be discussed in *Core Activities and Missions*. This annex provides an overview of the Airman's perspective of the SO core activities, while other annexes discuss some of these activities in much greater detail.

AFSOF Characteristics. AFSOF are distinct from conventional forces (CF). Commanders should be familiar with AFSOF characteristics, as well as SOF capabilities and limitations, to better select missions and tasks compatible with their capabilities.

AFSOF conduct joint and combined training within the special operations forces (SOF) community and with CF. When employed, SOF are presented with their command and control (C2) structure intact, which facilitates their integration into joint force plans, retains cohesion, provides a control mechanism to address specific SO concerns, and coordinates their activities with other components and supporting commands.

AFSOF routinely operate closely with other government agencies, intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and other nations' forces. Clandestine/low-visibility SO requires extensive and detailed interagency and international coordination. Additionally, AFSOF require unique training and education and the development, acquisition, and employment of weapons and equipment not standard for other CF.

- Certain AFSOF personnel undergo a rigorous selection process and mission-specific training beyond basic military skills to achieve proficiency in entry-level SO skills. AFSOF

units tend to be populated with seasoned personnel, many of whom maintain high levels of competency in more than one military specialty.

- Select AFSOF are regionally, culturally, and linguistically oriented for employment. Extensive language training and cross-cultural education are routine parts of their development. Some personnel require highly technical and advanced training in order to accomplish assigned missions.

AFSOF can be formed into versatile, self-contained teams that provide an agile and adaptable force capable of operating in dynamic environments. AFSOF can:

- Deploy rapidly to provide tailored responses to different situations.

- Gain access to hostile, denied, or politically sensitive areas to prepare the operational environment for future operations and develop unconventional options for addressing ambiguous situations.

- Conduct operations in most environments with minimal support, low profile, and non-intrusive presence.

- Communicate globally using organic equipment.

- Work closely with regional military and civilian authorities and populations.

- Survey and assess local situations and report these assessments rapidly.

- Execute SO missions using SOF-unique equipment.

AFSOF Mission Criteria. SOF/AFSOF employment is facilitated by basic criteria that provide guidelines for both SOF and CF commanders and planners to consider when employing AFSOF. Historically, commanders have found that following these guidelines provides the greatest propensity for AFSOF mission success:

- The mission or activity should be appropriate for AFSOF. AFSOF should be used to create effects that require SOF's unique skills and capabilities. AFSOF resources should not be planned to conduct missions more appropriate for CF.

- The mission should support the JFC's campaign, operation plan, or contingency response. Unity of effort and purpose is an imperative. Conducting operations, which do not support this economy of force, could result in the loss of limited AFSOF resources.

- The mission should be operationally feasible, supportable, and acceptable with the appropriate capabilities, capacities, and authorities for successful mission execution.

AFSOF are not structured for attrition or force-on-force warfare and should not be assigned missions or employed beyond their capabilities.

- The mission should have required resources to execute and support the AFSOF mission. Some AFSOF missions require support from non-SOF sources, such as airlift, intelligence, communications, information operations, medical, logistics, space, weather, and other types of support.

- The expected outcome of the mission should justify the risks. AFSOF assets are limited and commanders should ensure they fully consider risk to the force when making employment decisions. In addition, commanders should consider SOF mission effects on US diplomatic and domestic political interests in risk calculation.

- Coordination with indigenous populations and use of culture and language skills may be required to accomplish the mission.

AFSOF Limitations. Years of operational experience have led to understanding key AFSOF limitations. Commanders should understand:

- AFSOF cannot be quickly reconstituted or rapidly expanded, due to the lengthy time required to recruit, train, and educate AFSOF operators. Improper employment of these forces runs the risk of rapidly depleting their capabilities.

- AFSOF are not a substitute for CF. In most cases AFSOF are not organized, trained, sized, or equipped to conduct sustained conventional combat operations. Using AFSOF to conduct or support conventional operations may inhibit their ability to conduct SO.

- Most AFSOF missions require non-SOF support. AFSOF are not structured with robust logistic and sustainment capabilities. Therefore, AFSOF frequently rely on external support. Limited SOF logistical capacity frequently requires support from conventional force structures supplemented by HN or contracted support.

- AFSOF operations in non-combat areas could have additional restrictions placed upon them by the Ambassador or Chief of Diplomatic Mission, which may limit access or otherwise effect operations.

The Air Force Special Operations Forces Legacy

In preparation for Operation OVERLORD, the cross-channel invasion of France, small numbers of special operations forces began infiltrating Europe as early as 1942. Eventually, the special operators needed their own clandestine air insertion capability. In August 1943, General Carl A. Spaatz, at the time the commander of North African Air Forces, allocated three B-17 bombers to support Office of Strategic Services (OSS) activities. This marked the start of the ever-expanding special air activities in the European theater by specially trained aircrews who came to be known as “Carpetbaggers.”

Concurrently, General Henry “Hap” Arnold, commander, Army Air Forces, approved the activation of an American special air unit in the China-Burma-India (CBI) theater of operations. The First Air Commando Group’s primary task involved support for Lord Louis Mountbatten’s British commando forces in the CBI.

Together, the Carpetbaggers and Air Commandos represent the earliest manifestations of AFSOF. Since World War II, Air Commandos have fought in numerous conflicts and contingencies. Whether in the Philippines, Korea, Vietnam, Grenada, or Panama, AFSOF have supported United States national objectives honorably and with distinction.

America has always recognized AFSOF value and unique contributions, but in the face of shrinking budgets, America’s specialized airpower struggled to remain healthy and viable through peacetime. The American military’s inability to adequately respond to the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis highlighted this deficiency within America’s SOF community. Although the ill-fated rescue attempt did not make it past its initial landing site--code named DESERT ONE --it ushered in a new era for AFSOF.

Following this failed mission, congressional persistence and support from key leaders within the Department of Defense (DOD) establishment led to the creation of the USSOCOM and its Air Force component, Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC).