AIR FORCE DOCTRINE PUBLICATION 3-05

SPECIAL OPERATIONS

U.S. AIR FORCE

31 October 2024

Air Force Doctrine Publication 3-05, *Special Operations*

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FOREWORD

Doctrine embodies the fundamental principles by which military forces guide their actions in support of national objectives. It is a body of carefully developed, authoritative but not directive ideas that have been officially approved and establish a common frame of reference for solving military problems. However, to be an effective guide, the challenge for doctrine is to be simultaneously informed by the past, applicable in the present, and focused on the future; all in equal measure.

The United States Air Force (USAF) must prepare for a new reality, one in which decision advantage, freedom of maneuver, and freedom of action are increasingly challenged. To deter, compete, and win across the competition continuum, Airmen must advance solutions that allow us to conduct operations in highly contested environments. Broadly, the joint force's approach to meeting this challenge is encapsulated in joint all-domain operations (JADO). Together with joint all-domain command and control, JADO provides the joint force commander the means to integrate, synchronize, and deconflict the convergence of effects across all domains to achieve an operational advantage.

Air Force Doctrine Publication (AFDP) 1, *The Air Force*, supports this effort by establishing mission command as the Airman's philosophy for the command and control of airpower. Despite our advances, adversaries will likely retain the ability to deny or degrade our communications. Therefore, decision-makers at all echelons should have the ability to develop understanding, make decisions, and converge effects when disconnected from higher echelons. Mission command embraces centralized command, distributed control, and decentralized execution as the foundation for the responsiveness, flexibility, and initiative necessary at the tactical edge, and ensures capabilities continue to function, even when information is degraded or denied.

AFDP 3-05, *Special Operations*, though firmly rooted in the past, looks to the future, adapting as needed to ensure continued utility and efficacy for the challenges to come. Properly planned and executed, special operations are a crucial element to enable the achievement of joint force commander (JFC) objectives across the competition continuum, including conflict. What worked in the past, will work in the future, but not in the same way. Airmen must be trained to plan operations in a distributed or decentralized manner and execute the mission when isolated from higher echelons in denied environments. Airmen at all levels must be comfortable making decisions and operating based on the commander's intent and the principles of mission command. Effective special operations are informed by past lesson but find novel ways to apply those lessons in current and future environments.

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS

Air Force Doctrine Publication (AFDP) 3-05, *Special Operations,* captures United States Air Force (USAF) special operations fundamentals and principles that guide Air Force special operations forces (AFSOF) to support national objectives across the competition continuum. It incorporates AFSOF warfighting principles, lessons learned, and best practices for conducting USAF special operations in a complex global security environment. This doctrine provides general guidance for commanders to plan, employ, support, and conduct command and control (C2) of AFSOF to accomplish global campaign plans, national and theater strategies, and respond to contingencies. It also explains AFSOF's unique command relationships to facilitate the planning and execution of joint operations.

USAF special operations are an integral part of joint operations that provide JFCs and US Embassy chiefs of mission with a discreet, precise, and scalable force that integrates and synchronizes military operations with other activities. Special operations are designed to assess, shape, and influence foreign, political, and military environments. They are conducted either unilaterally or by working with host nations, regional partners, and indigenous populations to prevent and deter conflict or prevail in war.

Typically, USAF special operations are conducted by a relatively small force at significant distances from support bases, in a distributed manner, with small operational and logistical footprints. They employ sophisticated equipment and means of infiltration, support, and exfiltration to penetrate and return from contested, denied, or politically sensitive areas. Special operations can be conducted independently; however, most operations require a networked approach in conjunction with conventional forces (CF), other government agencies, or host nations (HN) and may include operations with indigenous, insurgent, or irregular forces.

Special operations may differ from conventional operations in the degree of strategic, physical, and political risk, operational techniques, modes of employment, and dependence on intelligence and indigenous assets. AFSOF complement and collaborate with CF. They do not compete with, nor are they a substitute for CF. For example, a special operations aircraft should not be used when a conventional aircraft would be more appropriate for the mission.

Although not always decisive on their own, when properly employed USAF special operations can set conditions for decisive combat action, or conditions that are favorable to US strategic goals and objectives.

Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) is a USAF major command (MAJCOM) and the Air Force component of US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) tasked to organize, train, equip, and present AFSOF. AFSOF is the encompassing term for the USAF's active and reserve component to include those units or forces specifically designated as special operations forces (SOF) by the Secretary of Defense. AFSOF consist of highly trained operations and support personnel, unique aircraft, and other specialized equipment.

Humans are the most important element in USAF special operations. Specialized training, education, and development are required to produce, build, and sustain AFSOF. Special operations Airmen are developed to be joint-minded, all-domain, innovative thinkers who generate comprehensive solutions to problems. AFSOF are specially trained to operate in diverse and austere environments**.** They are experienced Airmen with a high level of competency in more than one military specialty and apply special skills to enable adaptability, improvisation, and innovation. In certain instances, AFSOF are regionally oriented, culturally aligned, and language conversant in specific operational areas.

AFSOC CORE AND INTEGRATING MISSIONS

AFSOC provides specially tailored aviation related capabilities to conduct special operations core activities and missions. Special operations core activities are mutually supporting and interoperable in most cases. The execution of one core activity may have an operational or strategic impact on other core activities being performed or planned. AFSOC's core and integrating missions are displayed in the below graphic and detailed thereafter.

AFSOC Core Missions	SOF Air Mobility	SOF Strike	SOF Air-Ground Integration	SOF ISR
AFSOC Integrating Missions	Theater Engagement	Command & Control	Operations in the Information Environment	AFSOF Support

AFSOC CORE AND INTEGRATING MISSIONS

Core Missions: As a USAF MAJCOM and the Air Force component of USSOCOM, AFSOC provides specialized, aviation-centric capabilities to conduct and/or support special operations core activities:

- **SOF Air Mobility:** The ability to deliver rapid long-range assault and adaptive air mobility in uncertain, hostile, and denied environments to achieve special operations and joint force objectives.
- **SOF Strike:** The ability to deliver rapid tactical and long-range fires in uncertain, hostile, and denied environments to achieve special operations and joint forces objectives.
- **SOF Air-Ground Integration:** The ability to integrate and synchronize special operations, joint force, and Allied and partner aviation assets with surface (ground and maritime) operations to meet joint force objectives.
- **SOF Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR):** Synchronization and integration of collection, processing, exploitation, and dissemination. It consists of manned and remotely piloted aircraft and specialized collection and analysis of

organizations that deliver actionable intelligence in direct support of special operations forces and the joint force.

Integrating Missions: Specialized AFSOC capabilities providing critical integrating support to accomplish the four AFSOC core missions.

- **Theater Engagement:** The ability of AFSOF to develop and maintain Allied and partner capabilities during campaigning to help shape the global environment, improve deterrence, and expedite the transition to conflict should the need exist.
- **Command and Control (C2):** The ability to exercise a commander's authority and direction over assigned and attached forces. C2 elements consist of personnel and equipment with the capability to plan, direct, coordinate, and command and control forces to conduct special operations activities.
- **Operations in the Information Environment (OIE):** The ability to conduct military information support operations, military deception, and operations security. AFSOC OIE produces effects by integrating these disciplines with other information-related capabilities to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp adversary human and automated decision-making while protecting our own. OIE coordinates and integrates across the functions to gain and maintain information advantages while influencing the target audience's decision-making toward a desired behavior or effect.
- **Air Force Special Operations Support:** Enables AFSOC core missions and capabilities across the competition continuum. Protects, fields, prepares, deploys, maintains, sustains, and reconstitutes personnel, weapons systems, infrastructure, and information in support of USSOCOM core activities.

Armed Overwatch

Armed Overwatch provides geographically isolated SOF personnel with an airborne Precision Strike and Full-motion Video (FMV) capability paired with additional AFSOC core activities as dictated by mission requirements, combining elements of the core missions of SOF Strike, Air-Ground Integration, and ISR with the integrating mission of Command and Control.

EMPLOYING SOF

Commanders and staffs should be aware of the following considerations before planning or conducting special operations missions:

- SOF should support joint force objectives, national mission objectives, or national response missions.
- AFSOF can be used to create unique and specific effects. SOF are not organized, trained, or equipped to conduct sustained conventional operations and should not be employed when CF can achieve the objective.

- Risk assessment is critical, and the possible effects of SOF missions on US diplomatic and domestic political outcomes should be weighed against SOF employment benefits.
- AFSOF operations in non-combat areas may be limited as directed by the ambassador or Chief of Diplomatic Mission.
- Special operations are generally limited in scope by the size of the SOF unit. SOF does not rely on massing combat power, but on agility, informed by accurate intelligence, to achieve stealth, surprise, and precision.
- Mission planning should include coordination for required resources to support AFSOF operations. SOF are not organized with robust sustainment capabilities. SOF frequently relies on CF or other external logistical support for sustained operations. Support may be required from CF, HN, or a contracted agency for sources for airlift, intelligence, space operations, cyberspace operations, communications, OIE, medical, logistics, weather, and other types of non-SOF-specific support.
- Coordination with indigenous populations and the use of culture and language skills may be required.
- Improper employment of SOF runs the risk of rapidly depleting SOF capacity which cannot be reconstituted rapidly.

SOF FLEXIBILTY AND VERSATILITY

In the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on 11 September, 2001, AFSOF evolved from a strategic competition and crisis response force, optimized for contingency operations and episodic theater engagement, to a force honed to counter global violent extremist threats. With the re-emergence of strategic competition combined with the accelerated rate of technological change and tightening fiscal constraints, AFSOF have transformed to meet the competition challenges of the future operating environment.

AFSOF are optimized for great power competition, including preparing for conflict, while maintaining the capability to sustain an enduring counter-violent extremist organizations (VEO) effort. AFSOC's ability to uniquely organize, train, equip, and generate forces with robust C2 capabilities provides combatant commanders (CCDRs) with special operations aviation capabilities to:

- Generate advantage in competition below armed conflict.
- Execute operations that support the joint force to win in armed conflict.
- Execute counter-VEO operations.
- Respond to crisis.

AFSOF have adapted many of the skills honed in the counter-VEO fight to compete in areas where adversaries act through proxies and employ unconventional tactics. During competition below the level of armed conflict, AFSOF create dilemmas for adversaries. AFSOF's ability to operate with low visibility and attribution allows the SOF community to

create uncertainty and induce friction into our adversaries' decision-making cycles with a low risk of escalation. With unique access and placement, AFSOF provide vital intelligence to our policymakers and JFCs about an adversary's intent and actions. This capability strengthens relationships with our partners, shapes the environment, and expands the joint force's competitive advantage and freedom of action.

Carpetbaggers and Air Commandos—The First Air Force SOF

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 operations 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 activities. Spaatz's order marked the start of the ever-expanding special air activities in the European theater by special 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 theater.

Together, the Carpetbaggers and Air Commandos represented 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 US national objectives honorably and with distinction.

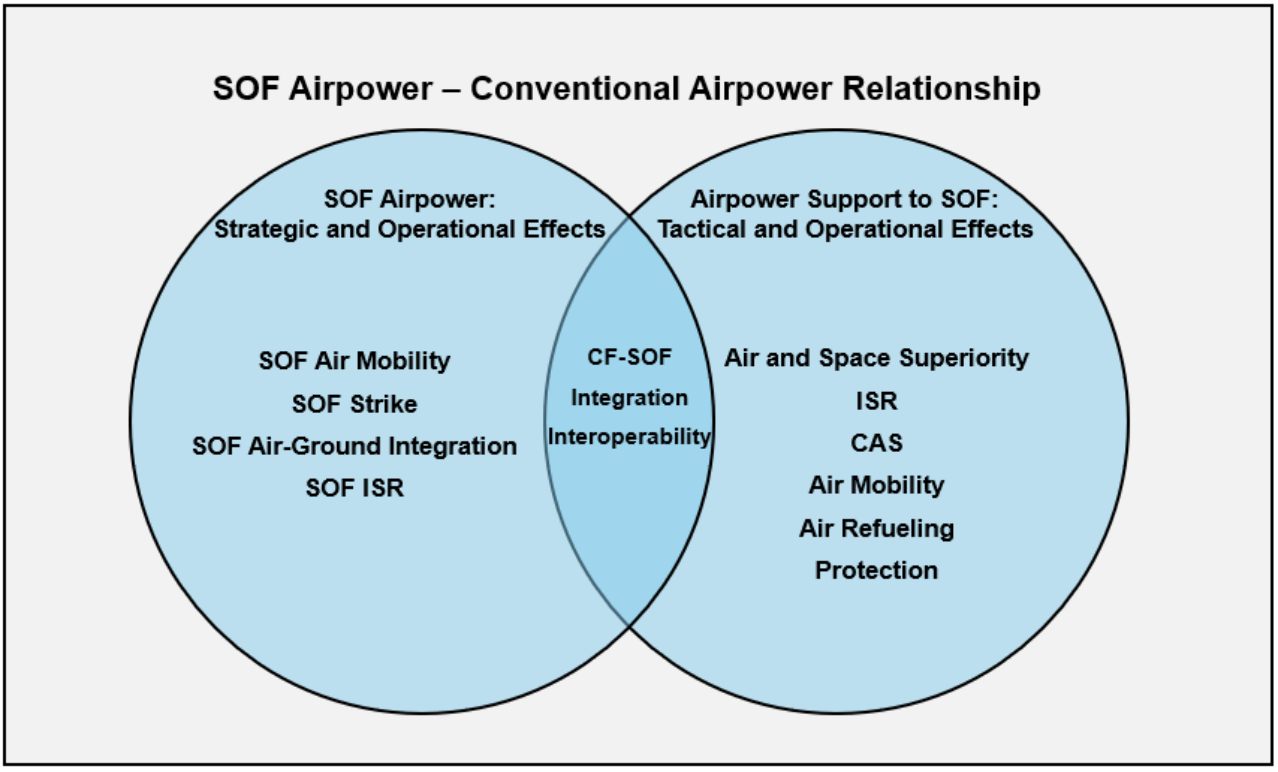
America has always recognized AFSOF value and unique contributions, but in the face of shrinking budgets, America's specialized airpower struggled to remain healthy and viable through peacetime. The American military's inability to adequately respond to the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis highlighted this 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 the failure at DESERT ONE, Congressional persistence and support from key leaders within the Department of Defense led to the creation of USSOCOM and its Air Force component, AFSOC.

In armed conflict, AFSOF generate specialized combat power to produce advantages for the joint force, allies, and partners. AFSOF employ low-visibility capabilities to identify high-value targets in denied areas and contribute to the joint force's ability to link those targets with desired effects. AFSOF leverage their access and placement to provide organic multi-

domain fires to open windows of opportunity the joint force can then exploit with mass. AFSOF provide the joint force with unique options to impose costs and hold adversaries at risk outside immediate conflict zones with a comparatively low risk of horizontal escalation. This complication of the adversary's decision-making can have significant asymmetric effects on the battlefield.

AFSOC presents AFSOF to USSOCOM to meet both joint force and special operations objectives. AFSOF airpower has a unique relationship with conventional airpower. Depending on the mission, the joint force air component commander (JFACC) may support AFSOF with conventional airpower, or AFSOF airpower may operate in support of SOF or conventional operations. The planned, coordinated, and focused CF-AFSOF interoperability, integration, and interdependences are essential to achieving tactical, operational, and strategic objectives and effects. The below figure graphically represents the mutual support relationship between SOF and CF airpower.



SOF–Conventional Airpower Relationship

SOF IN IRREGULAR WARFARE

The joint force conducts irregular warfare (IW) operations and activities by, with, and through partner nations (PN), to address mutual interests with the US. CF leads, facilitates, and participates in IW activities with SOF. IW and traditional warfare can be applied together to accomplish US objectives in all areas.

IW is a form of warfare where state and non-state actors campaign to assure, deter, persuade, or coerce states or other groups through indirect, non-attributable, or asymmetric

activities.[1] IW favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, different from traditional warfare, to achieve the desired ends, particularly concerning the population. Traditional warfare regards the **population as peripheral to the conflict** and focuses on coercing an adversary's key political leaders or defeating an adversary's military capability. IW considers the **population as central** and focuses on a struggle for legitimacy and influence of relevant populations.

IW is a Department of Defense (DoD) core competency that requires a deliberate and sustained integration of conventional and special operations capabilities. The joint force should employ capabilities to dictate the terms and tempo of competition to prevail against all global adversaries short of war and build and sustain our global advantage in careful coordination with allies and partners. SOF are ideally suited to participate in US efforts to counter IW adversaries and threats.

[1] See JP 1, Volume 1, *Joint Warfighting,* for additional information.

CHAPTER 2: COMMAND AND ORGANIZATION

The Commander, USSOCOM (CDRUSSOCOM) exercises combatant command (COCOM) authority over all assigned or attached active and reserve component forces mobilized or ordered to active duty (other than for training). Additionally, CDRUSSOCOM exercises training and readiness oversight authority of assigned AFSOF reserve component when not on active duty status.

While CDRUSSOCOM maintains COCOM authority over all US SOF and theater special operations commands (TSOCs), CCDRs normally are given operational control (OPCON) of the attached TSOCs and SOF in their theaters. TSOCs and SOF tactical units are attached to their respective CCDRs under OPCON. CCDRS typically exercise C2 of attached SOF through the commander, theater special operations command (CDRTSOC). Unless otherwise directed by the President or Secretary of Defense, CCDRs command special operations activities or missions in their area of responsibility (AOR).[2]

SOF C2 is best executed within a SOF chain of command. The modular C2 structure for SOF depends on objectives, security requirements, and the operational environment.

ORGANIZATION

JOINT FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMPONENT COMMANDER

When established, the joint force special operations component commander (JFSOCC) is the senior SOF representative in the operation or theater. The JFSOCC makes recommendations on the proper employment of SOF to the JFC. The JFSOCC typically is designated when one or more functional components are established. The JFSOCC is the supported commander within a joint special operations area (JSOA) when established to meet specific joint force objectives.

Typically, the JFSOCC provides the JFACC with a special operations liaison element (SOLE) to synchronize and deconflict SOF air and surface operations with CF air operations. The SOLE deconflicts SOF multi-domain operations with other component liaisons, multinational partners, and interagency activities. The SOLE coordinates SOF requirements in the air tasking order (ATO) and airspace control order (ACO) and provides real-time mission support in the air operations center (AOC).

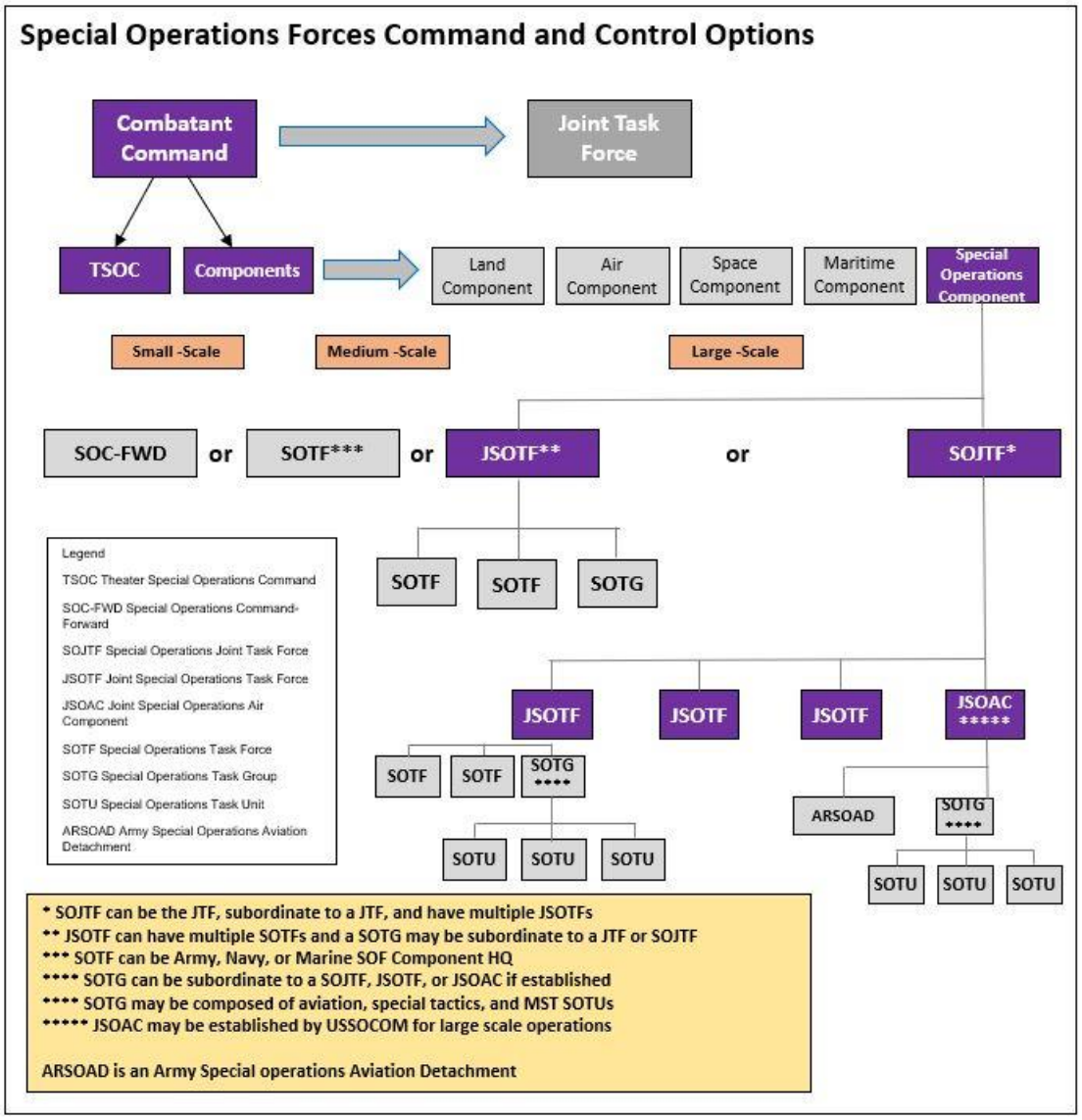
COMMANDER, AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

The Air Force special operations forces commander (COMAFSOF) exercises OPCON over assigned forces and tactical control (TACON) over forces made available for tasking with appropriate support relationships. The AFSOC Commander retains administrative control (ADCON) of assigned active AFSOF components and specified elements of ADCON over AFSOF air reserve component personnel. However, the forward-deployed COMAFSOF exercises some specifications of ADCON while others remain with the AFSOC Commander.

[2] See JP 3-05, *Joint Doctrine for Special Operations,* for additional information.

THEATER SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

The TSOC is a subordinate unified command assigned to USSOCOM and attached to a respective CCDR. The TSOC plans and conducts campaigns in support of the CCDR requirements. The CDRTSOC is the senior SOF advisor to the CCDR, service component commanders, and other staff for employment and integration of SOF capabilities. As the senior SOF Commander in theater, the CDRTSOC is often designated as the JFSOCC. As such, the CDRTSOC has the authority to plan and conduct joint operations as directed by the CCDR. The CDRTSOC can also be designated as a commander, special operations joint task force (CDRSOJTF), or commander joint special operations task force (CDRJSOTF). CDRTSOC, CDRSOJTF, CDRJSOTF, and JFSOCC, when designed, are JFCs.[3]



Special Operations Forces Command and Control Options

[3] See JP 3-05, *Joint Doctrine for Special Operations,* for additional information.

When a CCDR establishes multiple joint task forces (JTFs), the CDRTSOC may establish a special operations joint task force (SOJTF) or multiple joint special operations task forces (JSOTFs) to C2 SOF assets. The CCDR normally establishes support relationships between JSOTF commanders and JTF commanders. The CDRTSOC normally delegates OPCON of AFSOF to an Air Force special operations task group (SOTG), or a joint special operations air component (JSOAC), depending on the scale of operations. Refer to the "Special Operations Forces Command and Control Options" diagram for details of the SOF organization.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND-FORWARD

The CDRTSOC may establish a forward-deployed presence and C2 element through a Special Operations Command-Forward (SOC-FWD) to provide military engagement, security cooperation, and deterrence operations using distributed nodes. If conditions warrant a more robust SOF presence, a SOC-FWD can transition to a JSOTF or SOJTF. The SOC-FWD maintains a close relationship with the associated country team, HN forces, multinational forces, and intergovernmental organizations. The SOC-FWD assists the CDRTSOC with SOF campaign management and as a special operations advisor to the CCDR.

JSOTF and SOJTF Comparison	
JSOTF	**SOJTF**
Joint task force (JTF)-level commander	JTF-level commander
Normally commanded by an O6	Normally commanded by a general officer/flag officer
Can be constituted from component forces	Requested from USSOCOM by CCDR via a request for forces (RFF)
Normally subordinate to a SOJTF	Can command and control multiple JSOTFs and a joint special operations air component
Normally contains either theater mission forces or special mission unit	Contains both theater mission forces or special mission units
Crisis-based	Deliberate
Conventional forces capabilities provided by a combatant commander (CCDR)	Conventional forces capabilities coordinated through RFF from USSOCOM to Joint Staff

JSOTF and SOJTF Comparison

SPECIAL OPERATIONS JOINT TASK FORCE

A SOJTF is a modular, tailorable, and scalable special operations task force (SOTF) and JTF-headquarters (HQ) organization that allows CDRTSOC to provide joint SOF to CCDRs and subordinate JFCs. The SOJTF is typically used for larger-scale SOF operations and may include multinational SOF forces. In coordination with the CCDR, theater component,

and JTF commanders, the SOJTF commander is responsible for planning, integrating, and conducting special operations in a JSOA or other area of operations.

JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS TASK FORCE

A JSOTF contains special operations units from more than one SOF component to carry out specific operations or support campaigns. The JSOTF is typically subordinate to the SOJTF and organized for medium-scale operations. The JSOTF addresses joint SOF missions rather than strictly air-centric problem sets. The JSOTF can integrate subordinate SOTFs and CF. If the JSOTF is augmented with multinational or PN SOF, it becomes a combined joint special operations task force (CJSOTF).

JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS AIR COMPONENT

For large-scale operations, the CDRTSOC/JFSOCC may establish a JSOAC. The JSOAC is a task-organized unit that provides C2 functions for all SOF aviation assets under the OPCON of the JFSOCC. The JSOAC is manned with appropriate representation from the SOF components, multinational SOF, and CF, as required, for coordinating the integration of air assets. The JSOAC is augmented by qualified weapon systems experts from those units to which it provides C2. Based on efficiency, availability, and mission requirements, the JFSOCC may select the joint special operations air component commander (JSOACC) from either AFSOF or Army special operations aviation (ARSOA). JSOAC support functions identify command relationships within the JSOAC to ensure airspace, ISR, mobility, fires, and refueling are coordinated. Additionally, they ensure that weather, intelligence, imagery analysis, threat-to-air operations, enemy air order of battle, rescue, space, communications, airfield operations, and system support are efficient and beneficial from a SOF aviation perspective.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS TASK FORCE

A special operations task force (SOTF) is a grouping of SOF assets formed to carry out a specific operation or a continuing mission. SOTFs are scalable organizations normally built around the nucleus of an Army Special Forces battalion, Ranger battalion, Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) Raider battalion, or Naval Special Warfare unit. For distributed operations, a SOTF may be the only SOF C2 HQ in the area of operations or may be aligned under a JSOTF. A SOTF is deployed for more enduring operations requiring an HQ to conduct a campaign against a violent extremist organization, C2 a JSOA within a larger joint area, support a JSOTF or provide a functional C2 HQ for a smaller effort.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS LIAISON ELEMENT

The CDRSOJTF, CDRJSOTF, or JFSOCC provides a SOLE to the JFACC, or appropriate service component air C2 facility, to coordinate and synchronize SOF air and surface operations with joint air operations. The SOLE director places liaison officers throughout the JFACC's staff, located in the Joint Air Operations Center (JAOC). The SOLE coordinates, synchronizes, and deconflicts all SOF activities by providing a SOF presence in the JAOC that is aware of special operations activities. Special operations should be closely coordinated with joint air operations planning and execution to prevent friendly fire incidents and ensure the achievement of mission objectives.

The SOLE normally provides the following functions:[4]

- Harmonizes JFSOCC strategy and targets with the JFACC's intent via liaison with the AOC strategy division.
- Coordinates SOF requirements (to include ground, maritime, and subsurface SOF units) within the JFACC's master air attack plan with the combat operations division (COD).
- Coordinates JFSOCC inputs into the ATO, ACO, and special instructions with the COD.
- Provides situational awareness updates to the AOC's COD to coordinate close air support (CAS) and request immediate support for time-sensitive targets.
- Monitors and deconflicts SOF activities to prevent friendly fire incidents.
- Coordinates real-time ISR requirements for the JFSOCC.
- Synchronizes SOF personnel recovery with the joint personnel recovery center.
- Coordinates SOF component space requirements with the designated US Space Force (USSF) component field command.
- Coordinates and monitors SOF support of conventional units and operations (e.g., AC-130 gunships conducting CAS in support of non-SOF units).
- Provides additional deconfliction between SOF and other aircraft to include unmanned aircraft during theater air operations.

AFSOF UNIQUE ORGANIZATION

AFSOF deploy with an organic C2 structure, facilitating integration into joint force plans. AFSOF C2 provides cohesion and a control mechanism to address AFSOF and SOF-specific concerns when coordinating activities with other components and commands.

A SOTG and its subordinate special operations task units (SOTUs), along with an O-6 lead aviation staff augmentation team (ASAT), are AFSOC's service-oriented organizational contributions to a special operations joint force.

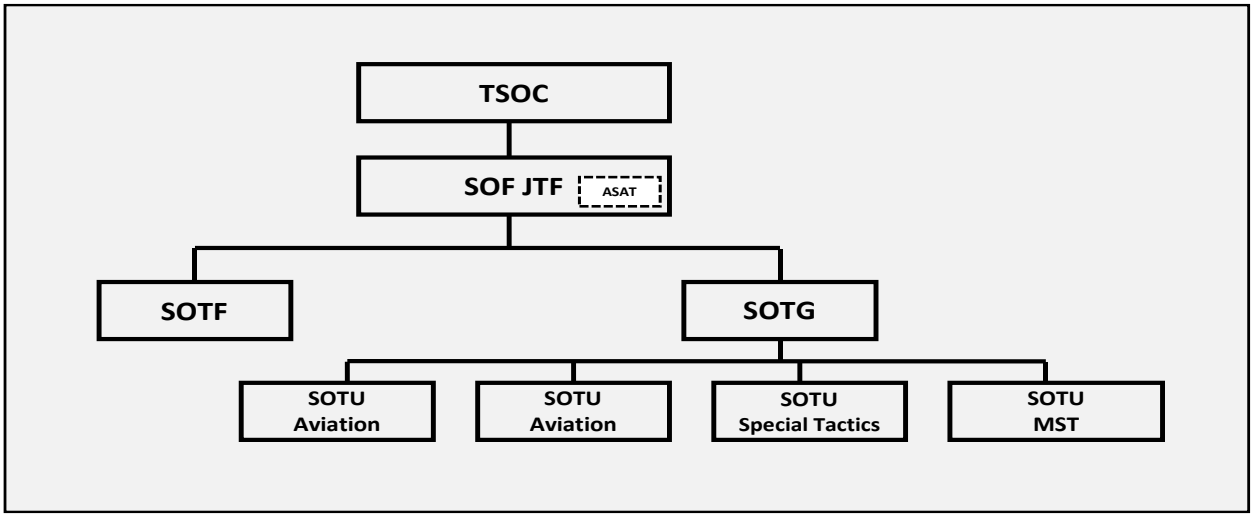
SPECIAL OPERATION TASK GROUP

A SOTG operates similarly to a SOTF and uses C2, information, intelligence, fires, movement and maneuver, protection, and sustainment functions to integrate and employ the full spectrum of AFSOF capabilities into SOF JTF operations. The SOTG is normally an O-5 led organization comprised of a HQ element and two or more SOTUs that conduct and/or support multi-domain operations in support of SOF JTF directives. SOTGs provide the C2 for SOTUs tactical units that provide an agile and ready force for high-end competition and conflict, as well as crisis response and counter-VEO operations. The SOTG exercises OPCON of assigned SOTUs and provides the necessary planning to direct and

[4] For additional information on SOLE, see JP 3-05, *Joint Doctrine for Special Operations*, and USSOCOM Directive 525-7, Joint Special Operations Liaison Element.

execute operations while also integrating C2, ISR, OIE, and Air Force Special Operations Support. SOTGs may assume OPCON of joint assets, as directed by the TSOC, or the higher HQ, if requisite expertise and authorities are provided to the SOTG HQ staff. Day to day, the SOTG operates under the JTF or JSOTF but could be assigned to a TSOC depending on mission requirements. A notional TSOC with subordinate units including a SOTG with its subordinate SOTUs is depicted in the "Notional Theater AFSOF Command and Control" diagram.

The special operations task group commander (COMSOTG) normally is the COMAFSOF and normally exercises OPCON over assigned forces and in rare cases, TACON of non-AFSOF for short durations.



Notional Theater AFSOF Command Organization

SPECIAL OPERATION TASK UNIT

SOTUs are primarily focused on singular AFSOF capabilities. SOTUs are designed to deploy with a parent SOTG HQ to support peer-echelon missions (i.e., SOTFs) or conduct independent AFSOF missions. A SOTU consists of an organic C2 element and one or more expeditionary force packages. There are three distinct types of SOTUs: aviation, special tactics (ST), and mission sustainment teams (MST).

- Aviation SOTUs consist of a C2 element, aircrew, aircraft, and support professionals.
- ST SOTUs are comprised of a C2 element and one to four special tactics teams (STT) with support elements.
- MST SOTUs enable movement and maneuver, sustainment, and protection of aviation and ST SOTUs worldwide. This includes supporting SOTUs by forward deploying the force, establishing operating locations, and enabling mission generation. Special Operations MSTs can support SOTGs/SOTUs with limited force protection, bed down, subsistence, ground support for air transportation services, and other support specialties. MSTs include force support, civil engineering, communications, logistics,

security forces, beddown/sustainment, medical, airfield management, and contracting capabilities.

AVIATION STAFF AUGMENTATION TEAM

The SOTG Commander may recommend that an ASAT be deployed for use within other US SOF component-led O-6 or above HQ staffs serving as JSOTFs or JTFs that are leading a SOTG. More specifically, the ASAT integrates into a service-provided O-6, or above HQ staff that requires AFSOF aviation expertise. See “Notional Theater AFSOF Command and Control” diagram. The ASAT is not a liaison team, instead, it is a team of aviation subject matter experts that facilitate joint special operations planning and execution.

CHAPTER 3: AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

Effective deterrence or prevailing in high-end conflict depends on credible actions in peacetime competition. AFSOF Airmen can expand the competitive space by extending the scope, scale, and reach of deterrent tools and authorities through trusted relationships, cultural awareness, intelligence vectors, nontraditional partners, and IW.

Global campaigns seek to capitalize on the cumulative effect of multiple coordinated and synchronized operations, activities, and investments across the competition continuum that shape the operational environment to achieve strategic and operational objectives.[5]

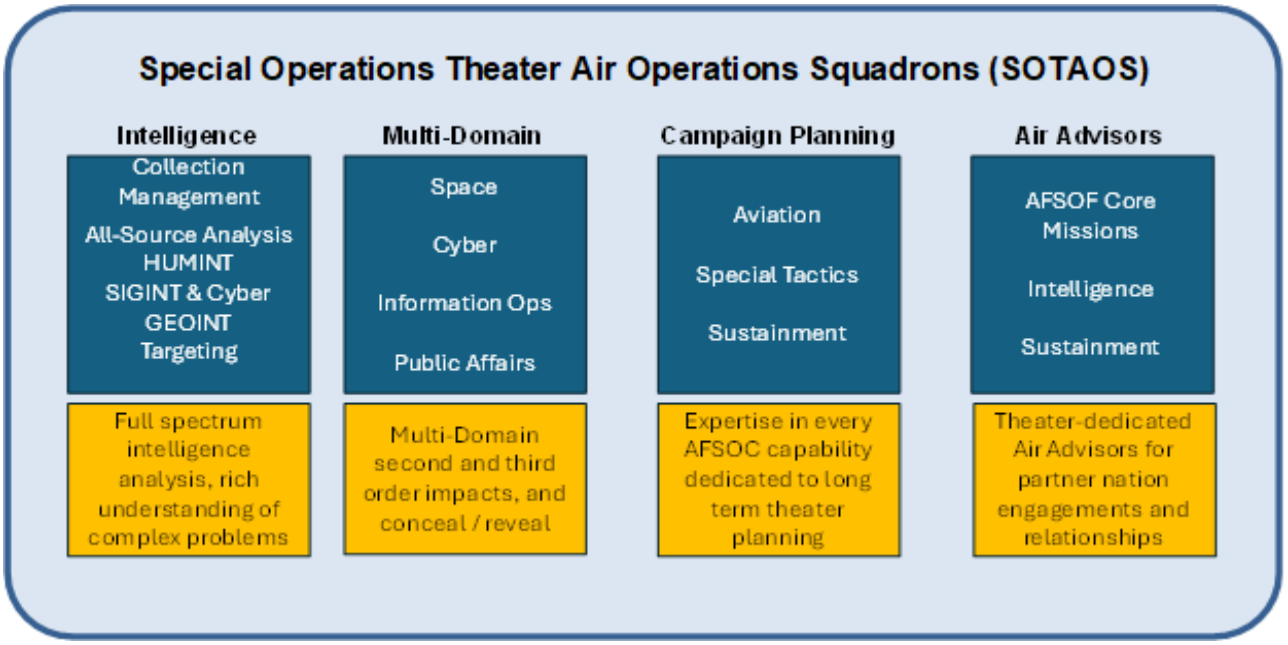
Through aligned daily activities and a persistent forward presence, AFSOF Airmen support global campaign plans by means of planning, preparing, and conducting operations that generate flexible response options for effects. Foundational AFSOF capabilities in support of global campaigning are Special Operations Theater Air Operations Squadrons (SOTAOS), SOF Air Advisors, ST, Agile Combat Support (ACS), and information forces conducting OIE.

AFSOC Power Projection Wings (PPW) are aligned to regional and crisis response missions. The Special Operations Wings, and their A-staffs, focus training and operations against missions, not functions. Command teams balance pathfinding and compliance while decreasing regulatory guidance in a risk-informed manner. Through decentralized execution and mission-type orders, AFSOC empowers teams to execute swiftly and effectively.

Special Operations Theater Air Operations Squadron

The SOTAOS is a regionally aligned squadron assigned to a PPW that regionally synchronizes, integrates, enables, and selectively employs AFSOF capabilities to increase advantage against national priorities and strategic competitors by providing multi-domain options for the Joint Force. The SOTAOS contains four pillars that enable it to recommend best utilization of AFSOF to solve theater air centric problems. The robust intelligence flight enables continuous awareness, understanding, and assessment of the operational environment via Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT), Electronic Intelligence (ELINT), Geospatial Intelligence (GEOINT), Human Intelligence (HUMINT), and ISR. The intelligence flight utilizes all source analysis to provide joint intelligence preparation of the environment. The multi-domain operations flight incorporates Space, Cyber, and OIE considerations into the employment of AFSOF. The Operations Planning flight contains Subject Matter Experts (SME) from every operational capability within AFSOC to best advise the planning process of the capabilities and limitations of AFSOF. The Air Advisor flight provides Air Advisors to impart subject matter expertise upon allies and partners to best assess and implement partners' capabilities into the Joint Force plan.

[5] See JP 3-0, *Joint Campaigns and Operations,* for additional information on Global Campaigning.



SOF AIR ADVISORS

SOF air advisors provide influence based on their placement and access to partner aviation forces and infrastructure. SOF air advisors also provide expertise in IW, C2, ISR, SOF Strike, and SOF Air Mobility, including non-standard aviation (NSAv), to influence partner availability, integration, and interoperability.

Air advisors are personnel who communicate professional knowledge and skills to PN aviation personnel to improve PN airpower capabilities. Air advising is comprised of five core functions: assess, train, advise, assist, and equip. These activities are conducted “by, with, and through” the PN counterpart and can be accomplished at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. While these functions can be performed across a range of operations, they are often used to help shape the environment and deter future aggression.

SPECIAL TACTICS AIRMEN

ST Airmen support theater engagement through their specialized training and experience. ST Airmen provide expertise in the air-to-ground integration and/or employment of aviation infrastructure development, ACS, SOF Advising, C2, SOF Strike, SOF Air Mobility, and rescue and recovery through their understanding of aviation and ground infrastructure.

AGILE COMBAT SUPPORT

ACS encompasses the logistics, maintenance, medical, communications, and force protection career fields. These career fields provide vital access to aviation support operations that provide aviation infrastructure development (e.g., medical capabilities, aircraft capabilities, logistical capabilities, and airfield security). ACS personnel provide expertise in combat support, IW, C2, and SOF Air Mobility.

INFORMATION FORCES

Information forces are those AFSOC personnel specifically organized, trained, and equipped to create effects in the information environment. These forces provide expertise and specialized capabilities that leverage information and can be aggregated as components of a joint OIE unit to conduct OIE.[6] AFSOC information forces provide expertise in the core disciplines of military information support operations (MISO), military deception (MILDEC), and operations security (OPSEC) and often work closely with the supported TSOC, JFC, and CCDR to protect and project information in support of operations objectives to achieve desired effects.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

AFSOF taskings varies from missions requiring specific AFSOF capabilities to missions where AFSOF are the only force able to respond. Planners should understand the capabilities, limitations, and risks associated with SOF missions.

Mission rehearsal is a critical element of mission preparation.

AFSOF missions are often:

- ✪ High-risk.
- ✪ High-payoff.
- ✪ Time constrained.
- ✪ Require first-time success.

AFSOF planning and preparation efforts typically involve extensive coordination, deconfliction, and integration across the United States government and its partners. Failure to properly coordinate requirements can severely impact mission execution and effectiveness.

TSOCs and subordinate SOF tactical units perform planning for core missions, preparation of the environment activities, contingency operations, and specialized continuous missions. Special operations center on individuals and small units applying special skills with adaptability, improvisation, and innovation. Special operations normally require precise tactical-level planning, detailed intelligence, and knowledge of the cultures and languages of the operational areas. Rigorous training and mission rehearsals are integral to the success of most special operations. Given the limited size and sustainability of AFSOF, adequate support and rehearsal is vital to special operations success.

[6] See JP 3-04, *Information in Joint Operations*, for additional information.

MISSION REHEARSAL

Mission rehearsal is a fundamental SOF activity that ensures mission success. SOF conducts rehearsals of operations and certain mission elements to ensure personnel, mission essential tasks, and support are analyzed to produce a fully developed operational plan along with requirements. Rehearsals allow operators to practice the mission, develop tactics, and reveal plan shortfalls. Mission training and rehearsals are integral to operations and reducing risk. SOF planners should consider and allow time for mission rehearsal if needed and available.

AFSOC Theater Engagement Construct

To better address global campaigning, AFSOC established an organizational transformation known as the Theater Engagement Construct. The Theater Engagement Construct optimizes AFSOC's force employment, development, and design in support of intelligence-driven, multi-domain operations.

At the heart of the Theater Engagement Construct lies the Special Operations Theater Air Operations Squadron (SOTAOS). Each SOTAOS is regionally aligned within a COCOM area of responsibility and force generated to provide AFSOF expertise, capabilities, and options to the commander. Foundational elements of the SOTAOS include SOF air advisors, ST, ACS, and information forces performing OIE.

The SOTAOS mission regionally synchronizes, integrates, enables, and selectively employs AFSOF capabilities—providing multi-domain SOF options to the joint force in support of national priorities. The SOTAOS supports PN capability development by integrating and synchronizing AFSOF and Security Force Assistance; providing specialized air mobility in support of joint, allied, and PN capacity; assisting the development and execution of TSOC COCOM campaign plans; and building new relationships and partnerships.

LANGUAGE, REGION, AND CULTURE

AFSOF face an expanding and dynamic operational environment requiring the ability to operate across a wide range of regional and cultural contexts. Planners should understand the operational environment as it is critical to success and identify requirements for cross-cultural competence and foreign language proficiency. These capabilities increase efficiency and lower the risk to SOF missions.

INTELLIGENCE

AFSOF intelligence provides specialized ISR capability across the full spectrum of SOF operations. AFSOF planning and execution are intelligence-intensive, timely, and detailed with tailored all-source intelligence. All-source intelligence should be broad in scope yet adequately detailed. Special operations success requires the mitigation of uncertainties associated with the threat, environment, and objective through the deliberate application of

intelligence operations and processes. Intelligence requirements differ from those of other air components due to the nature of the mission, the degree of detailed planning information, and the required tailored support. However, intelligence requirements unique to AFSOF operations produce some distinct characteristics, such as criticality, sourcing, and sensitivity. Detailed intelligence allows mission planning to avoid or minimize direct enemy confrontation and provides security for clandestine missions.

Because of the inherent jointness of special operations and the holistic threat presented both by adversary forces and the population in terms of detection, AFSOF intelligence conducts joint intelligence preparation of the operating environment (JIPOE) incorporating general military, socio-cultural, and aviation-specific intelligence to develop the special operations mission planning folder.

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.
- Combat tactics and concepts of employment based on expected threat scenarios.
- Target materials.
- Annotated imagery.
- Specialized geospatial products.
- Specialized Signals Intelligence products.

The release of post-mission reports with organically collected intelligence, target area analysis, and intelligence assessments may be limited due to the sensitivity of many types of SOF missions. Depending on the sensitivity, commanders should report data either through special access or routine intelligence reporting channels, as appropriate.

COMMUNICATIONS

AFSOF require integral communications resources characterized by high reliability, flexibility, lightweight, and low probability of detection and interception. SOF communications should operate without interference in a variety of environments. AFSOF's communications forces contain organic communications specialists and equipment to provide rapidly deployable communications capabilities. These communications include deployed network infrastructures, secure telecommunications services, and access to the Department of Defense Information Network (DoDIN). DoDIN access 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 deployable communications teams or host-base support. Trained and equipped SOF deployable communication teams provide specialized and general communication services

for initial AFSOF beddown support. These teams move forward to austere operating locations with AFSOF aviation units.

Communications security, OPSEC, and physical security are vitally important to SOF. From initial planning to force recovery, mission-critical information, and OPSEC indicators should be controlled to prevent the adversary from collecting and deriving information that could compromise the mission. AFSOF habitually operate from secure training sites and employment bases to reduce the opportunity for hostile intelligence collectors to observe and report SOF activity.

AFSOF maximize secure communications that ensure communications discipline (emissions control) and discretion (low probabilities of detection and intercept). Effective planning and coordination can ensure control of information while ensuring access necessary for flexible compartmented operations.

The AFSOC mission is supported by global special operations C2 networks. These networks are robust and expand as necessary during wartime, contingencies, and exercises to support an increase in operating locations.

OPERATIONS IN THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

OIE integrates and synchronizes multiple capabilities within the information environment that span the range of SOF operations. At the special operations air component level, OIE should be carefully integrated and synchronized through planning and execution in support of SOF objectives (i.e., not regarded as a separate OIE plan). Through the deliberate, tailored, and balanced application of capabilities, AFSOF can achieve the commander's desired effects.

CYBERSPACE OPERATIONS

Operations occurring in cyberspace can provide a military advantage to SOF in multiple domains. Cyberspace operations conducted remotely allow operations with a smaller-sized force to minimize detection. AFSOC possesses organic defensive cyberspace forces that can provide support to cyberspace operations. Support should be requested through the supported TSOC to US Cyber Command.

The SOTG, or JSOAC, should identify desired cyberspace operations and submit a theater-specific cyberspace support request to the JFSOCC or TSOC for validation and staffing the request to CCDRs.

SPACE OPERATIONS

Space capabilities are vital to the defense of our nation and enable SOF to gain and maintain initiative across the competition continuum. SOF rely on space capabilities to provide global access to conduct operations using space support to enhance missions by providing robust military satellite communications, space-borne remote imaging, signals collections, missile warning, space and terrestrial weather, and positioning, navigation, and timing capabilities. Additionally, space capabilities enhance SOF operations by protecting friendly systems, countering space-based and terrestrial threats, and degrading/denying an adversary's use

of space. SOF may specifically request offensive space operations to negate enemy use of space-support capabilities, reducing the effectiveness of adversary forces in all domains. Additionally, SOF are charged to maintain a key space domain responsibility to operationally prepare the security environment, deter aggression, and apply lethal and nonlethal force.

SOF provide options in the terrestrial and link segments that alter or shape ongoing adversary behaviors and objectives to protect and defend the national security space organizations.

Operation NEPTUNE SPEAR

On 2 May 2011, US Navy SEALs, supported by selected Joint SOF elements, executed a highly complex operation into an Al Qaeda compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. The operation, codenamed, NEPTUNE SPEAR, located and killed the leader of Al Qaeda and orchestrator of the 11 September 2001, attacks on the US—Osama bin Laden. The entire operation, which lasted less than 40 minutes, was the culmination of years of intelligence collection and analysis, detailed planning, and training.

Throughout the entire process, AFSOC aircraft and Airmen were highly instrumental. The speed and precision of the joint raid and its nearly flawless execution showcased the immense capability and evolution of US SOF, marking a transformation from the failure of Operation EAGLE CLAW into an elite joint force capable of highly integrated planning and execution with multiple services and across government agencies.

-- Press Briefing on the Killing of Osama Bin Laden

The USSF provides space capabilities to USSOCOM to conduct global special operations and activities as part of the joint force to support persistent, networked, and distributed CCMD operations and campaigns to protect and advance US policies and objectives.

CHAPTER 4: AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS SUPPORT

Combat support (CS) consists of functions necessary to support and sustain AFSOF for the duration of operations. During mission planning, unique CS requirements should be identified and coordinated via SOF channels to achieve sustained operational capability. During deployments, CS functions are normally provided by the CCDR, through the tasked service component. However, at forward and austere operating locations, where the preponderance of forces are AFSOF, the COMAFSOF should provide the majority of CS functions at that location.

AFSOF CS possesses capabilities unique to SOF, like Deployed Air Ground Response Element (DAGRE) security and force protection teams.

AFSOC possesses unique CS capabilities that directly enable the AFSOF mission. AFSOC refers to these as ACS. AFSOC's ACS capabilities provide forces with support and protection in many threat environments. ACS supports the AFSOF missions at both home station and forward-deployed locations. The ACS core mission contributes numerous diverse capabilities to AFSOC's global combat capabilities. SOF ACS capabilities include security and force protection; civil engineering (CE) support including chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) operations; aircraft maintenance and generation; forward deployed ground refueling operations; and medical operations.

CIVIL ENGINEERING

The core capabilities of AFSOC CE special capability teams include remote beddown, CBRN protection, and specialized explosive ordnance disposal (EOD).

Additionally, AFSOC CBRN defense teams can provide counter-CBRN defense for deployed personnel and assets for 30 days. CE special capability teams conduct this mission via the High Mobility Decontamination System (HMDS) and collective protection (COLPRO) teams. The HMDS is used primarily for tactical CBRN equipment and infrastructure decontamination, while COLPRO teams focus on tactical CBRN personnel protection.

Finally, the Engineer SOF EOD Gunship J-Support Team is a specialized, deployable EOD team required in support of worldwide combat operations and exercises of USSOCOM air and ground assets providing support for personnel within austere, contested, or non-standard operating locations. SOF EOD provides specialized capabilities and equipment required to support non-standard, kinetic aviation expeditionary force packages, airfield and tactical landing zone operations, aircraft recovery, minimal force protection, limited improvised explosive device detection and defeat, response to munitions incidents, specialized demolition, and other aspects of irregular warfare.

AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE

AFSOF employ multiple specialized fixed-wing and tilt-rotor vertical airlift platforms. These aircraft contain state-of-the-art modifications and system upgrades facilitating aircrew and mission partner set requirements for infiltration, exfiltration, precision strike, airlift, aerial refueling capabilities, and ISR. These platforms require specialized maintenance training and qualifications to inspect, service, troubleshoot, and repair these advanced systems at a home station or a deployed location. AFSOF also use commercial contractor maintenance to supplement USAF aircraft maintenance personnel.

An AFSOC Special Logistics Element provides mid to long-term supply chain operations to include retail material management, transportation, and logistics readiness functions required, but not otherwise available. The SOTG Commander may request a Special Logistics Element be deployed for use at a SOTU in contingency locations not co-located with a USAF materiel management function.

FORWARD AREA REFUELING POINT

Forward Area Refueling Point (FARP) consists of fuels operations used to hot refuel aircraft in areas where fuel is otherwise not available.[7] Fuel is transferred from a source aircraft's (C-130, C-17, or C-5) internal tanks to receiver aircraft while both aircraft's engines are running. Missions are typically accomplished at remote locations under blackout conditions and include airfield seizure, hostage rescue and recovery, and combat search and rescue missions.[8]

MEDICAL

SOF medical elements (SOFME) and special operations surgical teams (SOST) are embedded within AFSOF units to provide medical support to SOF operations and contingency medical support needs. AFSOC maintains medical specialty and functionally aligned equipment, personnel, and capabilities. SOFME and SOST personnel packages are critical to AFSOF deployed forces. SOFMEs and their equipment may deploy as part of an aviation unit or as a tailored, task-organized response package depending on SOF mission requirements.

SOFMEs provide a broad but limited continuum of medical capabilities: Force Health Protection, BOS primary care, advanced trauma life support, advanced cardiac life support, urgent point-of-injury trauma care, and casualty evacuation (CASEVAC). The SOST performs forward resuscitative surgery and immediate life and limb saving damage control, limited patient holding, and critical care CASEVAC.

SOSTs are embedded within and employed by the special operations wing and special operation units. Additionally, SOFMEs and SOSTs can provide medical support for humanitarian missions, noncombatant evacuation operations, civil affairs, foreign internal defense (FID), and global healthcare engagement missions.

[7] Sister service doctrine defines FARP as Forward Arming and Refueling Point.
[8] See DAFI 23-201, *Fuels Management,* for additional information.

AFSOF medics operate in diverse operations in remote and austere environments, far removed from conventional logistics support and resupply. Due to these conditions, equipment sets should be flexible, robust, lightweight, reliable, and easy to operate.

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