

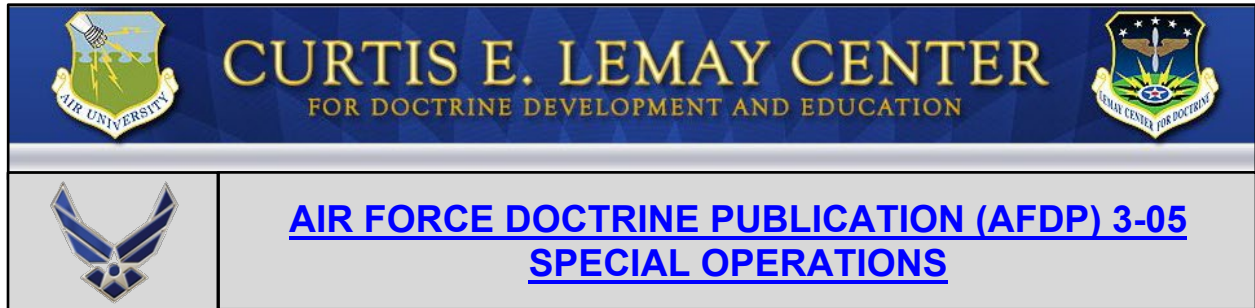
AIR FORCE DOCTRINE PUBLICATION 3-05

SPECIAL OPERATIONS



U.S. AIR FORCE

1 February 2020



INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL OPERATIONS

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Special operations doctrine is constantly evolving. It should guide effective organization and employment of special operations across the competition continuum. As we continuously improve our airpower capabilities, our ability to revolutionize special operations and incorporate new concepts and technologies will shape future special operations doctrine.

This AFDP 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 in a wide variety of scenarios in a complex global security environment. Future special operations in a contested environment against a peer adversary require its air component to be more adaptive, resilient, and agile in its deployment and employment plans and leadership philosophies.

This AFDP 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 special operations; and third, it explains AFSOF's unique command relationships. Special operations are rarely conducted as a single Service operation; therefore, special operations planning should consider joint support and coordination.

As a contributor to the special operations joint force, AFSOF conduct and support specific special operations core activities. The special operations core activities, and the AFSOF core missions, which support those activities, will be discussed in [Core Activities](#) and [Core Missions](#). This AFDP provides an overview of the Airman's perspective of the special operations core activities, while other AFDPs 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 [special operations forces](#) (SOF) capabilities and limitations, to better conduct operations.

AFSOF conduct joint and combined training within the SOF community and the 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 SOF 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 and low-visibility special operations may require detailed interagency and international coordination. Additionally, AFSOF require unique training, education and the development, acquisition, and employment of weapons and equipment not standard to the force.

- ★ Certain AFSOF personnel undergo a rigorous selection process and mission-specific training beyond basic military skills to achieve proficiency in entry-level special operations skills. AFSOF units normally include 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 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 asymmetric 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 special operations missions using SOF-unique equipment.

AFSOF MISSION CONSIDERATIONS

Before planning or conducting special operations missions, SOF and CF commanders and staff should be aware of the following considerations.

- ★ AFSOF should be used to create effects that require SOF's unique skills and capabilities. AFSOF are not a substitute for CF. 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 special operations. Limited AFSOF resources should not be used to conduct missions more appropriate for CF.
- ★ The mission should support the joint force commander's campaign, operation plan, or contingency response. Unity of effort and purpose across the force is imperative for mission success. Conducting operations, which do not support this economy of force, could result in the loss of limited AFSOF resources.
- ★ AFSOF are not structured for attrition or force-on-force warfare and should not be assigned missions or employed beyond their capabilities. 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.
- ★ Mission planning should include coordination for required resources to support AFSOF operations. Special operations often require support from CF, host-nation or contracted sources for airlift, intelligence, space operations, cyberspace operations, communications, information operations, medical, logistics, 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 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 affect 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.”

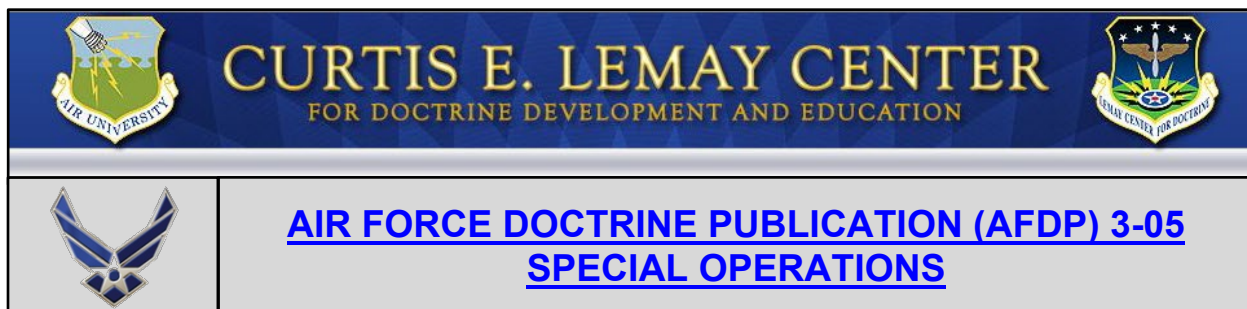
Concurrently, General Henry “Hap” Arnold, commander, Army Air Forces, approved the activation of an American special air unit in the China-Burma-India (CBI) theater of operations. The First Air Commando Group’s primary task involved support for Lord Louis Mountbatten’s British commando forces in the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

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





SPECIAL OPERATIONS DEFINED

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[Special operations](#) require unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment, and training, and often occur in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments. Some or all of the following characteristics typify special operations: time sensitive, clandestine, low visibility, conducted with or through indigenous forces, requiring regional expertise, and/or a high degree of risk.

Air Force special operations are an integral part of special operations and provide [combatant commanders](#) and ambassadors discreet, precise, and scalable operations that integrate military operations with other activities. They are designed to assess, shape, and influence foreign political and military environments unilaterally or by working with host nations, regional partners, and indigenous populations in a culturally attuned manner that is both immediate and enduring in order to enable the nation to prevent and deter conflict or prevail in war. Special operations can be conducted independently; however, most require a networked approach in conjunction with operations of [conventional forces](#) (CF), other government agencies, or host nations, and may include operations with indigenous, insurgent, or irregular forces. Special operations may differ from conventional operations in degree of strategic, physical, and political risk; operational techniques; modes of employment; and dependence on intelligence and indigenous assets.

Additionally, Air Force special operations forces (AFSOF) are relatively small forces that may operate independently from other friendly forces. Air Force special operations are often conducted at great distances from major bases in a distributed manner with relatively small footprints. They employ sophisticated communications systems and special means of infiltration, support, and exfiltration to penetrate and return from hostile, denied, or politically sensitive areas. AFSOF should complement and collaborate with, but not compete with nor be a substitute for CF. As an example, an AC-130 gunship should not be employed when a conventional aircraft would be more appropriate for the target and the operational conditions. The need to attack or engage strategic or operational targets with small units drives the formation of units with specialized, highly focused capabilities. Although not always decisive on their own, when properly employed, special operations can be designed and conducted to create conditions favorable to US strategic goals and objectives. Often, these operations may require clandestine or low visibility capabilities.

The most important element of the Air Force's special operations capabilities resides in its aircrews, special tactics units, combat aviation advisory teams, and support personnel specially trained to conduct and support a wide array of missions. Certain AFSOF units are regionally-oriented, culturally astute, and include personnel experienced and conversant in cultures and languages found in specific operational areas. When required, [special operations forces](#) (SOF) elements should provide liaisons to facilitate conventional, multinational, and interagency interoperability. For example, special operations liaisons are normally provided to the [joint force air component commander](#) to help ensure coordination, synchronization, and to prevent friendly fire incidents.

DESIGNATION OF AFSOF

AFSOF is the umbrella term for those regular and Reserve Component (RC) Air Force forces or those units or forces that have since been designated as SOF by the Secretary of Defense. The Commander, US Special Operations Command (CDRUSSOCOM) exercises [combatant command](#) authority over all active component and all RC mobilized or ordered to active duty (other than training) AFSOF. CDRUSSOCOM exercises training and readiness oversight authority over assigned RC AFSOF when not on active duty or when on active duty for training.

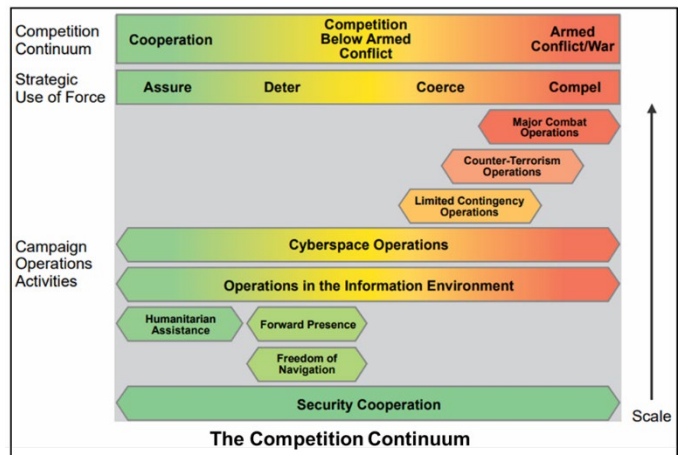
AFSOF are composed of special operations aviation units (including unmanned aircraft systems), special tactics personnel (including combat control teams, pararescue personnel, special reconnaissance teams, and select tactical air control party), dedicated SOF [intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance](#) units, precision strike, specialized air mobility, aviation [foreign internal defense](#) units, and support capabilities such as [command and control](#), [information operations](#), and [combat support](#) functions.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES WITHIN THE COMPETITION CONTINUUM

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INTEGRATED CAMPAIGNING

The [Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning](#) (JCIC) describes the competition continuum of armed conflict through cooperation (See figure, “The Competition Continuum”). Fundamentally, special operations force (SOF) are an integral part of joint force campaigning and fits within this model.



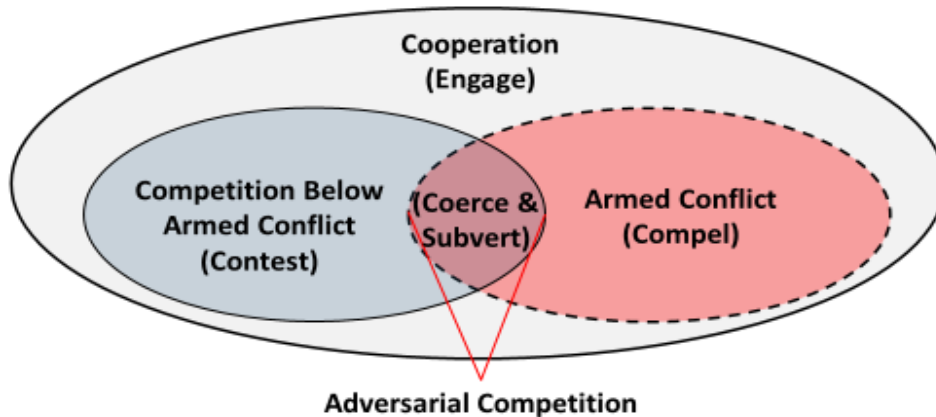
THE COMPETITION CONTINUUM

Competition is a fundamental aspect of international relations. As states and non-state actors seek to protect and advance their own interests, they continually compete for diplomatic, economic, and strategic advantage. To better adapt to the changing environment, the joint force has adopted a framework for understanding, describing, and participating in a competitive operational environment. Rather than a world at peace or at war, the competition continuum describes a world of enduring competition conducted through a continuous mixture of cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict. US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) defines competition as the interaction among actors in pursuit of the influence, leverage, and advantage necessary to secure their respective interests.

The three broad categories of strategic relationships allow planners the ability to frame military activities across campaigns and operations. Planners should not view the categories in a linear fashion; campaigns and operations can begin within any of the categories; accelerate, surge, or decrease in scope and intensity; and occur concurrently. The overlapping in the figure, “Interrelation of Actions within the Competition Continuum,” represents the intersection of Department of Defense (DOD) activities that can occur within these three categories to assure partners in cooperation

compete against adversaries below the level of armed conflict, coerce or subvert adversaries when competition moves towards armed conflict, and compel enemies

Interrelation of Actions within the Competition Continuum



during war. At the intersection of competition and armed conflict lies adversarial competition typically a SOF operating space.

Interrelation of Actions within the Competition Continuum

SOF are guided by the following principles of competition:

- ★ **Orient campaigns on US interests.** Campaigns should center on US interests and—in the context of global campaign plans—determine how actors threaten those interests or how to exploit opportunities to advance that interest relative to the actor.
- ★ **Conduct integrated campaigning.** SOF should enable joint force core warfighting functions and contribute through tasks beyond the capability of conventional counterparts.
- ★ **SOF acts on a global scale and over time.** The distribution and activities of SOF should reflect a comprehensive understanding of national priorities in time and space, not just in theater, but regionally as well as globally.
- ★ **Exploit asymmetries and leverage indirect approaches.** Campaigns should incorporate a strategic and operational understanding of asymmetries that exist between US and adversaries' interests, strategies, cultures, postures, capabilities, and relationships.
- ★ **Employ unorthodox methods.** SOF are inherently limited in resources, which almost always bear a significant opportunity cost when employed. Within a

compound approach, campaigns should strive to direct SOF in ways that fully realizes its potential effect in the strategic environment.

SOF COOPERATION

Typically, SOF play a crucial role in cooperation activities. Cooperation activities are normally enduring with no discrete start or end. Relationships with the allies or partners are in place and will continue for the foreseeable future with mutual benefit to both the US and its partners. In some cases, however, cooperation in specific areas with a partner whose overall relationship with the US is neutral, or even adversarial, may be necessary. Cooperative activities can take many forms, from security force assistance with a partner in a quiet region to multinational operations and activities in an armed conflict. The common thread is that campaigning through cooperation is a purposeful activity to achieve or maintain policy objectives. SOF are typically used to build partner capacity, integrate partner capabilities into joint operations, help understand the operational environment, and prepare/shape conditions for follow-on joint force activities.

Campaigning through cooperation requires patience, consistency, and empathy. The most productive relationships take time to build. A partnership is unlikely to reach its potential if the joint force approaches military engagement as discrete events rather than as part of a deliberate, continuous process. SOF commanders and staffs should have an understanding of the environment, a realistic appraisal of the partner's objectives, and the nature of the partner's relationship with the US to derive a range of feasible and productive military options that lead to sustainable and acceptable end states for the US and its partner.

SOF COMPETING BELOW THE LEVEL OF ARMED CONFLICT

Competition below armed conflict tends to occur over extended periods. In comparison to armed conflict, actions are often more indirect and the expenditure of resources less intense, thus allowing for a more protracted effort. As an inherently constrained and measured approach, these campaigns are not designed to achieve quick results. To compete during these operations, SOF adopt a long-term approach; agile enough to react to rapid changes in the political, diplomatic, and strategic environment. During these activities, SOF set conditions to enable the maximum range of options to accommodate and respond to changing political and diplomatic environment. When properly executed, competition below armed conflict creates strategic opportunities for the US and its partners. The methods employed in competition below armed conflict will vary with the situation, but successful SOF action features the following characteristics.

- ✦ Provide understanding of how relevant actors will perceive action or situations.
- ✦ Conduct a broad array of activities: Establish access to critical areas, forward positions units, establish appropriate and timely presence, organize exercises, share intelligence, prepare the environment for crisis response, and conduct operations in

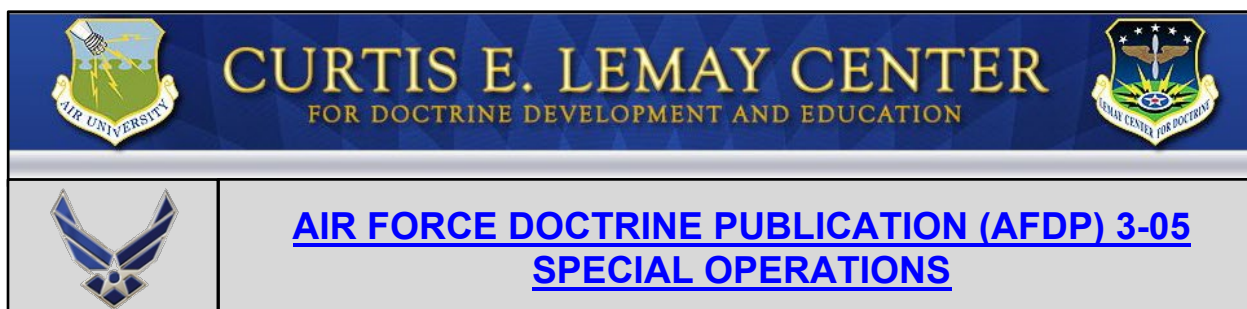
the information environment, to include efforts to counter and undermine the competitor's narrative.

- ★ Continually assess the competitor's intentions and capabilities, which will change over time. For these actions to have tangible effects on a competitor's behavior, it is essential to have a deep understanding of competitor perceptions and decision-making, as well as the close integration of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic efforts.

SOF IN ARMED CONFLICT

One implication of the competition continuum is that it is not solely sufficient to excel in campaigning through armed conflict. Even in an international armed conflict, success requires the skillful application of both cooperation and competition below armed conflict. If these are ignored or treated as ancillary to the armed conflict effort, then the joint force is at increased risk for failure to meet some or all of the desired objectives. Commanders and staffs should be aware of the interrelated nature of these various elements. SOF should be aware that while engaged in armed conflict, they may be required to conduct cooperation and competition below the level of armed conflict activities within the theater of operations, or globally. During armed conflict, SOF conduct core activities and other operations that enable joint force objectives.

Rarely do wars end with a complete end of armed conflict. Wars disrupt political, social, and economic structures, networks, and institutions to the point it is often impossible to simply return to a pre-conflict state. Destruction of government and societal institutions can create conditions for intense competition among internal, regional, and global actors seeking to retain or gain power, status, or strategic advantage within a new order. The joint force might be directed to fight in an armed conflict against enemy combatants who become guerrillas, warlords, or criminal militias. Global or regional competitors can then exploit these conditions by supporting these groups as proxies or surrogates to continue the armed conflict. Therefore, the immediate "post-war" period still requires the joint force to campaign through a mixture of cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict. SOF typically play a crucial role in ensuring transitions between phases of operations and campaigns, and as environments transition between cooperation, competition below the level of armed conflict, and armed conflict.



SPECIAL OPERATIONS RELATIONSHIP TO IRREGULAR WARFARE

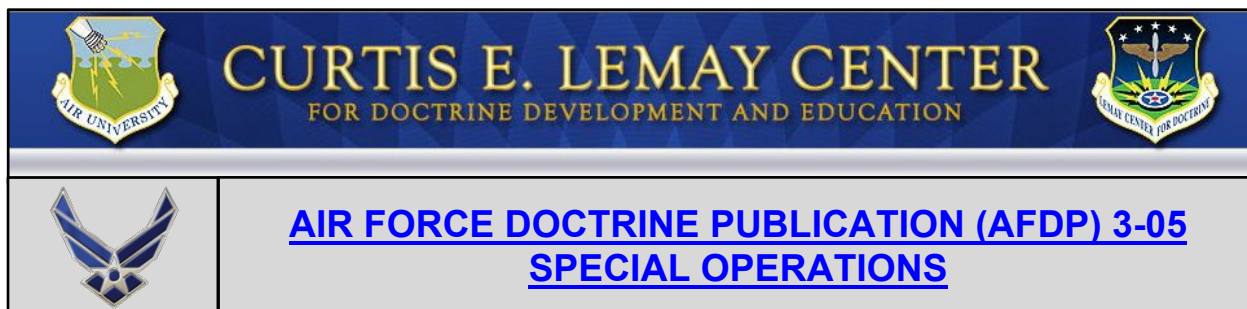
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Adaptive adversaries such as terrorists, insurgents, criminal networks, and rogue states resort to irregular forms of warfare as effective ways to challenge US forces. [Irregular warfare](#) (IW) is “characterized as a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s).”¹

Irregular warfare is an enduring, economical contribution to America’s national security and will remain an essential core competency of the Department of Defense (DOD). The DOD has mandated that irregular warfare be institutionalized as a core competency that will require a deliberate and sustained integration of conventional and special operations capabilities. The joint force will employ our 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.

Since many irregular threats are not purely military problems, many of the responses required are not purely military either. Due to the complex nature of these threats, such conflicts may not end with decisive military victory. They are more likely to require long-term involvement to remedy, reduce, manage, or mitigate the conflict. US forces should seek to work in concert with other government agencies, multinational partners, and other partnered actors to prevent, deter, disrupt, and defeat irregular threats. They should understand the situation in depth, plan and act in concert, and continually assess and adapt their approach in response to the dynamic and complex nature of the problem. [Special operations forces](#) are ideally suited to participate in US efforts to counter IW adversaries and threats, because of their inherent capabilities, characteristics, and specialized training as well as the ability to operate by, with, and through partner nations. For more information on IW, refer to AFDP 3-2, [Irregular Warfare](#).

¹ Joint Publication 1, [Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States](#)



SPECIAL OPERATIONS CORE ACTIVITIES

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[Special operations forces](#) (SOF) conduct specific special operations core activities as established by the United States Code, Title 10, *Armed Forces*, section 167, "[Unified Combatant Command for Special Operations Forces](#);" Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 5100.01, [Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components](#); or as otherwise specified by the President or the Secretary of Defense. These activities are explained in US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Publication 1 (Pub 1), *Doctrine for Special Operations*; Joint Publication (JP) 3-05, [Special Operations](#); JP 3-13.2, [Military Information Support Operations](#); JP 3-22, [Foreign Internal Defense](#); JP 3-24, [Counterinsurgency](#); JP 3-26, [Joint Combating Terrorism](#); JP 3-40, [Joint Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction](#); JP 3-57, [Civil-Military Operations](#); as well as other USSOCOM, joint and Air Force doctrine documents.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS CORE ACTIVITIES

The special operations core activity definitions and descriptions are primarily derived from JP 3-05, USSOCOM Pub 1, and other supporting special operations doctrine publications. It is important to note that core activities are mutually supporting and interoperable in most cases. Rarely, if ever, will a special operation occur that does not support, include, or impact multiple core activities. The execution of one core activity may have operational or strategic influence on other core activities being performed or planned. As an example, an unconventional warfare campaign may include elements of direct action and special reconnaissance. The special operations core activities are:

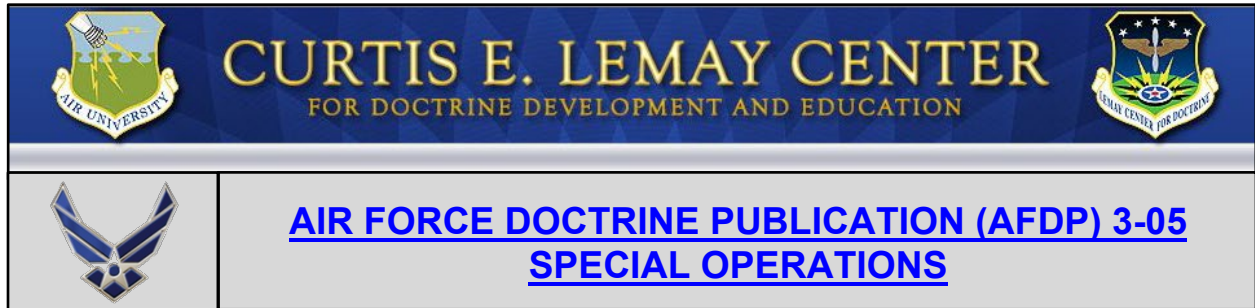
- ✦ [Direct Action](#) (DA). Short-duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or diplomatically sensitive environments and which employ specialized military capabilities to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover, or damage designated targets. [Air Force special operations forces](#) (AFSOF) primarily support DA by employing specialized air mobility, precision strike, and special tactics core mission areas.
- ✦ [Special Reconnaissance](#) (SR). Reconnaissance and surveillance actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance, employing military capabilities not normally found in [conventional forces](#). AFSOF

support SR by employing specialized air mobility, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance (ISR), and special tactics core mission areas.

- ★ **Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction** (CWMD). SOF support US government efforts to curtail the development, possession, proliferation, use, and effects of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), related expertise, materials, technologies, and means of delivery by state and non-state actors. WMD are chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons capable of a high order of destruction or causing mass casualties and exclude the means of transporting or propelling the weapon where such means are a separable and divisible part from the weapon. The strategic objectives of CWMD operations are to reduce incentives to obtain and employ WMD; increase barriers to acquisition and use of WMD; manage WMD risks emanating from hostile, fragile, failed states, or havens; and deny the effects of current and emerging WMD threats. USSOCOM supports geographic **combatant commanders** through technical expertise, materiel, and special teams to complement other combatant command teams that locate, tag, and track WMD; DA in limited access areas; helping build partnership capacity to conduct CWMD activities; military information support operations (MISO) to dissuade adversaries from reliance on WMD; and other specialized capabilities. AFSOF supports CWMD through its specialized air mobility, precision strike, and special tactics core missions.
- ★ **Counterterrorism**. Actions taken directly against terrorist networks and indirectly to influence and render global and regional environments inhospitable to terrorist networks. AFSOF primarily support these actions with specialized air mobility, ISR, precision strike, and special tactics core mission areas.
- ★ **Unconventional Warfare** (UW). 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. AFSOF primarily support UW activities with specialized air mobility, aviation foreign internal defense (AvFID), and special tactics core missions.
- ★ **Foreign Internal Defense** (FID). Participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to its security. AFSOF support this core activity through the AFSOF AvFID and special tactics core missions.
- ★ **Security Force Assistance** (SFA). The DOD activities that contribute to unified action by the US Government to support the development of the capacity and capability of foreign security forces and their supporting institutions. AFSOF support SFA activities through the AFSOC AvFID and special tactics core missions.
Note: FID and SFA are similar at the tactical level where advisory skills are applicable to both. At the operational and strategic levels, both FID and SFA focus on preparing foreign security forces (FSF) to combat lawlessness, subversion,

insurgency, terrorism, and other internal threats to their security; however, SFA also prepares FSF to defend against external threats and to perform as part of an international force. Although FID and SFA are both subsets of security cooperation, neither is considered a subset of the other and can be executed simultaneously.

- ✦ **Hostage Rescue and Recovery**. Hostage rescue and recovery operations are sensitive crisis response missions in response to terrorist threats and incidents. Offensive operations in support of hostage rescue and recovery can include recapture of US facilities, installations, and sensitive material outside the continental US. AFSOF support these activities through the full range of their core missions.
- ✦ **Counterinsurgency** (COIN). Comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes. SOF are particularly suited for COIN operations because of their regional expertise, language, and combat skills, and ability to work among populations and with or through indigenous partners. AFSOF support COIN activities employing the full range of their core missions.
- ✦ **Foreign Humanitarian Assistance**. DOD activities conducted outside the US and its territories to directly relieve or reduce human suffering, disease, hunger or privation. AFSOF supports humanitarian assistance and disaster relief by employing command and control, specialized air mobility, ISR, and special tactics core mission areas.
- ✦ **Military Information Support Operations** (MISO). The planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals. The purpose of MISO is to induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behavior favorable to the originator's objectives. AFSOF supports MISO by employing the information operations core mission area.
- ✦ **Civil Affairs Operations**. Those military operations conducted by civil affairs forces that, (1) enhance the relationship between military forces and civil authorities in localities where military forces are present; (2) require coordination with other interagency organizations, intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations, indigenous populations and institutions, and the private sector; and (3) involve application of functional specialty skills that normally are the responsibility of civil government to enhance the conduct of civil-military operations. AFSOF can support these activities by establishing measures to help the host nation gain support of the local populace and the international community, and reduce support or resources to those destabilizing forces threatening legitimate processes of the host nation government. AFSOF support civil affairs operation activities by employing the full range of their core missions.



AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND CORE MISSIONS

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As an Air Force major command and the Air Force component to US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) is responsible for providing specially tailored aviation related capabilities to conduct or support special operations core activities and other Secretary of Defense directed taskings. AFSOC refers to these capabilities as core missions. AFSOC core missions include:

- ✦ **Agile Combat Support** (ACS). Enables all AFSOC core missions and capabilities across the range of military operations. Protects, fields, prepares, deploys, maintains, sustains, and reconstitutes Air Force special operations personnel, weapons systems, infrastructure, and information in support of special operations core activities.
- ✦ **Aviation Foreign Internal Defense** (AvFID). AFSOC combat aviation advisors (CAA) assess, train, advise, and assist/accompany partnered forces aviation assets in airpower employment, sustainment, and integration. CAA conduct special operations activities by, with, and through foreign aviation forces. CAA mission priorities are focused on mobility, ISR, and precision strike missions, with associated surface integration tasks that enable the air-to-ground integration of partnered forces.
- ✦ **Command and Control** (C2). C2 is the exercise of the commander's authority and direction over assigned and attached forces. Operational C2 elements consist of personnel and equipment with specialized capability to plan, direct, coordinate, and control forces to conduct joint and combined special operations.
- ✦ **Information Operations** (IO). IO is the integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own by producing effects in and through the information environment. The resulting information superiority allows friendly forces the ability to collect, control, exploit, and defend information without effective opposition.

- ★ **Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance** (ISR). ISR synchronizes and integrates sensors, collection assets, and processing, exploitation and dissemination in direct support of current and future SOF operations. It consists of manned and remotely piloted aircraft and Distributed Common Ground Systems that deliver actionable intelligence to supported special operations forces (SOF). ISR produces detailed, specialized products tailored to mission, customer, and pace of operation that gives SOF a decisive advantage against our adversaries.

- ★ **Precision Strike.** Precision strike provides the joint force commander and the SOF operator with specialized capabilities to find, fix, track, target, engage, and assess (F2T2EA) targets. F2T2EA can use a single weapon system or a combination of systems to complete the kill chain. Precision strike missions include close air support, air interdiction, and armed reconnaissance. Attributes associated with precision strike include persistence, robust communications, high situational awareness, precise target identification, lethality, and survivability, as required.

- ★ **Specialized Air Mobility.** Specialized air mobility missions include both specialized mobility and refueling. Specialized mobility is the rapid global infiltration, exfiltration, and resupply of personnel, equipment, and material using specialized systems and tactics. Specialized refueling is the rapid, global refueling of both airborne and overland platforms using specialized systems and tactics, thereby increasing mission flexibility and aircraft range. This is done via in-flight refueling either as a tanker or receiver and can additionally be conducted on the ground through a forward arming and refueling point (FARP). These missions may be clandestine, covert, low visibility, or overt and through hostile, denied, or politically sensitive airspace using manned or unmanned platforms with a single aircraft or part of a larger force package. Specialized air mobility aircraft operate across the range of military operations in all environmental regions (e.g., arctic, desert, littoral, mountainous, sea, tropical, etc.), day and night, and during adverse weather conditions to include transient exposure to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear effects. Specialized air mobility platforms also have capability to conduct limited military information support operations (MISO) via leaflet drops of printed material. Although modern means of communications will most likely be used in MISO, leaflet drops can and will remain an effective MISO medium when the area of interest does not possess modern means of communications, is outside a high threat area, or is affected by natural disasters.

- ★ **Special Tactics.** A special tactics team (STT) is a ground force that conducts special operations core activities with expertise in airpower application. Special tactics conducts special operations at the tactical and operational level to solve threat-centric problems and concurrently applies specialized airpower capabilities. Special tactics required capabilities are Global Access, Precision Strike, Personnel Recovery (for more information, see USSOCOM Directive 525-21), and Battlefield Surgery. Special tactics capabilities enable the joint force to gain access, project combat power, and protect the force across the spectrum of conflict. Special tactics capabilities consist of air traffic control; assault zone assessment, establishment and control; terminal attack control; fire support; operational preparation of the

environment; special reconnaissance; command and control; full spectrum personnel and equipment recovery; humanitarian relief; battlefield trauma care; and battlefield surgery. The special tactics squadron is the basic unit of action and task organized with subordinate mission-oriented STTs. Each STT is oriented toward the Global Access, Precision Strike, or Personnel Recovery mission. The Special Operations Surgical Team (SOST) provides a forward resuscitation and surgical capability. Agile special tactics forces enable projection and integration of SOF power across domains, geographic boundaries, and operational environments in support of the special tactics required capabilities of Global Access, Precision Strike, Personnel Recovery, and Battlefield Surgery. Through an integrated warfighting approach, special tactics is uniquely capable of delivering airpower against hard problem sets that are otherwise not within operational reach of the joint force.

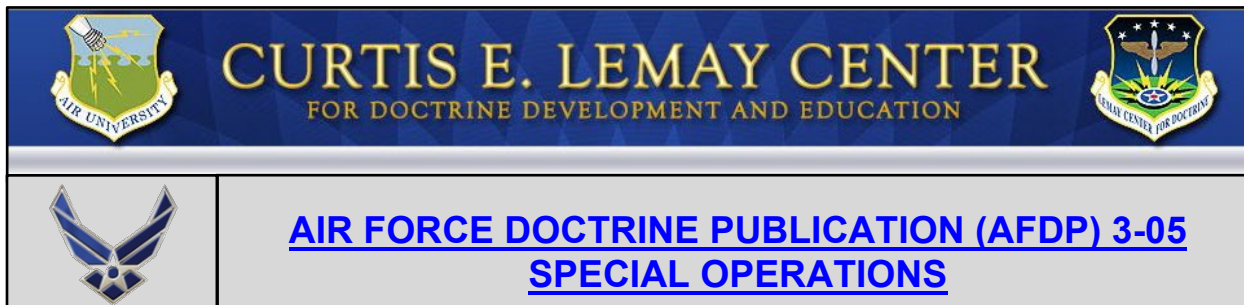
Operation ENDURING FREEDOM

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington D.C., on September 11, 2001, pushed the nation's special operations forces to the forefront of the war against terrorism. Additionally, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) invoked the "mutual defense clause" for the first time in its history in response to the attacks.

By the end of September 2001, AFSOC deployed forces to southwest Asia for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) to help confront and remove the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, along with the Taliban-supported al-Qaeda terrorist organization headed by Osama Bin Laden, who were responsible for the September 11 attacks on the US.

During the initial months of OEF, AFSOC Joint Terminal Attack Control (JTAC) qualified CCTs played a significant role in the campaign as the USAF airpower relied on their expertise for coordinated airstrikes. These strikes were critical in support to the Northern Alliance in their fight against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The AFSOC CCTs were instrumental in the first major gain of the conflict, leveraging airpower that led to the capture of the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif on November 9, 2001—a major breakthrough in the struggle to oust the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Airpower provided by AFSOC AC-130s, MC-130s, and special tactics teams significantly diminished the Taliban's and al-Qaeda's capabilities in Afghanistan.

In addition to their support in Afghanistan, AFSOC personnel also deployed to the Philippines, and later to the Horn of Africa, Trans-Saharan Africa, and the Caribbean and Central American regions to help aid partner nation's efforts in combatting terrorism.



AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS

Last Updated: 1 February 2020

[Air Force special operations forces](#) (AFSOF) are under the [combatant command](#) (COCOM) authority of the US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and under [administrative control](#) (ADCON) of the Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC). USSOCOM is a functional combatant command, with Service-like responsibilities in areas unique to special operations, and when established as a supported command, plans and conducts certain global special operations missions.

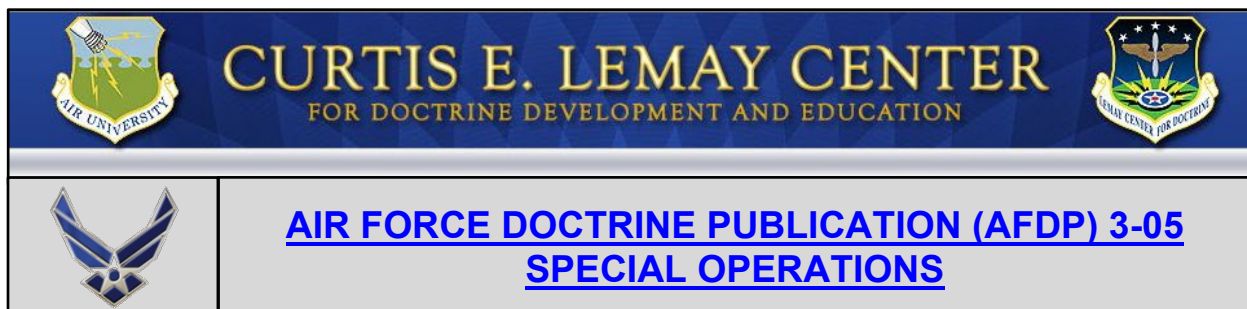
USSOCOM exercises COCOM authority over [theater special operations commands](#) (TSOC) for organize, train, and equip responsibilities. A [combatant commander](#) (CCDR), exercises [operational control](#) of special operations forces (SOF) through the commander, TSOC (CDRTSOC). The CDRTSOC may also be designated as the [joint force special operations component commander](#).

When a CCDR establishes and employs multiple joint task forces and independent task forces, CDRTSOC may establish and employ a special operations joint task force (SOJTF) or multiple [joint special operations task forces](#) (JSOTFs) to command and control SOF assets. The GCC normally establishes support relationships between JSOTF commanders and JTF/task force commanders.

AFSOC retains Service ADCON of all assigned active component and exercises specified elements of ADCON over reserve component AFSOF personnel. AFSOC may share selected elements of Service ADCON with other Air Force component commands in order to obtain regional beddown support.

Regardless of the arranged command relationship, commanders should provide for a clear, unambiguous chain of command ([unity of command](#)).

Refer to AFDP 3-30, [Command and Control](#), for additional information.



AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES COMMAND, CONTROL, AND ORGANIZATION

Last Updated: 1 February 2020

[Air Force special operations forces](#) (AFSOF) are presented to the [combatant commander](#) (CCDR) through a Secretary of Defense (SecDef) deployment order in coordination with and at the direction of US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), as the US joint force provider for [special operations forces](#) (SOF).

COMMAND AND CONTROL OF AFSOF IN THEATER

[Command and control](#) (C2) of SOF is normally executed within a SOF chain of command. The C2 structure for SOF depends on objectives, security requirements, and the operational environment.

Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC)

USSOCOM exercises [combatant command](#) (COCOM) authority over [TSOCs](#) for organize, train, and equip responsibilities. The TSOC plans and conducts campaigns in support of the GCC across the competition continuum. The GCC exercises [operational control](#) (OPCON) of SOF through the TSOC Commander. The TSOC Commander has two primary roles. As the senior SOF advisor to the GCC for employing and integrating SOF capabilities and as the senior SOF Commander in theater, the TSOC Commander is often designated as the Joint Forces Special Operations Component Commander (JFSOCC). As such, the TSOC Commander has the authority to plan and conduct joint operations as directed by the GCC. Secondly, the TSOC Commander advises the GCC, Service component commanders, and others on the proper employment of SOF.

Joint Forces Special Operations Component Commander (JFSOCC)

When established, the [JFSOCC](#) is the commander within a [joint operations area](#) (JOA) or joint special operations area (JSOA) responsible to the establishing commander for execution of SOF missions. The JFSOCC will normally be designated when one or more functional components are established and there are sufficient SOF in the JOA to execute special operations. See figure titled "Notional Theater Command Structure."

Special Operations Command-Forward (SOC-FWD)

The GCC normally exercises OPCON of attached SOF through the CDRTSOC, who may exercise OPCON of subordinate forces directly from the TSOC location, or through a smaller [special operations command forward](#). A SOC-FWD is a tailored, operational-level headquarters (HQ) that provides a forward-deployed, persistent presence, C2 capability. If conditions warrant a more robust SOF presence and engagement, a SOC-FWD can transition to a JSOTF or SOJTF. The SOC-FWD develops a close working relationship with the associated country team, host nation forces, and any multinational forces or intergovernmental organizations within the host nation, and helps the CDRTSOC in their role as the SOF campaign manager and as the senior theater special operations advisor to the GCC. For military engagement, security cooperation, and deterrence operations, forward-based and distributed nodes under the OPCON of the CDRTSOC provide C2 for SOF. For more information on SOF C2, see Joint Publication 3-05, [Joint Doctrine for Special Operations](#).

Special Operations Joint Task Force (SOJTF)

A SOJTF is a modular, tailorable, and scalable SOF organization that allows USSOCOM to provide joint SOF to GCCs and subordinate joint force commanders (JFCs). SOF capacity may be challenged during major combat operations or other large-scale campaigns. When theater SOF requirements exceed the TSOC's capacity, GCCs may request a SOJTF from USSOCOM. In coordination with the GCC, theater component, and joint task force (JTF) commanders, the SOJTF commander is responsible for planning, integrating, and conducting of special operations in a designated operational area. When tasked, the SOJTF commander may plan, integrate, and conduct all military operations in the designated theater of operations.

Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF)

A JSOTF is an O-6 level JTF composed of special operations units from more than one SOF component and Service to carry out a specific special operation or prosecute special operations in support of a theater campaign or operations. A JSOTF may have multinational SOF or partner nation forces integrated into the HQ and forces, in these cases the JSOTF becomes a combine joint special operations task force (CJSOTF). A SOJTF is a JTF capable HQ that can integrate subordinate US conventional forces and SOTFs, while a JSOTF also can be subordinate to a SOJTF or a JTF.

Special Operations Task Force (SOTF)

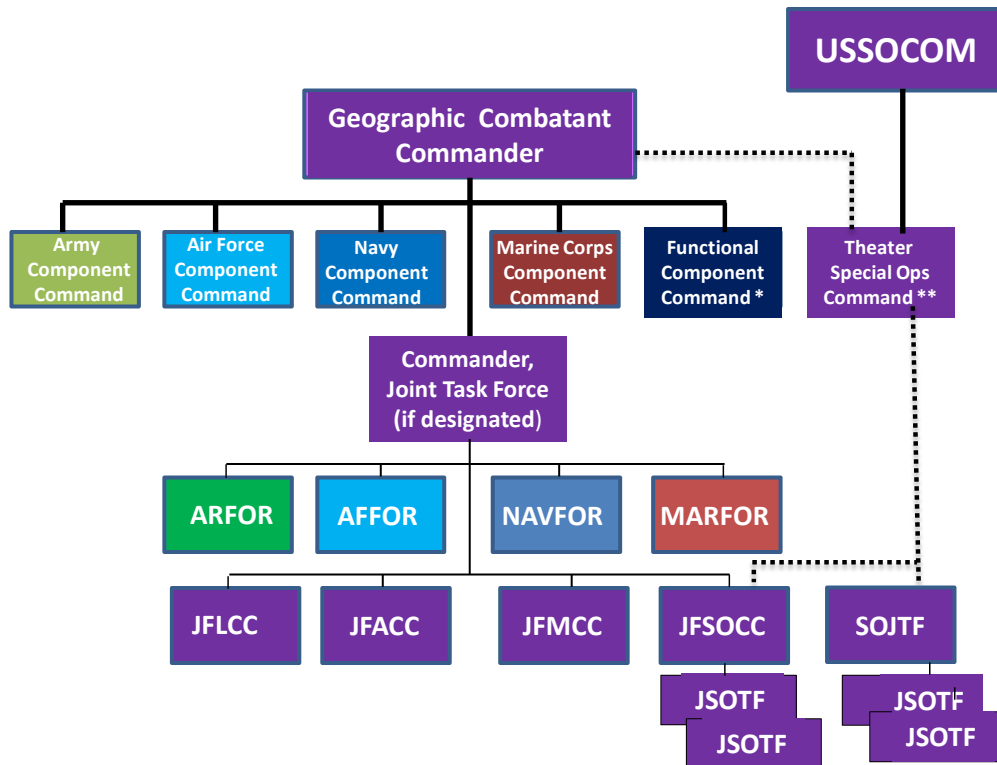
A battalion level task force organized around a special operations Component battalion headquarters, with organic and attached forces formed to conduct special operations. A SOTF is a grouping of SOF assets formed to carry out a specific operation or a continuing mission. SOTFs are scalable organizations and normally built around the nucleus of an Army Special Forces unit, Ranger unit, MARSOC Raider unit, or Naval Special Warfare (NSW) unit. For distributed operations a SOTF can be the only SOF C2

HQ within the operating environment, or can nest under a larger SOF C2 HQ, the joint special operations task force.

Joint Special Operations Air Component (JSOAC)

The JSOAC is a task organized unit that provides command and control functions for SOF aviation assets under the OPCON of the joint force special operations component commander. The JSOAC is manned with appropriate representation from the SOF Components, multinational SOF, and conventional forces, as required for coordinating the integration of air assets. The JSOAC is augmented by weapon systems experts from those assets to which it provides C2. Based on efficiency, availability, and mission requirements, the JFSOCC may select either the JSOAC Commander (JSOACC) from either the Air Force SOF or Army special operations aviation. Traditionally, the other SOF Component commander is the Deputy JSOACC. JSOAC support functions within the JSOAC ensure airspace, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, mobility, fires, and refueling are coordinated, and 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. See figure titled "Notional SOF Air Component."

Notional Theater Command Structure



* Functional component commanders report to the establishing JFC (GCC or CJTF).

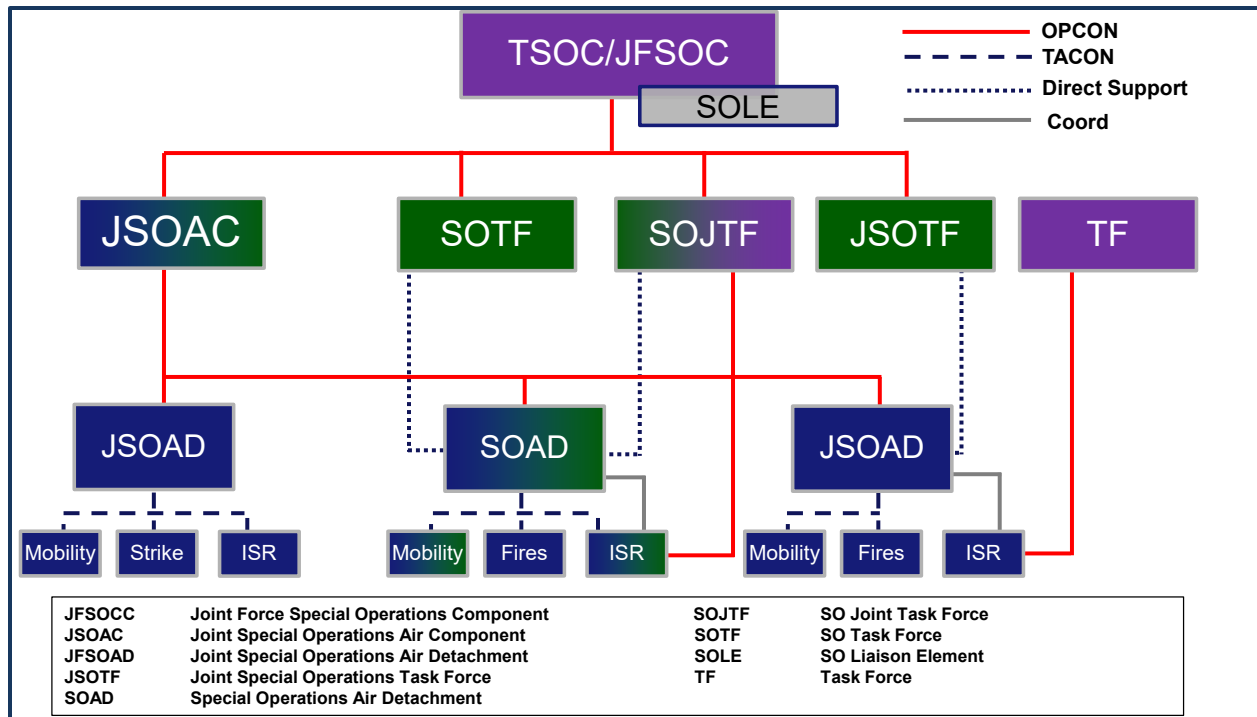
** CDRTSOC may also function as a JFSOCC and/or Commander, SOJTF, or JSOTF, if established

Legend

AFFOR	Air Force Forces
ARFOR	Army forces
CDRTSOC	commander, theaters special operations command
CJTF	commander, joint task force
GCC	geographic combatant commander
JFACC	joint force air component commander
JFC	joint force commander
JFLCC	joint force land component commander
JFMCCC	joint force maritime component commander
JFSOCC	joint force special operations component commander
JSOTF	joint special operations task force
MARFOR	Marine Corps forces
NAVFOR	Navy forces
SOJTF	special operations joint task force

—————	Combatant command (command authority)
.....	Operational control
—————	As designated

Notional Theater Command Structure



Notional SOF Air Component

Commander, Air Force Special Operations Forces (COMAFSOF)

The COMAFSOF is normally designated the JSOACC. The dual hatted COMAFSOF/JSOACC normally exercises OPCON over assigned forces and [tactical control](#) (TACON) over aviation forces made available for tasking. [Support](#) relationships are specified as required. Unlike the command relationships for a JFACC which is normally limited to TACON, the JSOACC is normally delegated OPCON over all SOF aviation forces regardless of Service. Specified elements of [administrative control](#) (ADCON) over AFSOF are exercised by the forward deployed COMAFSOF; remaining ADCON elements are retained by Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command.

Special Operations Liaison Element (SOLE)

The [SOLE](#) is the JFSOCC/TSOC liaison to the JFACC. The SOLE is a joint SOF team provided to coordinate, deconflict, and synchronize special operations air, surface, and subsurface operations with conventional air operations. The SOLE director has no command authority for mission tasking, planning, or execution. The SOLE normally provides the following functions:

- ✦ Harmonizes JFSOCC strategy and targets with JFACC's intent and vision via liaison with the [air operations center](#) (AOC) strategy division.

- ✦ Injects all SOF requirements (to include ground and maritime SOF contingents) within the JFACC's master air attack plan via close coordination in the AOC's combat plans division.
- ✦ Facilitates all JFSOCC inputs into the ACO, ATO, and special instructions "SPINS" with the combat plans division.
- ✦ Provides updates for situational awareness to the AOC's combat operations division to coordinate [close air support](#) (CAS) and request immediate support for time-sensitive targets.
- ✦ Monitors and deconflicts SOF activities and locations to prevent friendly fire incidents.
- ✦ Coordinates real-time intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance requirements for the JFSOCC.
- ✦ Synchronizes SOF personnel recovery (for more information, see USSOCOM Directive 525-21) activities with the joint personnel recovery center.
- ✦ Coordinates SOF component space requirements with the JFACC's Director of Space Forces staff when the JFACC is designated the theater space coordinating authority.
- ✦ 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.

JFACC Support to SOF

On occasion, SOF require JFACC support. For example, the JFACC can reduce risk to SOF mission success by providing air superiority in the joint special operations area (JSOA). The JFACC provides an umbrella of protection that facilitates and enables the success of SOF missions by gaining and maintaining freedom of movement and freedom from attack. This support requires detailed integration and is normally coordinated through the SOLE. Creating and maintaining habitual relationships with the JFACC best facilitates this integration. When CF are tasked to support SOF performing JFSOCC missions, the JSOACC should exercise TACON of CF requiring detailed integration or participation in SOF missions (provided the JSOACC has the C2 capability). Another notable example of support to SOF is the JFACC's CAS to SOF surface elements. There were numerous examples during Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM when the JFACC provided CAS to SOF teams engaged with enemy forces.

Notional Special Operations Liaison Element Functions

SOLE Director: Liaison to JFACC

Strategy Division

- Coordinates and synchronizes special operations strategy and targets with other components to meet combatant commander objectives and guidance.
- Nominates SOF targets for inclusion in the joint integrated prioritized target list.
- Provides SOF input for JFC apportionment recommendation decisions.

Combat Plans Division

- Coordinates SOF air requirements within the master air attack plan.
- Coordinates with JSOTF/JSOAC on ATO inputs and ensures distributed ATOs are merged with the master ATO.
- Provides special operations input for inclusion in SPINS.
- Coordinates airspace requirements and deconfliction for future operations.
- Represents the special operations components on the targeting effects team in the JAOC.

Combat Operations Division

- Monitors and coordinates current day flying operations with other components.
- Deconflicts ongoing special operations surface operations in real time with other components.
- Maintains updated list of team locations for deconfliction.
- Coordinates support for and prosecution of SOF-monitored targets to include time-sensitive targets.
- Coordinates airspace management with JAOC airspace manager.

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Division

- Coordinates ISR requirements for SOF in the field.
- Provides intelligence support for combat plans and operations division.

Other Coordination

- Coordinates requirements for airfield surveys supporting force basing (AMD).
- Coordinates JTAC support for SOF when required.
- Coordinates logistic requirements including supply, transportation, and contracting (AMD).
- Coordinates communications requirements, as necessary, for SOF in the field (communications representative).
- Coordinates with JPRC.

Legend

AMD	air mobility division	JSOAC	joint special operations air component
ATO	air tasking order	JSOTF	joint special operations task force
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance	JTAC	joint terminal attack controller
JAOC	joint air operations center	SOF	special operations forces
JFACC	joint force air component commander	SOLE	special operations liaison element
JFC	joint force commander	SPINS	special instructions
JPRC	joint personnel recovery center		

Notional Special Operations Liaison Element Functions

SOF SUPPORT TO CONVENTIONAL FORCES

Reciprocating JFACC support to SOF missions, the special operations component may provide support or enable JFACC tasking and priorities. Historical documentation of SOF actions during Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM offer a more detailed example of SOF support to the JFACC.

For example, during operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, AFSOF special tactics teams leveraged airpower by providing accurate targeting and weather data, enabling the dismantling of the Taliban and Iraqi warfighting capability.

SOF and Conventional Forces mutual support

At times, general purpose force (GPF) air advisors and SOF [combat aviation advisors](#) (CAA) will work together as a combined air advising team with GPF air advisors augmenting SOF CAA teams and vice versa. For example, GPF combat support personnel could support a SOF CAA team, or SOF CAAs with expertise in a specific foreign aircraft could support a GPF mobility advising team. SOF, Space, and Cyber elements are increasingly cooperating to enable and enhance joint operations across the competition continuum.

During Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, AFSOF STT members assisted anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan, STTs and JTACs coordinated CAS that enabled the fall of the Taliban with a minimum commitment of US and coalition ground forces.



Organization of Expeditionary Air Force Special Operations Forces

Due to its relationship with USSOCOM, AFSOF presents forces differently than conventional Air Force forces. See Air Force Special Operations Command Manual 10-410, [Operations Planning: Presentation of Air Force Special Operations Forces](#) for more information. In addition to expeditionary wings, groups, and squadrons, the Air Force can deploy elements below the squadron level for specific, limited functions. These include individuals and specialty teams such as special tactics, CAA, and combat support. They may deploy independently of other Air Force units, often to remote locations, and may operate directly with other Services. Examples of such deployed elements include augmentation to a joint military information support task force or special tactics personnel supporting a contingency response group.



AIR FORCE DOCTRINE PUBLICATION (AFDP) 3-05
SPECIAL OPERATIONS

**AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES MISSION
PREPARATION CONSIDERATIONS**

Last Updated: 1 February 2020

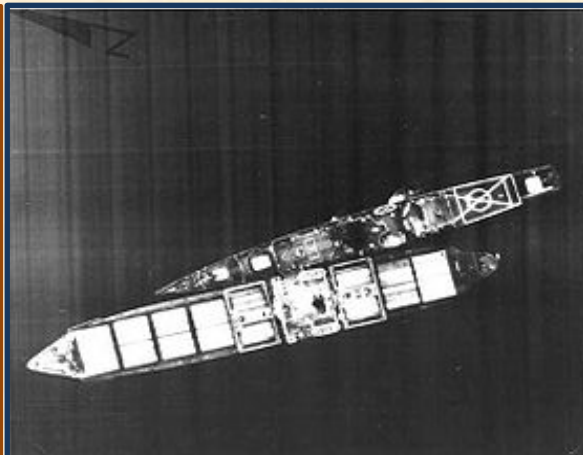
This section offers some planning considerations when preparing for the employment of [Air Force special operations forces](#) (AFSOF) elements in combat. Historically, AFSOF tasking has ranged from missions that called specifically for AFSOF capabilities, to missions where AFSOF was the only force that could accommodate due to time constraints or mission location. Regardless of how or why AFSOF are tasked, the tasking authority should be provided with a candid assessment of AFSOF capabilities, limitations, and risks associated with mission execution.



AFSOF missions are often high-risk and high-payoff operations, have limited windows for execution, and require first-time success. Given the limited size and sustainability of AFSOF, adequate support is vital to the success of the mission. Mission rehearsal is a key critical element of mission preparation.

AFSOF are employed as part of a joint [special operations forces](#) (SOF) package. As a result, AFSOF mission and sustainment planning considerations often should be coordinated and integrated with joint SOF, other joint, multinational, or other government agency partners. Failure to properly coordinate requirements can severely impact mission effectiveness.

The Mayaguez Incident



On 12 May 1975, the SS Mayaguez, an American-owned freighter, was boarded and seized by Cambodian forces while in international waters off the coast of Cambodia. The next day, the ship was taken to Koh Tang Island while the ship's crew was taken to another island for interrogation. The operation to take back the ship and rescue the crew highlights what can happen if reaction time is short, force selection is ad hoc, previous joint training is not done, and mission rehearsal cannot occur in the time available.

The plan called for 11 Air Force helicopters (six HH-53 Air Rescue Service and five CH-53 special operations helicopters) to support Marines in an assault on Koh Tang Island and to board and retake the Mayaguez itself. It was assumed that the ship's crew was being held on Koh Tang Island and the rescue force was told to expect only a handful of lightly armed Khmer Rouge soldiers.

The operation began on the morning of 15 May 1975. Retaking the Mayaguez went smoothly. The operation at Koh Tang Island, however, soon deteriorated into what one helicopter pilot described as "absolute and utter chaos." As it turned out, there were about 300 Khmer Rouge dug in on the island with heavy weaponry. By the time the first assault was completed, all but one of the original assault helicopters had been destroyed or damaged. Ironically, about three hours into the first assault, the Cambodians gave the entire crew of the Mayaguez back to forces from the USS Holt; the original problem had been solved. The Marines on Koh Tang Island, however, had to be reinforced and then extracted. These operations lasted through the night. In the end, US casualties were 15 killed in action, three missing in action, and about 49 wounded in action.

—*A Very Short War*, John F. Guilmartin

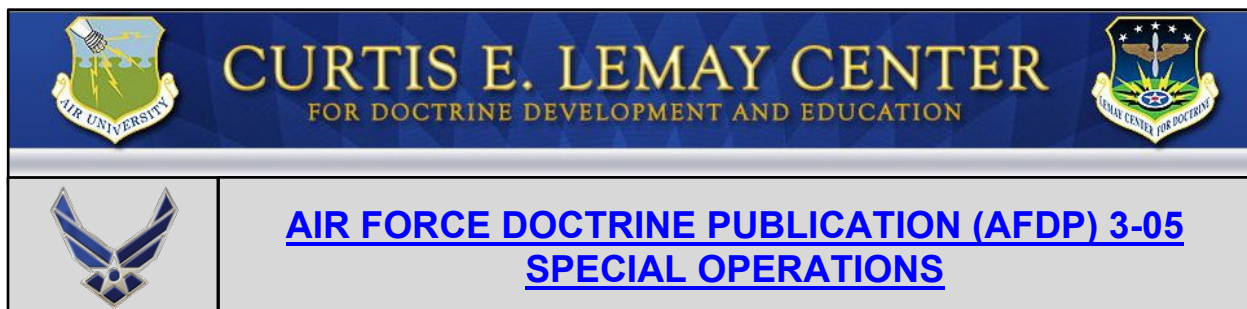
MISSION REHEARSAL

Rehearsal of special operations is a fundamental SOF principle. Often, repeated rehearsal of certain mission elements is necessary because personnel and essential tasks differ from mission to mission and because of the possible strategic implications of these missions. Operations may bring together a group of specialists who have worked together infrequently, or not at all. In addition, the specific tasks required may not have been practiced together or integrated in the required sequence. Rehearsals help reduce the risk to special operations mission success by revealing plan shortfalls. Training and rehearsals of the mission are integral to operations because of the complexity and risk.

LANGUAGE, REGION, AND CULTURE CONSIDERATIONS

AFSOF face an expanding and dynamic operational environment requiring the ability to operate across a wide range of regional and cultural contexts. Understanding the operational environment is critical to success. Cross-cultural competence and foreign language proficiency increase efficiency and lower risks to SOF core missions. Selected AFSOF personnel normally have basic cross-cultural training to avoid misunderstandings that may prolong or complicate mission accomplishment.

Language and cultural competence skills are supplemented with an increased understanding of regional, country-specific, and local political and military dynamics. Regional education includes basic education on geography, demographics, economics, politics, and selected historical events. Particular emphasis is placed on the specific political and military context in which the US foreign policy requires the use of military force. This context goes beyond pre-deployment intelligence briefings, and examines the stability and legitimacy of the host nation governance structures. This knowledge can be critical to operational effectiveness. Commanders should plan and optimize cultural, regional, and language training requirements to provide the most significant training in the most effective manner.



AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES OPERATIONAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Last Updated: 1 February 2020

[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 controlled to prevent the adversary from deriving or collecting information that would compromise 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 other Service support for defense against air, missile, and ground threats.

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

AFSOF intelligence provides specialized intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capability across the full spectrum of SOF operations. 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](#) tasking, AFSOF intelligence specialists should be prepared to provide intelligence support for 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. AFSOF operational planning requires specialized intelligence analysis to enable AFSOF missions across the spectrum of conflict and limit

vulnerabilities in anti-access and area denial environments in addition to semi-permissive and permissive environments. Such intelligence allows for AF/SOF to avoid engaging the enemy and provides security for clandestine missions. Some of the products often associated with AF/SOF 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

AF/SOF 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 AF/SOF 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. AF/SOF requires integral communications resources that are characterized by high reliability, flexibility, lightweight, 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. AF/SOF 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 Department of Defense 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

[Information operations](#) (IO) are integral to SOF operations. IO integrates and synchronizes multiple capabilities within the information environment spanning the range of SOF operations. The selection of capabilities and method of integration to meet mission requirements is tailorable based on the mission planned or the availability of capabilities. At the JSOAC level, IO should be carefully integrated and synchronized within the SOF air component planning and execution in support of theater special operations command (TSOC) objectives (i.e., not regarded as a separate IO plan). Only through the deliberate and balanced application of capabilities can the commander's desired effects be achieved at the operational and tactical levels.

CYBERSPACE OPERATIONS

Operations occurring in cyberspace can provide military advantage to SOF in multiple domains. 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. AFSOC possesses organic defensive cyberspace forces and can provide forces in support of offensive cyberspace operations or request support through the TSOC from US Cyber Command.

The JSOAC should identify desired cyberspace operations and submit a theater specific cyberspace support request to the [joint special operations task force](#), JFSOCC, or TSOC who will validate and forward the request to [combatant commanders](#).

Cyberspace defense of the JSOAC network is the responsibility of the Functional or Geographic Combatant Command providing the network (e.g., US Special Operations Command providing SOF Information Enterprise networks). The JSOAC/J6 has collateral responsibility for defensive cyberspace operations when operating an enclave off of the main, Functional or Geographic Combatant Command-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

Space operations capabilities are vital to the defense of our nation. Space capabilities enable special operations forces to gain and maintain initiative across the competition continuum. SOF rely on [space capabilities](#) to gain global access and conduct operations. Space capabilities enhance SOF by providing capabilities such as robust satellite communications, remote imaging, signals collections, missile warning, weather, and positioning, navigation and timing. Additionally, space capabilities enhance SOF operations by protecting friendly systems, countering threats, and denying an adversary's use of space. SOF may specifically request space control fires. Offensive space control fires negate enemy use of space support capabilities, reducing the effectiveness of adversary forces in all domains. As space capabilities continue to evolve, the joint force will become increasingly dependent on them – a fact known to our adversaries who will strive to exploit this dependence. AFSOF needs to prepare to fight through threats and win in today's contested, degraded and operationally-limited environment. Additionally, SOF retains a key responsibility in protecting the National Security Space Enterprise through Space Control and Space Mission Assurance functions and activities.

The Commander USSOCOM has delegated Space Coordinating Authority (SCA) to the Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command. On behalf of the SCA, the USSOCOM/AFSOC Director of Space Forces (DIRSPACEFOR) and staff develops requirements, plans, integrates and coordinates space operations for the USSOCOM Enterprise, including AFSOF. The DIRSPACEFOR is tasked with assuring cross-component space tasking consolidation, prioritization, and de-confliction. Also, the DIRSPACEFOR develops and maintains space-relevant shared understanding across SOF and provides space subject matter expertise to support USSOCOM and AFSOF during exercises, training, assessments, strategic planning, and force design updates.

For more information on counterspace operations, refer to AFDP 3-14, [Counterspace Operations](#).



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FOR DOCTRINE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION



AIR FORCE DOCTRINE PUBLICATION (AFDP) 3-05 SPECIAL OPERATIONS

AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES COMBAT SUPPORT

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Combat Support (CS) consists of functions necessary to support and sustain [Air Force special operations forces](#) (AFSOF). During deployments, most CS functions are normally provided by the theater commander, through the service component commanders tasked with providing such support. However, at forward and austere operating locations where the preponderance of forces are AFSOF, the AFSOF commander will normally provide the majority of CS functions at that location. Unique CS requirements for [special operations forces](#) (SOF) should be coordinated via SOF channels during mission planning to achieve sustained operational capability, with minimal risk, commensurate with the geographic combatant commander's operational objectives.



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

Although SOF, in general, must rely on the Services for many support functions, Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) possesses SOF unique CS capabilities that directly enable the AFSOF mission. AFSOF CS is provided by AFSOC's Agile Combat Support (ACS) core mission. As AFSOC's foundational and cross-cutting core mission, ACS enables AFSOF to deliver its combat capability in many threat environments. ACS supports the AFSOF mission at both home station and forward-deployed locations. The ACS core mission consists of numerous diverse functional capabilities that contribute to delivering AFSOC's global combat capabilities. These ACS capabilities include: SOF security and force protection, deployed SOF civil engineering support including chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) operations, SOF aircraft maintenance and generation, deployed SOF ground refueling operations, and SOF medical operations.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS SECURITY AND FORCE PROTECTION

Security Forces Deployed Air Ground Response Element (DAGRE) teams provide deployed security and force protection for special operations aircraft, resources, and personnel through proactive deterrence, detection, and response. DAGRE teams provide vulnerability assessments, counsel commanders on force protection matters, and suggest mitigating options for airfields, aircraft, munitions, personnel bed down, and vehicular routes.

The primary DAGRE unit type code (UTC) consists of five personnel, but can be tailored to meet mission requirements. DAGRE teams primarily deploy to protect AFSOF aircraft and personnel while transiting or at remote locations where security is inadequate, nonexistent, or unknown. They are trained to advise special operations mission commanders on all security and force protection matters for coordinating and interfacing with host nation security forces or other base defense forces when collocated.

DAGRE teams are also trained to provide fly-away security team (FAST) operations when AFSOF missions deploy into remote and isolated locations where security is nonexistent. SOF FAST can be tailored to meet individual mission requirements.

DEPLOYED SPECIAL OPERATIONS CIVIL ENGINEERING SUPPORT

AFSOC Civil Engineering (CE) J-Teams provide AFSOF commanders small, specialized CE equipment and personnel packages tailored to mission requirements. These CE J-Teams provide the self-sufficiency required to rapidly and autonomously execute limited civil engineering functions. These capabilities do not replace established, lead service component base operating support (BOS) missions at primary deployed installations, but rather provide a means to bridge the BOS gap at contingency locations. The core capabilities of AFSOC CE J-Teams include: austere level construction, CBRN protection, specialized explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), and engineering assessments. CE J-Teams conduct this mission via 12 specialized AFSOC UTCs.

Air Rapid Response Kit (ARRK) teams provide basic shelter, sanitation, and support for AFSOF personnel. ARRKs are comprised of billeting and messing shelters, shower facilities, rudimentary latrines, a modular and scalable command and control (C2) facility, armory facility, and other modular shelters as required (via playbook options or additional UTCs). ARRK UTCs provide tactical furniture, power (via generators), a water purification system, and heating/cooling systems via deployable environmental control units (ECUs). ARRK UTCs are capable of operating independently for up to 30 days in austere areas in warm or cold climates.

Additionally, AFSOC CE J-Teams provide AFSOF deployed personnel and assets protection from most CBRN environments for up to 30 days. CE J-Teams conduct this mission via two UTCs, 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 SOF EOD Gunship Team is a specialized, deployable EOD UTC directly supporting AFSOC AC-130 gunship aircraft. EOD Gunship teams provide AC-130 weapons clearing operations via the use of specialized tools and training. They provide full-spectrum, deployed support to render safe all AC-130 weapons systems during munitions incidents and malfunctions.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE

In order to execute the Air Force's special operations core function, and the air component mission of US Special Operations Command, AFSOC employs multiple specialized fixed-wing and tilt-rotor vertical airlift platforms. Each of these platforms require specialized maintenance to ensure AFSOC can conduct its missions. These aircraft contain multiple 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 intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

AFSOC maintenance teams receive specialized training and qualifications to inspect, service, troubleshoot and repair these advanced systems at home station and while deployed in austere conditions under low-light conditions. Through the use of commercial contractor maintenance and Air Force aircraft maintenance personnel, these platforms are capable of delivering AFSOF airpower anytime, anyplace without regards to physical environment.

The aircraft maintenance teams are deployed using standard UTCs and can be tailored according to the actual number and type of aircraft being employed at multiple locations. These maintenance UTCs are also postured to deploy on short notice.

The Special Operations Forces Logistics Element (SLE) supports AFSOC mission sets located in contingency locations not located with an Air Force materiel management function. The SLE provides effective supply chain operations when AFSOC forces operate from a location for more than 90 days, and when no specific end of mission date is established.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORWARD-DEPLOYED GROUND REFUELING

Forward Area Refueling Point (FARP) teams provide fuel support for special operations aircraft in forward-deployed, austere locations, and under cover of night. FARP teams can tactically refuel single or multiple aircraft with engines running with up to three refueling points simultaneously. FARPs primarily support airfield seizure, hostage rescue and recovery, and combat search and rescue missions. AFSOC employs five separate FARP teams via seven UTCs. A FARP UTC consists of three specially trained FARP personnel, one Forward Area Manifold Cart (FAM cart) and one single point sled. FARP teams are postured to deploy on short notice.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS MEDICAL CARE

SOF medical elements (SOFME) and special operations surgical teams (SOST) are embedded within operational AFSOF line units to provide medical support IAW mission capabilities statements (MISCAPS) which describe assigned medical UTCs to support special operations taskings and other contingency medical support needs. AFSOC maintains 24 medical specialty and functionally-aligned UTCs that vary in size, equipment, personnel, and capabilities based on the assigned mission. Two of these personnel packages critical to AFSOC deployed forces are the SOFME and SOST.

The SOFMEs and their equipment UTCs may deploy as part of an aviation unit or as a tailored, task-organized response package depending on SOF unique mission requirements. AFSOC SOFMEs provide a broad but limited continuum of medical capabilities: BOS primary care, Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS), Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS), 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 24th Special Operations Wing (SOW) and 352 SOW operational units. Additionally, AFSOC medics provide medical support for humanitarian missions, noncombatant evacuation operations, civil affairs, foreign internal defense and global healthcare engagement missions.

AFSOC medics adapt to diverse operations in remote or austere environments, far removed from conventional logistics support and resupply. Due to these conditions, equipment sets should be extremely flexible, robust, lightweight, reliable, and easy to operate. As a result, these equipment and support packages are state-of-the-art and updated frequently to ensure interoperability, suitability, and effectiveness.
