



# **AUSA BACKGROUND BRIEF**



---

No. 62

April 1994

---

## **SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: A PRIMER**

### **Introduction**

A small but critical part of the U.S. Armed forces is made up of the special operations forces (SOF) of the Army, Navy and Air Force. These specialized forces are comprised of special operations, psychological operations and civil affairs units.

Special operations forces are normally task organized on a joint basis to augment CONUS and theater-based joint forces destined to conduct operations in response to a crisis situation. SOF missions are also conducted with allied or coalition forces.

### **U.S. Special Operations Command**

The joint nature of SOF operations was recognized in the establishment of a permanent unified command, the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). The USSOCOM commander in chief commands all active and reserve special operations, psychological operations and civil affairs forces of the Army, Navy and Air Force (about 47,000 personnel). USSOCOM supports other U.S. unified commands.

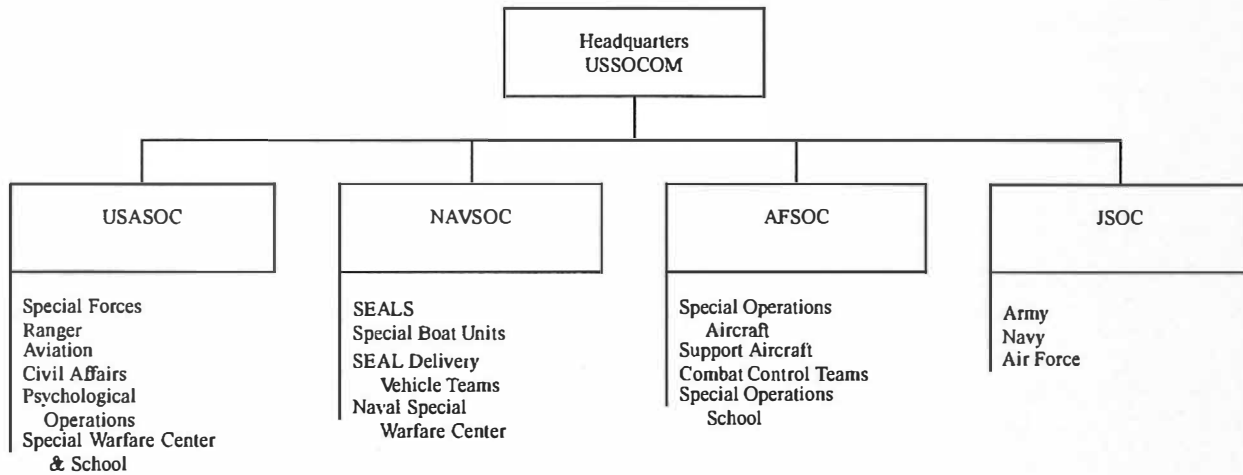
**USSOCOM** is composed of four subordinate commands: U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Naval Special Warfare Command, Air Force Special Operations Command and Joint Special Operations Command.

**U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC)**, headquartered at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, is composed of active and reserve component Army forces consisting of Special Forces groups, a Ranger regiment, psychological operations groups, a special operations aviation regiment, civil affairs commands, and special operations signal and support units.

**Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSOC)**, headquartered at Coronado, California, consists of two Naval Special Warfare groups, each composed of SEAL (Sea-Air-Land) teams, SEAL delivery vehicle teams and special boat units.

**Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC)**, headquartered at Hurlburt Field, Florida, is made up of special tactics groups and squadrons which provide fixed- and rotary-wing airlift, air fire support and a long-range, night, low-level troop movement capability.

**Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC)**, headquartered at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, is a joint headquarters designed to study the special requirements and techniques of all services to ensure standardization.



**Fig. 1 - U.S. Special Operations Command**

**Missions** assigned to USSOCOM are to:

- prepare assigned forces to carry out special operations, psychological operations and civil affairs missions as required and, if directed by the President or Secretary of Defense, to plan for and conduct special operations;
- develop doctrine, tactics, techniques and procedures for SOF;
- conduct specialized courses of instruction for all special operations forces;
- train assigned forces and ensure interoperability of equipment and forces;
- monitor the preparedness of special operations forces assigned to other unified commands;
- develop and acquire unique special operations forces equipment, materiel, supplies and services;

- consolidate and submit program and budget proposals for Major Force Program 11;
- monitor the promotions, assignments, retention, training and professional development of all special operations forces personnel.

To carry out these broad missions on a day-to-day basis, more than 2,000 USSOCOM personnel are employed in more than 20 countries around the world; they provide training, advice and nation-building assistance. Additionally, SOF will support conventional theater forces in power projection and sea control missions. Some SOF operational missions include special reconnaissance, counterterrorism and unconventional warfare, as well as psychological operations and civil affairs activities. SOF may also be employed for direct action when required and to aid in foreign internal defense, an interagency activity with the objective of assisting friendly nations in responding to subversion, illicit drugs, lawlessness and insurgency.

### U.S. Army Special Operations

The U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) was established at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, on December 1, 1989, to enhance the readiness of Army SOF. USASOC commands both active Army and U.S. Army Reserve SOF. It provides training oversight of Army National Guard SOF in coordination with the National Guard Bureau and state adjutants general. As the Army component of USSOCOM, USASOC provides trained and ready SOF composed of Special Forces, Ranger, special operations aviation, psychological operations and civil affairs units, as well as signal and support units.

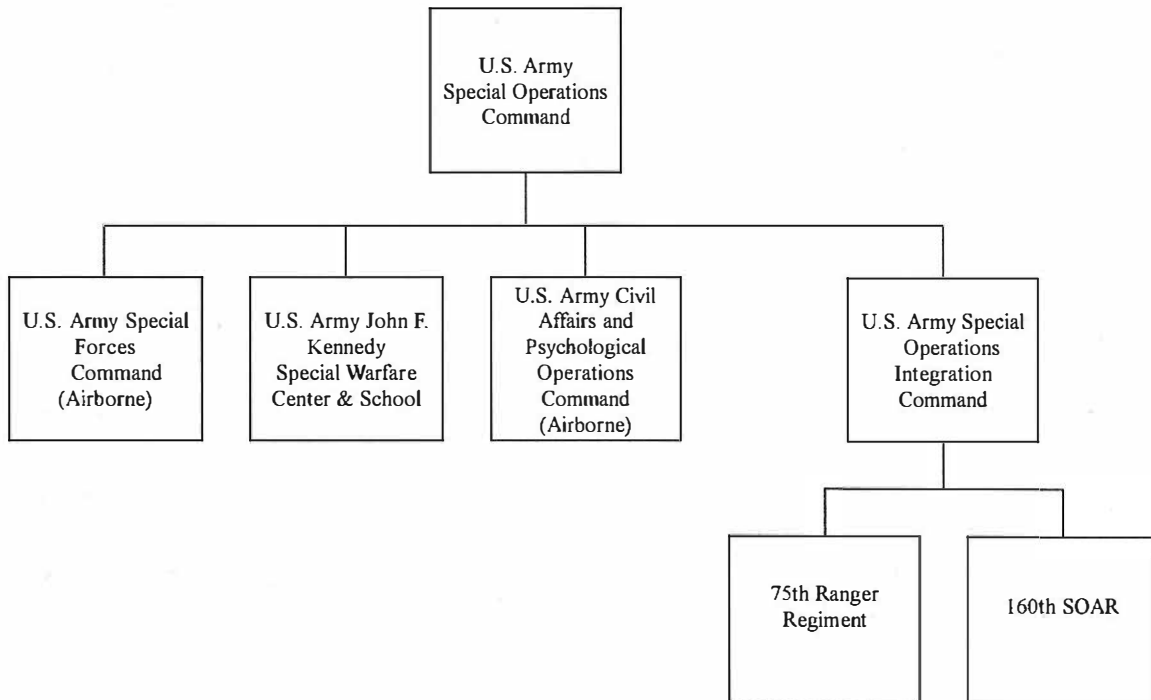


Fig. 2 - U.S. Army Special Operations Command

**Special Forces** plan, prepare for and, when directed, deploy to conduct unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense missions, special reconnaissance and direct actions. Units train continually to conduct unconventional warfare in any of its forms — guerrilla warfare, evasion and escape, subversion and sabotage. Approximately 1,400 soldiers are assigned to a typical Special Forces group; the operating level is the 12-man “A-team” (all expert or cross-trained in weapons, engineering, communications, medical aid, operations and intelligence). The John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School conducts Special Forces, psychological operations and civil affairs training and serves as the USASOC proponent and doctrine arm.

**Rangers** are the masters of special light infantry operations. Missions include attacks to temporarily seize and secure key objectives and other light infantry operations requiring unique capabilities. Like their Special Forces counterparts, Rangers can infiltrate an area by land, sea or air.

**Special operations aviation** provides capabilities for inserting, resupplying, extracting and search and rescue of U.S. and allied SOF personnel. These units can also provide forward air control and close air support. They are prepared to support SOF on a worldwide basis.

**Psychological operations** are aimed at demoralizing the enemy by causing dissension and unrest among military units while at the same time convincing the local population to support American troops. Units disseminate propaganda messages in the form of leaflets, posters, broadcasts and audiovisual tapes; each unit has its own intelligence and audiovisual specialists.

**Civil affairs** units are designed to assist commanders in discharging their responsibilities toward the civilian population, to provide liaison with civilian government agencies and to prevent civilian interference with tactical operations.

**Signal and direct support** to SOF are provided by units specifically organized for this purpose. A signal battalion provides communications links and service among the command, joint controlling agencies or commands and U.S. Army special operations commands in the theater of operations. A support battalion enhances USASOC medical, supply and transportation capabilities.

## **USASOC Operations in the Gulf War**

During the Desert Shield portion of the Gulf War, the Army SOF coalition warfare mission was to conduct liaison and foreign internal defense operations with Royal Saudi Land Forces. They conducted defensive training, including air-to-ground close air support and artillery fire support.

Army Special Forces conducted special reconnaissance and early warning missions along the Saudi Arabia-Kuwait border. During the day they conducted U.S. vehicle patrols, reconnaissance and training. Night patrols, conducted with the Saudis, helped to find line-crossers and refugees, while providing early warning of attack.

Special Forces teams also worked with the Pan-Arab forces from Egypt, Syria, Oman, Morocco, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and Qatar. Later they assisted in reconstituting the Kuwaiti army. Upon completion of the allied buildup, some 106 liaison teams were assigned to the coalition forces. Special Forces personnel taught defensive nuclear, biological and chemical warfare methods and served as experts on staff planning, to include armored and mechanized warfare.

Another valuable mission performed by SOF was special reconnaissance. Special Forces teams, supported by Air Force and Army SOF aviation, executed missions deep inside Iraqi territory in support of allied ground forces. The teams observed and verified the movement of Iraqi forces along major roads and railroads. These missions — as much as 165 miles into Iraq — were in densely populated areas where SOF teams had a high risk of compromise. Some missions were compromised and required emergency exfiltration; other SOF teams remained concealed until link-up with U.S. ground forces.

Operation Desert Shield was representative of U.S. efforts to resolve a crisis at an acceptable level of force. Working with U.S. and allied information agencies, psychological operations specialists supported political and economic efforts to persuade the Iraqi leadership to withdraw from Kuwait. They also served to counter Iraqi propaganda and provided information to regional military personnel and civilians.

In order to terminate hostilities and minimize casualties during Operation Desert Storm, leaflets were dropped on the enemy. The leaflets described the hopelessness of the Iraqi soldiers' plight and gave directions on how to surrender. Battle areas also included many civilians who were the target audience of information campaigns intended to help them avoid becoming casualties.

During and after the ground war, linguists helped control military prisoners and civilian refugees, speaking over loudspeakers and face-to-face. Civil affairs personnel met with local leaders to organize and return displaced persons, restore order and develop an infrastructure to expedite recovery.

When the plight of the Kurdish refugees of northern Iraq compelled the international community to provide relief, they were assisted during Operation Provide Comfort by Special Forces, psychological operations and civil affairs specialists, and both Air Force and Army SOF aviation. SOF teams assisted in immediate distribution of food and medicine, and helped local leaders establish control of the refugee population.

## **Oversight of Special Operations Forces**

Oversight has been significantly strengthened in recent years. The establishment of an Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD/SOLIC) and Commander in Chief, U.S. Special Operations Command (USCINCSOC) provides senior civilian and military oversight of special operations and forces. It ensures that appropriate special operations options are considered in meeting national security requirements. Policy affecting special operations is reviewed by the ASD/SOLIC; operational considerations are reviewed by the Joint Staff and USSOCOM.

Special operations resource issues are represented on the Defense Planning and Resources Board (DPRB) by the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy through the ASD/SOLIC. In addition, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff represents USSOCOM interests on the DPRB. Also, a proponent for special operations is present when SOF items are considered by the Defense Acquisition Board.

The regional unified commands have established theater special operations commands (SOCs) to plan and control special operations to effectively meet theater requirements. The role of the theater SOCs in crises or contingencies was demonstrated during Operation Just Cause in Panama and Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf region.

### **Special Operations Resource Management and Control**

The resource management and control process for SOF has been enhanced by congressional establishment of Major Force Program 11 (Special Operations Forces) and provision of direct budget authority to the Commander in Chief, U.S. Special Operations Command. This focuses the resource process and ensures a review of special operations requirements. Management by USSOCOM provides coordination of multiservice sourcing and global employment of SOF.

In 1991, the Special Operations Research, Development and Acquisition Center (SORDAC) was established under USSOCOM. The center is responsible for the development and acquisition of equipment to meet the unique requirements of SOF. The goal is to streamline the acquisition process so that state-of-the-art equipment reaches SOF as soon as possible.

SORDAC is not intended to replace or duplicate the extensive research, development, testing and evaluation (RDT&E) capabilities of the services. It focuses on SOF-unique or critical programs, requirements and technological applications. Only selected SOF-peculiar programs are directly managed by SORDAC.

### **Conclusion**

Special operations forces play an increasingly significant role in supporting U.S. foreign policy. The flexibility and availability of SOF for immediate deployment offer the national command authorities a wide range of viable alternatives.

Among the threats to U.S. security are terrorism, extremes of nationalism and ethnic fundamentalism, and illegal drug activities, in addition to significant conventional threats and weapons of mass destruction. Short of actual operations, special operations forces can in many cases deter or mitigate threats through peacetime military assistance programs.

(This *Background Brief* was prepared by the staff of the AUSA Institute of Land Warfare in coordination with USASOC and USSOCOM.)

###