



## **AFSOF OPERATIONAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

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[Operations security](#) (OPSEC), [communications security](#) (COMSEC) and physical security are vitally important to [special operations forces](#) (SOF). From initial planning stages to the force recovery stages of a special operation, mission-critical information and OPSEC indicators should be tightly controlled to prevent the adversary from deriving or collecting information that would compromise the mission success. [Air Force special operations forces](#) (AFSOF) habitually operate from secure training sites and employment bases in order to shield forces from the attention of hostile intelligence collectors. Since AFSOF have little organic base defense capability, they depend almost exclusively on conventional Air Force units or sister Service support defense against air, missile, and ground threats.

Additionally, AFSOF pay particular attention to COMSEC, in order to control inadvertent release of mission-critical information and OPSEC indicators. For example, AFSOF maximize secure communications that ensure communication discipline (emissions control) and discretion (low probabilities of detection and intercept). Effective planning and coordinating can ensure information is adequately controlled, while ensuring access to information, equipment, and activities necessary for flexible yet compartmented operations.

### **Intelligence**

In past warfare, a lower level of effort was required to identify the enemy (e.g., an armored division massed on the border). However, in today's conflicts, a greater level of effort is required to identify the enemy (e.g., terrorist networks, cells, and leadership). Therefore, AFSOF planning and execution are intelligence-intensive, timely, and detailed. Tailored, all-source intelligence is vital. All-source intelligence should be broad in scope yet adequately detailed. Due to the nature of [special operations](#) (SO) tasking, AFSOF intelligence specialists should be prepared to provide information on a broad spectrum of target sets associated with the core activities.

Intelligence requirements for AFSOF differ from those of other air components due to the nature of the objective, degree of detailed planning information, and the tailored support that may be required. Such intelligence allows for AFSOF to avoid engaging the enemy and provides security for clandestine missions. Some of the products often associated with AFSOF mission planning are:

- ★ SOF mission folders
- ★ Mission planning orders validated through rehearsal(s)
- ★ Evasion plan of action for all missions
- ★ Combat tactics and concepts of employment based on expected threat scenarios
- ★ Target materials
- ★ Annotated imagery
- ★ Specialized geospatial products

Release of post-mission reports with organically collected intelligence, target area analysis, and intelligence assessments may be constrained by the sensitivity of many types of SOF missions. Depending on the sensitivity of the mission, commanders should report data either through special access or routine intelligence reporting channels, as appropriate. To the extent possible, sensitive information may be provided when sources and methods are removed (e.g., tear line).

### **Communications**

AFSOF communications consist of three broad categories: [command and control](#) (C2), mission support, and tactical communications. Communications for C2 deal with operational planning and execution. It requires immediate and responsive communications connectivity from the [joint force commander](#) and [joint force special operations component commander](#) (JFSOCC) through the [joint special operations air component](#) (JSOAC) to the most forward deployed SOF forces. Command and control should enable AFSOF operators to rapidly deploy and dynamically operate with assured connectivity and security in all environments. Tactical communications are carried by SOF airborne and supporting or supported ground forces to communicate with command stations and other SOF elements in operational missions. Interoperability between tactical communications and C2 networks is critical. Low probability of detection and low probability of interception are critical requirements for SOF tactical communications means. AFSOF requires integral communications resources that are characterized by high reliability, flexibility, light weight, and a small footprint. SOF initial and on-the-move communications should be rapidly and continuously available to operate in a variety of threat environments. Man-packable equipment should be operational within minutes versus hours or days. AFSOF communications forces contain, and normally require, organic communications specialists and equipment to provide these rapidly deployable communications capabilities. SOF combat support communications provides deployed network infrastructure, secure telecommunications services, and access to the DoD Information Network (DODIN). Access to the DODIN enables planning, intelligence, logistics, and other functions at austere deployed operating locations. Mission support communications infrastructure may be provided on a limited basis by SOF unit deployable communications teams or by host base operating support. SOF deployable communications teams are trained and equipped to provide specialized and general

communications services for initial AFSOF beddown support. They are intended to move forward to austere operating locations with AFSOF aviation units.

### **Information Operations (IO)**

[Information Operations](#) should be an integral part of SOF operations. IO integrates and synchronizes multiple [information-related capabilities](#) (IRC) within the information environment spanning the range of SOF operations, but primarily occurring outside of traditional conflict. This integration occurs between several different capabilities, which may be interchangeable based on the mission planned or the availability of capabilities. As such, IO should be carefully integrated and synchronized within the SOF planning and execution processes at the JSOAC level, and should not be regarded as a separate IO campaign plan. Only through the balanced application of IRC can the commander's desired effects be achieved at the operational and tactical levels.

### **Cyberspace Operations**

[Cyberspace Operations](#) crosses all the physical domains and provides military advantage to both SOF and adversaries alike. Cyberspace operations in support of special operations can often be conducted remotely, thus reducing the SOF footprint and contributing to freedom of action within a given operational area. Some AF cyberspace forces may be designated to provide specific support to SOF; in some cases, they may be apportioned directly to SOF, while in others, they may be aligned in a supporting role.

When formed, the JSOAC should identify desired cyberspace operations and submit a theater-specified cyberspace support request to the [joint special operations task force](#) / JFSOCC who will validate and forward the request to [combatant commanders](#) -designated lead for cyberspace operations.

Cyberspace defense of the JSOAC network is the responsibility of the Service component providing the network (e.g., the component AFFOR for Air Force-provided networks, and ARFOR for Army-provided networks). The JSOAC/J6 has collateral responsibility for network defense when operating an enclave off of the main, Service-provided network. When parts of the SOF network reside inside of the [air operations center](#) or other component operations centers, that component's communications section has a collateral responsibility to defend the portions of the network residing with the component's firewall.

### **Space Operations**

AFSOF rely on [space capabilities](#) and assets to enable combat operations. To accomplish this, AFSOF require timely, accurate, and current space products and support from initial planning through deployment and execution. To ensure the proper integration of space capabilities, space personnel are assigned to AFSOF units to support contingency operations. AFSOF deploys space personnel as part of the SOLE and AFSOF C2 nodes. As the AFSOF space experts, these teams plan and coordinate the necessary SOF space requirements through the [space coordinating authority](#), normally the [joint force air component commander](#) (JFACC), in order to ensure cross-component space tasking consolidation, prioritization, and deconfliction.

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