**Title:** Interagency SOF – Shaping the Future Security Environment

Interagency SOF is the logical force for future strategic relevancy in shaping operations. Existing interagency programs do not achieve the full potential of a truly whole-of-government approach. Disjointed efforts by independent government agencies and gaps created by merely coordinating and de-conflicting interagency operations do not allow for the synergy of an integrated force to be harnessed and focused with unity of command to achieve mission success. A force receiving coherent strategic guidance, planned, coordinated, and de-conflicted regionally, then executed by experts wielding all elements of national power to influence and shape vulnerable or dangerous states can exploit the benefits of the interagency and at the same time avoid the drawbacks of single agency or merely “de-conflicted” operations.
FUTURE WAR PAPER

TITLE:

INTERAGENCY SOF – SHAPING THE FUTURE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

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**Introduction**

Recent American experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, and current U.S. Army and Marine doctrine, reinforce that a whole-of-government approach, integrating diplomacy, defense, and development, is key to both fighting counterinsurgency and nation building. Similarly, the U.S. Government should develop a whole-of-government approach to shape troubled and vulnerable states so they do not develop into armed conflicts. Creating interagency Special Operations Forces (SOF), capable of synchronizing all elements of national power and executing strategic national security tasks, will enable the U.S. government to positively influence willing and unwilling nations in order to avoid large scale troop commitments.

National security is not a one-agency responsibility and certainly not the sole purview of the military. Governments have a responsibility to use all of the elements of national power (diplomacy, information, military, and economy - DIME) to influence the future security environment. The future world will demand that nations use all available approaches to avoid armed conflict where possible and win wars when necessary. The U.S. must adopt a fully integrated interagency national security policy.

Within the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense (DoD) has the greatest capacity to absorb additional responsibility for coordinating an interagency effort related to national defense.¹ Within the DoD, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) has a history, an existing role, and the capability to absorb additional responsibility in shaping the future security environment by assuming a lead interagency coordinating role. Special Operations Forces (SOF) can become the force of choice to lead the U.S. government strategy of shaping nations in the future security environment so as to avoid armed conflict whenever and wherever possible. However, SOF alone can not achieve the desired shaping effects.
Dr John B. Alexander, senior fellow at the Joint Special Operations University, believes that, “with rapid changes in warfare there will be a need for capabilities that currently are not in the [SOF] inventory but the need for which becomes apparent over time.”\(^2\) He proposes that in a future information intensive conflict, SOF will play several key roles and will guide both friend and foe in manners commensurate with U.S. national interests.\(^3\) In that regard, the best method of combining all of the necessary skill sets required to influence troubled nations of the future is not to increase the already overly specialized SOF operator skill set, but rather to integrate selected “specialists” with the appropriate skills and basic military training into an interagency SOF team where each member plays a critical role, for example: military/security, policy/diplomacy, intelligence, law enforcement, etc…

In order to avoid large armed conflicts in the future, a more relevant and effective approach for the U.S. to shape weak, failed, and failing states is to synchronize strategic national security policy guidance, coordinated regionally by interagency combatant command-like staffs, and executed at the tactical level by integrated interagency SOF teams. This approach will capitalize on the synergy generated by the unity of effort of integrating all elements of national power and on the focus and tempo that can be generated by unity of command.

It is understood that for the U.S. government to operate more effectively and efficiently the interagency must function. There are many conflicting philosophies, ideas, and theories on how the interagency should function; however, this paper will concentrate on only one specific concept that addresses how SOF and the interagency can better affect U.S. national security. Reality dictates that it will take legislation similar to Goldwater-Nichols to ensure the interagency restructures so that it can then take advantage of the synergies created by one focused approach to national security. In the meantime, to avoid seams created by overlapping
geographical area breakdowns of the world by many separate agencies and departments, a common model of how the U.S. looks at the various regions would be a great starting point. Regional interagency organizations similar to the existing Combatant Command (COCOM) structures that command, control, and coordinate all military forces within each region would also ensure greater cooperation and de-confliction amongst the interagency.

It is acknowledged that there will still be unresolved aspects of this thesis that must be studied further should the concept be accepted. There are several legal considerations associated with U.S. Code Title 10, Title 11, Title 22, and Title 50 authorities that must be realized for this concept to be considered for implementation. There are also career progression issues within each of the agencies and departments that would impact personal and organizational decisions to participate in such an establishment. The limitations of this concept are not fully addressed; rather this paper will focus on the requirement for interagency SOF to prevent future conflicts.

Emphasis will be placed on establishing that the future security environment will require (and the National Defense Strategy acknowledges) that a whole-of-government approach using all elements of national power is essential to shaping potential threats to U.S. national security. The paper will also explain that the existing interagency structure is insufficient and that USSOCOM is the appropriate organization to stand-up an interagency SOF capability, coordinated by integrated regional interagency commands, to execute strategic missions to shape troubled states and potential threats to U.S. National Security.

**Future Security Environment**

The 2008 Joint Operating Environment (JOE) study published by Joint Forces Command acknowledges that it is possible that “U.S. military forces will be engaged in persistent conflict
over the next quarter century.”4 During this same period, the world will undergo incredible changes and nations will have to adapt their security and defense strategies to this changing world with evolving threats. The challenge for DoD is that, while engaged in persistent conflict, it hopes to be able to predict then react to these changing threats as well as be ready for all other contingencies. The JOE states, “While some change is foreseeable, even predictable, future joint force planning must account for the certainty that there will be surprises.”5 If done well, contingency planning can at least minimize the impact of surprise; however, the challenge is to minimize surprise itself. Promoting stability through maintaining influence around the world and actively shaping unstable areas will assist in reducing surprise.

The future security environment will continue to be influenced by competition and conflict among states behaving according to broadly recognized rules.6 However, the projected increase in weak and failing states, and the corresponding weakening of certain norms will create the conditions for greater influence by non-state actors, contributing to greater instability. Paradoxically, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the spread of violent extremism reinforces the need for stability among developing states and will increase the role developed states must play in containing and influencing change in unstable regions of the world. Thus, the JOE recognizes that, “preventing war will in most cases prove more important than waging it.”7 Therefore, the JOE recommends that, “in the long-term, the primary purpose of the military forces of the U.S. must be deterrence, because war in any form and in any context is an immensely expensive undertaking both in lives and in national treasure.”8 To that end, the National Security Strategy (NSS) should promote a whole-of-government approach using all elements of national power to avoid future conflict, by shaping those nations that might become future threats.
Individual departments and agencies of the U.S. government are currently assisting and influencing weak and unstable nations around the world. And the U.S. military already participates in shaping operations in troubled regions of the globe. However, a prioritized, coordinated, and whole-of-government approach to avoiding future armed conflicts does not exist. There are many countries willing to request international support to strengthen their governments so they can avoid failing as states. Some countries, however, are unwilling to request U.S. assistance for fear of provoking anti-government/anti-Western unrest or sentiment within their fragile states, and many states simply do not desire U.S. involvement in their internal affairs. Prioritizing these unwilling and disinterested countries, then focusing interagency efforts to develop strategies for shaping their future, would be a constructive approach to reducing instability. Using neutral developed countries as U.S. agents would be another method. Failure to be pro-active, that is, failing to influence those States to avoid conflict, will arguably result in more frequent troop deployments followed by lengthy “nation-building” (or, more realistically, nation-rebuilding).

**National Defense Strategy**

Arguably, the most important military component of the struggle against violent extremism is not the fighting we do ourselves, but how well we help prepare our partners to defend and govern themselves.

2008 National Defense Strategy

The 2008 National Defense Strategy (NDS) accurately portrays the current threats and potential future threats, and then delineates a coherent strategic framework for addressing the problems facing the U.S. military. The Department’s key objectives for supporting the NSS point to violent extremism as the greatest threat to U.S. national security; although it demands a balanced approach to defense to ensure all potential threats are covered.
With the above in mind, the NDS clearly outlines that DoD will achieve its objectives “by shaping the choices of key states, preventing adversaries from acquiring or using WMD, strengthening and expanding alliances and partnerships, securing U.S. strategic access and retaining freedom of action, and integrating and unifying our efforts.” Equally important, the NDS acknowledges that the interagency and international partners are critical to the strategy. Applying all elements of national power in collaboration with old allies and new partners will enable the U.S. military to help prepare its partners to defend and govern themselves and develop the internal capabilities of vulnerable states to, in turn, undermine and reduce sources of support for extremist groups. Helping to influence vulnerable regions and helping to shape the choices that strategic states make cannot be done with military resources alone. The NDS recognizes that all of the elements of national power must be integrated in a whole-of-government approach. However, the strategy does not go further in terms of providing guidance or direction. This direction must come from the White House.

SOF play a key role in supporting the NDS objectives. In the 2009 USSOCOM Posture Statement, and in his address to Congress, Admiral Eric T. Olson, Commander USSOCOM stated that, “SOF must focus on the environmental dynamics and root causes that create today’s and tomorrow’s threats and adversaries. This belief requires an approach that is integrated with the long-term work of civilian agencies, especially the State Department and USAID [U.S. Agency for International Development], to foster credibility and influence among relevant populations.” He went on to posit that USSOCOM “must also develop the appropriate mechanisms to effectively mesh DoD Irregular Warfare activities with the diplomatic and development efforts of our interagency partners.” In short, interagency cooperation, even integration, is required to properly address today’s and especially tomorrow’s threats.
Policy, diplomacy, intelligence, and law enforcement are so intertwined in SOF tasks that close cooperation, detailed coordination, and de-confliction are insufficient to harness the synergistic effect that could be achieved by the integration of specific interagency capabilities to shape regions and specific countries in furtherance of U.S. national security. USSOCOM has considerable experience coordinating DoD and interagency efforts and remains responsible for synchronizing the DoD efforts against global terrorist networks. USSOCOM also has the responsibility for synchronizing the DoD role in Security Force Assistance (SFA), as well as the DoD lead role for countering Threat Financing in conjunction with the U.S. Treasury and Justice Departments.\textsuperscript{15} USSOCOM is, therefore, a natural choice to lead an interagency effort to integrate a whole-of-government approach to shaping vulnerable and unstable regions that could become future threats to U.S. national security.

Current operational SOF commitments limit the resources available to effectively influence future threats. With increased instability caused by non-state actors, it is in the best interest of the U.S. to enable existing governments to stabilize their own country and to deny extremist organizations influence in these high risk and troubled nations. Strengthening and leveraging partnerships and de-conflicting with allies to achieve economy of effort will alleviate duplication of effort. However, in priority threat areas, U.S. “boots-on-the-ground” are required to ensure U.S. national security interests are addressed. SOF have been and will continue to be the most appropriate military resource to accomplish these tasks.

To defeat enemies in Iraq and Afghanistan, conventional coalition forces have embraced irregular warfare (IW) and the indirect approach to winning wars. With increased operational experience and a renewed counterinsurgency focus, conventional forces are becoming more capable of assuming many of the tasks previously accomplished only by SOF. As conventional
forces become more “SOF-like”, both in terms of embracing SOF attributes as well as their approach to executing operations, SOF can re-prioritize its own tasks, realign forces, and redefine how they will defeat global terror networks and meet future threats to national security.

For example, conventional forces are now heavily engaged in Security Force Assistance (SFA) and Foreign Internal Defense (FID) with Afghan security forces and live amongst the local population providing protection while interagency development efforts are emphasized. This approach, where conventional forces are used to train, advise, and assist local security forces, is useful to shape willing partners with open assistance. This would allow SOF to focus on integrated interagency SOF efforts to shape unwilling states where large scale FID/SFA is not appropriate. To avoid large scale troop commitments, the U.S. must influence those high risk nations so as to avoid future, deeper involvement.

**Shaping**

Successful implementation of the NDS will result in increased national security and a balanced capability for addressing future threats. Avoiding armed conflict where possible is the logical and responsible approach for any government. Economic reasons alone make avoiding large troop deployments for armed conflict desirable. Balancing the force in view of the spectrum of possible threats necessitates mitigation of as many threats as possible. The future international security environment will provide no end of potential threats to U.S. national security.

The traditional phases of a military campaign identified in *Joint Publication 5-0 Joint Operation Planning* are: shape, deter, seize the initiative, dominate, stabilize, and enable civil authority. Phase Zero, *shaping*, encompasses all activities that can be done to prevent conflicts
from developing. Executed properly, shaping operations are continuous and adaptive to each situation with the goal of promoting stability by building capacity in partner nations. Phase Zero operations should involve the execution of a broad national strategy where DoD is not the lead agency and its programs are only one part of a larger U.S. Government effort. Executed properly, the remainder of the phases can be avoided.

Shaping is more complex than simply training indigenous forces; it is much more than military action alone. More often than not, military tasks may be subordinated to interagency governance or economic programs with the overall goal of helping to prepare partners to defend and, more importantly, govern themselves.

Building capacity is an interagency endeavor and even FID and SFA require more than military assets to execute the mission properly; policy, economics, law enforcement, and judicial reforms also play a role. In fact, each of the SOF core competencies that will be executed in support of the NDS can extend beyond purely military action. The State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Department of Justice, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) could all easily play a crucial role in future SOF tasks of counterterrorism, counter-proliferation, FID/SFA, unconventional warfare and information operations; however, any number of additional government agencies may be required to augment teams to provide assistance.

Shaping a state or a region through cooperation and partnership is preferable; however, not all vulnerable or troubled nations will be willing partners. For many reasons, nations may be unwilling to cooperate with the U.S. government or its allies. Nevertheless, states strongly influenced by powerful non-state actors or U.S. adversaries can still be shaped in order to avoid larger conflict in the future. These circumstances may require sensitive covert or clandestine
operations, but in terms of national security, “the U.S. must be prepared to take whatever action it deems necessary in order to protect [its] vital interests.”\(^{19}\) The authorization and legal requirements for these special missions can be granted, and if the U.S. government is serious about avoiding future large-scale deployments for counterinsurgency or war, these decisions must be made.

While the U.S. military is currently the best organization to operate in non-permissive environments, and they have proven successful in shaping operations in the past, it does not possess the full spectrum of expertise essential to accomplish delicate shaping operations. Likewise, other agencies that could play a role in pro-active shaping of high risk nations may contribute only a “part of the expertise required to succeed in these lengthy, complex, and demanding missions. These agencies often have relevant expertise at one end of the strategic spectrum while lacking corresponding skill sets at the other levels of warfare.”\(^{20}\) Combined, however, the U.S. military – and in particular SOF – and other agencies can offer the whole-of-government solution.

**The Existing Interagency**

Although many examples of effective cooperation between U.S. government departments and agencies existed prior to September 11\(^{th}\), 2001 (e.g. counter-drug operations in Latin America), interagency cooperation has increased dramatically since then. Moreover, future threats will require new approaches to national security and the NDS acknowledges that military success alone is insufficient to achieve success.\(^{21}\) Acknowledging that new approaches will require realigning departmental structures and interagency planning and response efforts are only the first step.\(^{22}\) Greater cooperation between the military, intelligence community, policy-
makers, and law enforcement is only logical; but the U.S. must now break down any remaining interagency barriers and organizational biases, and seek integration in order to achieve maximum value and synergy.

In a recent article in *Parameters*, strategist Lew Irwin wrote: “The U.S. government’s existing interagency mechanisms have failed to effectively integrate and coordinate agency resources and efforts, a problem that arises primarily from a disjointedness of authority and vision at the national-strategic level.”23 Interagency integration does often occur at the tactical level. Operations in Afghanistan offer numerous examples of how the State Department, CIA, FBI, USAID, Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), and SOF, as well as conventional military forces have integrated their activities during counterinsurgency operations. Each element of the U.S. Government brings essential skills that tactical commanders are able to leverage. Mechanisms have also been established to coordinate and de-conflict activities at both the national and theater level. Unity of effort and cooperation between departments is understood to be critical for IW and nation building. How effective the interagency could become if relationships were formalized within one chain of command remains to be seen.

Irwin correctly identifies that, although “DoD does require access to the expertise and resources needed to carry out its specific IW responsibilities, the broader expertise required to successfully prosecute IW, nation building, and stability operations cannot and should not reside solely within DoD.”24 The solution is to create integrated interagency SOF entities so that the expertise that other agencies bring to the fight can be combined in one organization with specific direction, goals, and focus so that the U.S. government can synchronize these capabilities to better influence vulnerable regions.
The Solution

Interagency SOF is the logical force for future strategic relevancy in shaping operations. Existing interagency programs do not achieve the full potential of a truly whole-of-government approach. Disjointed efforts by independent government agencies and gaps created by merely coordinating and de-conflicting interagency operations do not allow for the synergy of an integrated force to be harnessed and focused with unity of command to achieve mission success. A force receiving coherent strategic guidance, planned, coordinated, and de-conflicted regionally, then executed by experts wielding all elements of national power to influence and shape vulnerable or dangerous states can exploit the benefits of the interagency and at the same time avoid the drawbacks of single agency or merely “de-conflicted” operations.

Establishing an integrated interagency organization will not be easy; nevertheless, realigning departmental and agency regional areas of operation have been underway for several years. Overlap between departments has led to the creation of “seams” where coordination between departments becomes difficult and where criminal and terrorist organizations can operate to their benefit. By creating fully integrated functional interagency regional commands to unify all departments in their approach, more effective and efficient operational level planning, coordination, and direction will result. U.S. Africa Command serves as a start point and an example of an integrated regional command. These commands must have proper representation, at a minimum, from the State Department, CIA, FBI, USAID, DEA, and DoD for the interagency to be effective.

Command and control are key elements to the successful creation and employment of organizations. The nature of the tasks interagency SOF will perform demands a clear chain of command from the tactical level to the strategic policy level. At the strategic level, USSOCOM
should be responsible for recruiting, training, equipping, and administering all efforts within DoD and the interagency. Facilitated by Congressional legislation and responsive to the National Security Council through the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF), USSOCOM would synchronize the efforts across the interagency. This approach would be similar to the role that USSOCOM played during the Bush Administration in terms of synchronizing interagency efforts with regard to terrorism, yet with the added responsibility for creating and funding the interagency force.

Policy regarding shaping a sensitive region or troubled state would originate from the White House. At the regional interagency commands (Interagency COCOMs), interagency SOF planners would design plans to achieve the strategic objectives and would coordinate with the interagency SOF teams at the tactical level. These tactical teams would be trained to operate in non-permissive environments to establish and maintain contacts and build relationships, collect intelligence, provide expertise with regard to all elements of national power, and execute strategic missions across the spectrum of special operations tasks. Country-specific expertise would be “developed by means of a focused and persistent effort over time.” Just as any small unit requires continuity, teams would be geographically focused and augmented as required with specialists from any agency for specific missions to shape the specific strategic environment.

Non-SOF team members would be selected by their department or agency, screened and vetted through a “selection” process to ensure they possess the right attributes, and given basic military training and survival skills to be able to operate with relative ease in non-permissive environments. Each would be an expert in his or her functional area, knowledgeable in multiple agency functions, and trained to contribute to a cohesive unit.
Unity of effort and unity of command are critical to this concept. DoD and USSOCOM can build an interagency organizational culture and specialized interagency SOF teams that can conduct national security related shaping operations. But the organization must have the right components to be able to influence and shape the future security environment. In that regard, interagency personnel must be responsive to the organization and not “accountable” to their parent organization. “As long as agency personnel remain ultimately accountable to the ‘home office’ instead of leaders on the ground, and the agencies in question do not have adequate opportunities to develop the operational and strategic-level expertise needed to meet the complex challenges of IW, these operations will remain disjointed and ineffective.”26 Combining the aggregate strengths of each agency in one organization as opposed to the continuing inefficiencies of multiple efforts with specialized teams in each department makes sense. The U.S. cannot afford to have a disjointed approach to national security given the potential threats in the future security environment.

Conclusion

In early 2009, the Secretary of Defense wrote in *Joint Forces Quarterly*:

Where possible, our strategy is to employ indirect approaches - primarily through building the capacity of partner governments and their security forces - to prevent festering problems from turning into crises that require costly and controversial American military intervention. In this kind of effort, the capabilities of our allies and partners may be as important as our own, and building their capacity is arguably as important if not more so than the fighting we do ourselves.27

SOF are currently the military force of choice to execute this indirect approach and perform a myriad of strategic tasks that influence national security. To become more relevant in the future security environment, SOF must focus on empowering partner nations to become more capable
of ensuring their own security by eliminating threats before they can gain sufficient momentum
to threaten regional and ultimately U.S. national security. Additionally, SOF must remain
capable of influencing and shaping unfriendly governments. This idea echoes that of Brigadier
General Bennet Sacolick, who addressed the graduating class from the Special Forces
Qualification Course in 2009. He stated:

In the application of pure combat power, the skills of our Special Forces Soldiers
are second to none. But herein lies the problem: eradicating terrorists alone will
not win the war on terrorism, frankly, it won’t even put a small dent in it. Our
real problem lies in the fact that the vast majority of the world has no idea how to
deal with the extremists in their own countries.28

Hard lessons have been learned in Iraq and Afghanistan that have led the U.S. to understand that
a whole-of-government approach is required to win counterinsurgencies and pursue nation
building in IW. To avoid future conflicts, renewed emphasis must be placed on shaping
countries that are or may become potential trouble spots. This shaping will have greater effect if
it is done with an integrated whole-of-government approach. Integrated interagency SOF teams,
executing shaping operations in vulnerable regions, planned and coordinated by joint/interagency
staffs at integrated theater Commands, is a pro-active solution to assuring U.S. national security.

The difficulty in accurately predicting future threats demands the U.S. military balance its
force to be highly capable in complex operations in both conventional and IW. Currently, there
are areas of the world that are neglected by the U.S. military because the preponderance of U.S.
forces are engaged in the Middle East and South Asia. However, the U.S. cannot afford to
continue this ad hoc and disjointed effort. The U.S. must have a force capable of achieving
strategic influence with pro-active engagement in vulnerable areas so as to avoid, where
possible, large scale deployments or greater expenditure of U.S. resources.
Notes

3 Ibid., 37.
5 Ibid., 8.
6 Ibid., 24.
7 Ibid., 43.
8 Ibid., 43.
10 Ibid., 13.
11 Ibid., 8.
12 Ibid., 14.
14 Ibid., 15.
15 Ibid., 2.
22 Ibid., 18.
24 Ibid., 67.
25 Ibid., 75.
26 Ibid., 72.
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