

SPECIAL FORCES TRANSFORMATION IN FACE OF THE CONTEMPORARY CONFLICTS CHALLENGES

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Abstract: *Historically called “unconventional” operations are not new phenomenon. Guerilla warfare has a long history of operations (actions) at the tactical level, when the “irregular” forces fought against “regular” one¹. However, in this context, strength of “irregular” forces was mostly associated with non-state and quasi-state groups, whereas the “regular” one with the armed forces which are legitimate policy instrument of governments and states. What is the most striking in terms of special operations in late of twentieth century; it is a remarkable increase in irregular activities conducted by regular forces in unconventional style in order to protect the operational and strategic effects². In the first part of the paper attempted to define Special Forces as kind of forces and operations (actions) especially in terms of their utility at operational level. Later on an attempt to identify main changes and emerging trends in the tasks and capabilities of Special Forces, which in last decade has become an obvious tool in responding to crises of last decade. An attempt was also made to analyze innovative modes of action that have emerged in recent operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.*

Keywords: *special Forces, operations contemporary conflicts, transformation*

After the Soviet Union collapse in August 1991, nature of armed conflicts and way of military forces use appeared to go beyond the existing, traditional and fixed boundaries³. One of more interesting current phenomena in area of military operations is growing importance of special operations and role of Special Forces.

At the edge of the twentieth century, most armed forces have begun to build up an elite combat unit, which in most cases were included in army structure. States with higher amount of forces also possess Navy and Air Force special units.

Generally their main task was to support the achievement of operational and strategic objectives and complementing of the conventional forces operations⁴. However, over the last decade there was a distinct turn in development of Special Forces that have become an important, well-functioning and separate component of modern armed forces, with its own structures and doctrines.

Increasingly, Special Forces acquire “joint” character, proving their immense usefulness across whole spectrum of contemporary conflicts, and thus have direct impact on operational art, strategy development and the conduct of military operations.

It could be argued that Special Forces are currently precursor of changes in way the modern operations are perceived and conducted. In addition, they offer a more effective and legitimate options in traditional approach to use of force by state.

Most conclusions are the result of lessons learned and analysis regarding the way special forces are used by United States and Australia.

1 W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical and Critical Study*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, NJ, 1998, pp. 45.

2 C. Gray, *Modern Strategy*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999, pp. 286-289.

3 M. Evans, *From Kadesh to Kandahar: Military Theory and the Future of War*, Naval War College Review, vol. 56, no 3, summer 2003, pp. 132–50.

4 A. Beaumont, *Special Operations and Elite Units: 1939–1988*, Greenwood, Westport, CT, 1988, pp. 7.

In most of experts and analysts opinion just these two countries made the greatest contribution to the concept of Special Forces use.

Therefore they are the best example on how the Special Forces underwent a transformation, and in which direction changes will go⁵.

To commence broader analysis of Special Forces we must begin with its theoretical basics, although in this case practice and empirical experiments are certainly richer than poorly written theory⁶.

Special forces, although often operate behind closed doors security policies of governments in mystery aura, without doubt, are the most glorified category of national forces by the media.

They are characterized by specific abilities and opportunities arising from the needs of a given state, for this reason, from the multinational operations perspective, have little in common beyond the status of being elite.

Given this, and no other circumstances, any attempt to define them, usually ends up on comparison of their capabilities with the capabilities of conventional forces - Special Forces as opposite to the main force which constitute defense forces.

Such tautological approach, however, is in its essence not very precise, because it should entail a broader set of military organizations with their various tasks and abilities.

For instance, certain Special Forces units can play role either internal policing or role of intelligence and reconnaissance, while others may perform airborne tasks.

An alternative and perhaps more appropriate approach seems to be to define what constitutes such activities (operations) can be called special and indicate of what kind of forces are chosen to conduct such kind of operations.

In western military thought operations/special activities are usually defined in the context of conventional high-intensity wars, shaped as result of twentieth century interstate conflict experiences.

For example, Edward Luttwak describes special operations as “independent military operations carried out by the self-sustained forces operate in hostile territory”⁷.

Similarly, Foot special operations sees as “unconventional attacks [...] unexpected sudden strikes, usually conducted and carried out outside the area of ongoing operations that have a surprising effect on opponent - preferably at the highest level of command”⁸.

However, Maurice Tougwell and David Chartres correctly note that these definitions are inadequate, due to lack of issues, that would indicate that modern special operations in many cases are executed outside the context of a conventional war.

What is associated with the fact that there is no properly defined “adversary” often not on “hostile territory” (although very likely still dangerous), and in fact does not always involve the use of violence”⁹.

Tougwell and Chartres in their considerations go further and suggest the most likely coherent and complete definition of a special operation, which although formulated in 1984 is still valid:

5 Other states with the highly developed special forces are: the United Kingdom, South Africa and Israel. Unfortunately, in contrast to the United States and Australia, there is a very limited access to information about them. For these reasons, it is difficult to analyze transformation of forces in these countries.

6 English literature often refers to the publications of: W.H. McRaven, *Spec Ops, Case Studies of Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*, Presidio, Novato, CA, 1995. Less known but more useful seems to be publication of C.S. Gray, *Explorations in Strategy*, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 1996.

7 E. Luttwak, *A Systematic Review of “Commando” (Special) Operations 1939–1980*, C&L Associates, Potomac, MD, 1982, pp. I-1.

8 M. Foot, *Special Operations, I*, [red] E. Elliott-Bateman (ed.), *The Fourth Dimension Resistance*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1970, pp. 19.

9 M. Tougwell, D. Chartres, *Special Operations and the Threats to United States Interests in the 1980s* [red] F. Barnett, B. Hugh Tovar, R. H. Shultz [red], *Special Operations in US Strategy*, National Defense University Press, Washington, DC, 1984, pp. 34.

“small-scale clandestine, secret, covert or overt operations of an unorthodox and frequently high-risk undertaken to achieve significant political or military objectives in support of policy¹⁰.

Special operations are also characterized as a simple or complex operation, conducted with limited use of violence, involving the use of military and nonmilitary measures, including intelligence and supervised by the highest level of the state administration¹¹.

If we look at the definition recognized by the U.S. Department of Defense it is seen, that its contents are similar to those previously quoted academic definition “special operations are the activities carried out in a hostile, unfriendly or politically sensitive environments to achieve military, diplomatic, informational and economic objectives by the use of military capabilities for which there is no need to apply a wide range of conventional forces¹². If we look at the current Australian military doctrine we can find, that it defines special operations as a highly focused operations implemented at the tactical level, using unconventional military means for achieving broader operational and strategic effects. Equally important is that the Australian government acknowledges that the nature of operations is shaped by special circumstances like political and military factors, for this reason these have to be dealt with at the national level¹³.

From the art of war theory perspective the most significant aspect of the Special Forces is the recognition of their operational utility. The concept of the operational usefulness endeavors to assess the effectiveness of certain types of military operations, taking into account the course and outcome of the conflict. Experts suggest that Special Forces may influence the outcome of the conflict at the tactical level in a direct manner while at the operational level, both indirect and direct. Colin Gray argues that the increasingly frequent decisions of the states to conduct special operations as well as associated with this phenomena noticeable recent development of Special Forces is largely due to their operational utility - it is their usefulness in providing “economy forces” and “extension of operational capacity”¹⁴. For Gray there are two “fundamental issues” that form the core of the operational usefulness of the Special Forces, so that one can get significant results with limited resources.

They act as “Force multiplier” to other conventional components operating in the area of operations and directly affect the conduct of activities¹⁵. Secondly, Special Forces expand the range of available options in the implementation of political and military objectives. Gray indicates that, in theory, governments always possess different possibilities in the use of force, for example, diplomatic solutions, sanctions etc. It notes, however, that in practice, “there are some situations that cannot be solved successfully without resorting to physical coercion.

Availability of Special Forces and their ability means that the state can use military force”in a flexible, limited and precise way”¹⁶. Gray in his study also presents seven operational utility aspects of special forces, which include: innovative action, influencing improve morale, being a showcase of military competence, providing moral support and mental humiliation of the enemy, enabling control of escalation and shaping the future¹⁷.

10 Ibid, pp.35. We should emphasize the difference between the meaning of “secret” and “hidden” adopted in the context of the definition. K.O ‘Brien gives a concise definition, which indicates that the “secret operations refer to activities carried out by soldiers wearing uniforms [...] so their actions cannot be neither confirmed nor denied, but they are not released to the public information. In contrast the hidden operations refer to activities carried out by no uniformed soldiers or non-combatants, in such a way that their involvement may be denied. See. A. O’Brien, ‘Special Forces for Counter-Revolutionary Warfare: The South African Case’ Small Wars and Insurgencies, Vol 12, No. 2, Summer 2001, pp. 79-109.

11 Ibid, pp. 121

12 US Department of Defense, Special Operations Force Posture Statement 2003/2004, [access 14.06.2013], www.defenselink.mil/policy/solic/2003_2004_SOF_posture_statement.pdf.

13 See, Australian Defense Doctrine Publication 3.12—Special Operations, 2004.

14 C. Gray, Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures: When do Special Operations Succeed?, Parameters, spring 1999, no 2, pp. 163.

15 Ibid., pp. 168-74. Gray indicatesseventeen reasons why special operations forces provide economy.

16 Ibid, pp.174.

17 Ibid, pp. 175-85

Given the increasing complexity of modern security environment Mark Mitchell notes other issues, which in his belief are very important in the context of the operational usefulness of the Special Forces - “the ability to adapt to missions”¹⁸. Examples of Afghanistan and Iraq confirm that modern Special Forces are characterized by adaptability to diverse, constantly changing situations and conditions and possess skills, experience and operational maturity having allowed using them in the broad spectrum of tasks.

One can ask question whether modern Special Forces vary significantly from its historical predecessors or recent precursors. Over the millennia, in fight against an opponent, society used methods of conducting operations using irregular or raid units. One can even refer to Roman and Persian empires era, which led operation in unconventional character already 1500 years ago.

In nineteenth and early twentieth century British fought desperately on the India north-western boundary with the adversary, who led the military operations of an irregular and unconventional character¹⁹.

Colin Gray points out that although modern Special Forces actually have historical predecessors (particularly in tradition of non-western organization and training of small elite groups of soldiers), it is only recently changes and innovations in military affairs left a significant impact on their character²⁰. Special Forces experienced the greatest growth and achieved a significant position during World War II, when almost all parties involved developed and exploited certain types of unconventional and irregular operations.

What has changed in relation to that period and what draws more and more attention is the fact that modern Special Forces required to maintain an extremely wide range of tasks in a highly complex global security environment. To achieve these tasks must have a completely new and innovative ability. These new tasks include: conducting operations in a global framework within preemptive action including so called Global War on Terrorism, role in shaping national security, national fight against terrorism, several key tasks outside the scope of combat operations, including fight against narcotic traffic and tasks in area of crisis response.

Special Forces are increasingly being used to conduct operations on a global scale in different regions of the world in the context of preemptive action –expeditionary operations. Undoubtedly on undertaking this kind of operations have had impact attacks in 11 September 2001 and October 2002.

Both stressed the requirement for taking preemptive action or at least maintain the ability for preemptive military actions against two key factors of terrorism: international terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Special Forces have become “forces of choice” for both international counter-terrorism operations and activities aimed at stopping the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. One of the recent RAND reports indicates that such an offensive orientation in the fight against terrorism is clearly different from previous efforts in this area²¹. Offensive tasks in the fight against terrorism are not conducted by United States armed forces, but also their coalition partners and partner states.

The exact nature as well as amount of undertaken operations remains a topsecret due to operational security reasons, however there are indications that suggest a high rate of these activities.

Thomas O’Connell Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Special Forces and conflicts of low intensity indicated that United States Special Forces are currently operating “strategic intelligence combat missions and training missions around the world”²².

18 M. Mitchell, *Strategic Leverage: Information Operations and Special Operations Forces*, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey CA, 1999, pp. 84.

19 T. Moreman, *The British and Indian Armies and North-West Frontier Warfare: 1849–1914*, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 20, no 1, 1992, pp. 35–64.

20 Gray, *op. cit.*, pp. 146

21 B. Nardulli, *The Global War on Terrorism: An Early Look at Implications for the Army*, RAND Corporation, Arlington, VA, 2003, pp. viii.

22 G. Gilmore, *Special Operations: Force Multiplier in Anti-terror War*, *American Forces Information Service*, October 2003, www.defenselink.mil/news/Nov2003.

In addition to these visible actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. special forces were engaged in an offensive combat terrorism operations in the Philippines, Djibouti, Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, Georgia, Uzbekistan and Colombia²³. It is estimated that from 11 September 2001, United States Special Forces have likely performed more than 4,000 different kinds of operations in more than 100 countries. Unofficially it is said that as a result abovementioned actions have been taken, killed or captured over two hundred terrorist groups' leaders planning actions in twenty different countries²⁴. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld responsible for conducting offensive operations against terrorism appointed the U.S. Special Operations Command as a Unified Combatant Command²⁵.

Moreover in short time notice a Special Forces Command as a "global synchronizer" in the war on terrorism for all U.S. military combatant commands and made them responsible for development of a new campaign plan in the global fight against terrorism and conduct intelligence and reconnaissance preparatory tasks against terrorist organizations around the world²⁶. This new approach documented in a secret National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism, for the first time in the history of United States unified armed forces under the umbrella of special operations²⁷.

This was a significant step because since then have exist special forces command, which have primary control over all ongoing offensive operations against terrorism around the world. Usability special forces in a global nature, is not only because their ability to conduct war operations, but more importantly so called soft capabilities ie. linguistic skills, specializations in cultural, political area and use of information technics. This kind of "soft capabilities" Special Forces have developed in recent times, and as operational cases show brought success that Anthony Cordesman has labeled them as "snake eaters with master's degrees"²⁸.

Since the mid-90s of last century Special Forces have been used more often to carry out various "nontraditional" military tasks. It went beyond current range of military operations and was related with support of the broader national security policy objectives and international efforts to maintain peace²⁹. Undoubtedly, the reason for increased use of Special Forces was their high readiness and wide range of activities as opposed to a conventional unit. In the world Special Forces have begun to develop unique capabilities within national forces and maintain a high level of training required for conduct of activities with minimal risk. Significant achievements in carrying out nontraditional nature tasks caused that Special Forces now become a common tool in the hands of politicians and governments in the case of international crises. Australia and United States are instances which in the 90's last century repeatedly used their special forces to conduct nontraditional tasks³⁰ such as counter-narcotic operations, tracking and capturing terrorists and war criminals. Starting in the mid-90s of last century, the U.S. government began to use Special Forces to conduct covert and overt action against the drug industry in South and Central America.

23 G. Corera, Special Operations Forces Take Care of War on Terror, *Jane's Intelligence Review*, January 2003, pp. 73.

24 M. Billingslea, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense SO/LIC, *Waging the War on Terrorism*, [access 14.03.2012] www.heritage.org/research/nationalsecurity

25 M. Fitzsimmons, *The Importance of Being Special: Planning for the Future of US Special Operations Forces*, *Defense and Security Analysis*, vol. 19, no 3, 2003, pp. 203–18.

26 L. Robinson, *Plan of Attack*, *US News and World Report*, pp.23 [access 02.02. 2012] <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/050801/1terror.htm>

27 *Ibid*, pp.25.

28 A. Cordesman, *The Iraq War: Strategy, Tactics, and Military Lessons*, CSIS Press, Washington, DC, 2003, pp. 364.

29 L. Fuller, *Role of United States Special Operations Forces in Peace Operations*, Strategy Research Project, US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 1996, pp. 124

30 Special Forces of many other countries also carry out such type of tasks. Most NATO states have used it in a lesser or greater extent in the Balkans and now uses in Afghanistan. France has repeatedly used its special forces in humanitarian aid tasks in Africa.

In most cases operations supported structures of host country in order to detect, coerce or interfere any actions linked with illegal drug activity³¹.

Indeed in 1997 alone U.S. Special Forces conducted over 194 counter-drug operations presumably mostly in Central America³².

These forces are still present in the region and continuously train host-nation forces directed to fight against drug industry particularly in Ecuador and Colombia, where Colombian forces captured key leader and drug lord Ricardo Palmera - allegedly with the assistance U.S special forces³³.

Some U.S. politicians have called for greater involvement of special forces in Colombia, where Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces have a strong rebel army in an amount of about 15 000 soldiers. This army has developed from a classic guerrilla army in the organization of the terrorist - criminal nature, dealing in the trade of narcotics and which is now a major threat in the region.

Possible model for fighting drug cartels of so importance has been suggested by two American analysts A. Valenzuela and V. Rosello, who predicted involvement of troops in form of mobile training teams of Special Forces. These teams have been used successfully in El Salvador in the eighties and early nineties of the last century³⁴.

Also Australian Special Forces have also begun to play a key role in the counter drug operations. A case of such kind of operation would be a situation when Australian Special Forces entered suspected drug traffickers ship Pong Su belonging to North Korea and sailing on Australian territorial water. 50 kilograms of heroin have been found and operation was a major success for Special Forces and cooperating agencies³⁵.

It is significant that only Special Forces were able to carry out such kind of attack in extremely short period of time without much preparation. This fact indicates that very likely such abilities will be increasingly used by states to fight against drug trafficking.

One of the major tasks of Special Forces was to detect and capture key persons so called key targets.

As an example of this might be German Otto Skorzeny kidnapping during the Second World War or Chinese leadership Ah How in the Malay jungle in 1958³⁶. Currently Special Forces are tasked with similar nature mission in case of two very different types of targets: international war criminals and leaders of international terrorist groups. Today's tasks have however several specific characteristics underlying their uniqueness.

Firstly, task of locating and capture these targets more often is conducted in no well-defined area of operations or even in a specific geographical area. Secondly intelligence requirements that are required for success of the mission have inter-agency and multinational character as so require high levels coordination and cooperation. Thirdly Special Forces are forced to act in contrary to accepted norms and conventions of war and even against opposing public and political rhetoric³⁷.

Especially notable were operations of various countries special forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The International Criminal Court for the former Yugoslavia after approval of Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995 has indicted a number of war criminals. Both the NATO stabilization force and current resident - European forces are aware of the problems arising from the remaining war criminals on loose. The task of finding and arrest criminals was mostly designated to United States and Great Britain.

31 Special Operations Force Posture Statement 2003/04, op. cit., pp. 40.

32 P. Schoemaker, US Special Operations Forces: the way ahead, *Special Warfare*, winter 1998, pp. 5.

33 J. Forero, Columbian rebel's capture was result of hunt aided by US, *New York Times*, 4 January 2004.

34 A. Valenzuela, V. Rosello, *The War on Drugs and Terrorism: El Salvador and Colombia*, *Military Review*, March-April 2004, pp. 28-35.

35 P. Conford, B. Malkin, *Seized: Ship They Hunted for Days*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 April 2003, pp. 65.

36 K. Conner, *Ghost Force—The Secret History of the SAS*, Orion Books, London, 2000, pp. 50.

37 W. Ferrell, *No Shirt, No Shoes, No Status: Uniforms, Distinction, and Special Operations in International Armed Conflict*, *Military Law Review*, vol. 178, winter 2003, pp. 94-141.

In a typical fashion these forces operated in Bosnia beyond NATO mandate conducting direct actions at the national level or special rescue tasks. American special units such as SEAL Team 6 and Delta Force have already occasionally operated in Bosnia accomplished with effort approximately 300 soldiers³⁸. These forces also demonstrated significant intelligence - strategic reconnaissance and rescue capabilities during operation in Somalia in 1992-1995. An example may be a Task Force Ranger which captured key members from Aided Mohamed network although suffered significant losses³⁹.

British Special Air Force Regiment has also been operating in Bosnia for some time and search for war criminals has been a core task for them. In contrast to United States Special Forces which units have well-defined, short-term tasks, the British forces in Bosnia operated with small units. This solution gave undoubtedly greater opportunities to gather intelligence and reconnaissance data useful in planning and training for specific tasks as well as rapid response to any emerging local information. British forces captured General Stanislav Galic the Serb Commander whose army sieged Sarajevo in December 1999. In 2000 year British Special Forces conducted eleven of such kind operations in the British Sector of Bosnia. Operations led to arresting fifteen suspected persons and killing another two. However the most quested two persons identified as war criminals such as Karadzic and Ratko Radowan Mladic remained long in release⁴⁰.

During the war against Iraq in 2003 Special Forces were used in more coordinated and synchronized way to search Baathist leaders. The new Task Force 121 has been created with the task searching Iraqi leaders and key terrorists operating in the region. Most of these forces remain covered. Undoubtedly Task Force 121 was prepared to carry out specific tasks elimination highly valuable targets. Soldiers of this unit found out and captured Hussein⁴¹.

In recent years U.S. Special Forces conduct large-scale operations in the south-eastern mountains of Afghanistan along the border with Pakistan⁴². This was due to recovery of efforts to find Osama bin Laden and his coworkers and preventing resurgence of Taliban and al-Qaida forces in border provinces. These Special Forces units were allegedly part of Task Force 121. As an evidence of their high activity can be helicopter crash belonging to the U.S. Special Forces in Kunar province resulted in sixteen Special Forces killed. Probably they had been involved in rescue smaller group of four soldiers from the unit SEAL involved in seizure one of key Taliban commanders⁴³.

This kind of operations conducted against leaders will continue as long as coalition led by United States and ISAF forces will fight militant groups in Afghanistan region. Also Australian government's decision to send back to Afghanistan Special Forces Task Group with Special Air Service Regiment is another sign of weight and role Special Forces play in this operational area.

More frequently undertaken and challenged tasks are unconventional one. These include: a broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations led by local forces organized, trained, equipped, supported and directed by so called external source⁴⁴.

Ironically unconventional operations are one of the primary tasks that led to creation of permanent Special Forces units in the modern armed forces of Western states. There are certain capabilities developed as a result of extensive allied troops experience gained during World War II in training and equipping guerrilla forces from France and Yugoslavia in Europe and Burma and East Timor in Asia⁴⁵.

38 R. Newman, Hunting War Criminals, World Report, [access 6 February 2012], www.specialoperations.com/Army/Delta_Force/bosnia.

39 J. Celeski, A History of SF Operations in Somalia: 1992–1995', Special Warfare, January 2002, pp. 16–27

40 SAS Sweep on Serb Butcher, Daily Mail (UK), [access 21 December 2010], www.specialoperations.com/Focus/butcher

41 T. Shanker, E. Schmitt, Pentagon Says a Covert Force Hunts Hussein, New York Times, 7 November 2003

42 B. Gellman, D. Linzer, Afghanistan, Iraq: Two Wars Collide', Washington Post, 22 October 2004, pp. A01

43 A. North, US Navy SEALs Afghan Disaster, [access 25 July 2011], http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south_asia/4712885.stm.

44 US Department of Defense Joint Publication 1-02, [red] K. Dickson, The New Asymmetry: Unconventional Warfare and Army Special Forces, Special Warfare, fall 2001, pp. 16–17

45 G. Jones, Unconventional Warfare: Core Purpose of Special Forces, Special Warfare, summer 1999, pp. 5–6.

At the beginning of Vietnam War most Western special forces rarely led unconventional operations focusing on other operational priorities. However at the beginning of twenty-first century these activities have become once again the focal point in developing Special Forces capability. Probably reason for returning to such kind operations were spectacular successes of United States special forces in Afghanistan at the end of 2001 and early 2002 in Operation Enduring Freedom.

During OEF special forces were used to conduct unconventional operations in two ways. Firstly in the words of former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld “you do not wipe out terrorists using conventional means you can do this by unconventional measures and using specialized combat skills which can provide only special forces personnel”⁴⁶.

Secondly, American political and military leaders wanted to avoid reiteration of the past experiences, when United Kingdom and Soviet Union engaged, a huge amount of conventional land forces in Afghanistan. During OEF the most famous example of Special Forces success in unconventional activities was undoubtedly liberation of Mazar-e-Sharif city on 10 November 2001. During operation 5th Special Forces Group assisted Northern Alliance to beat much superior Taliban forces⁴⁷. Special Forces performing functions of military advisers assisted Northern Alliance in almost all battles for major cities of Afghanistan such as Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Konduz⁴⁸. 5th Special Forces Group has been conducted similar unconventional tasks in another country in Central Asia for six weeks before attacks of September 11, 2001. The group moved to Afghanistan in the middle of October and merged with Harmed Karzai and his Northern Alliance forces⁴⁹. Soldiers of this unit had an enormous huge operational experience dated back from Central Asia many of them spoke local languages. This example shows the importance of long-term approach and commitment to the development of specific skills in unconventional Special Forces personnel activities.

One may note that in recent years of United States defense policy unconventional activities have become particularly important. In this context, special forces are now seen as a “global scout” which serves “to ensure allies and United States friends to carry out solutions of U.S. government”⁵⁰ that in future will be used to defeat a strong opponent “by means and methods so called anti-access and anti-denial”⁵¹. It should be mentioned that even before announcement Global War on Terrorism United States widely used Special Forces for training and support tasks around the world. Just in 1997 Special Forces have been used in 144 countries⁵². Recent unconventional operations in Afghanistan have achieved so much success that operation focused on Special Forces (SOF- centric campaign) has been described as a possible future model of operations in general.

Several commentators assumed that this type of unconventional war may be applied throughout whole spectrum of future conflicts⁵³. An example of such an approach was involvement of Special Forces in Operation Iraqi Freedom in early 2003. One of the key aspects of overall operational plan was coordination of Kurdish forces operations in northern Iraq by Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command. This task was a classic example of unconventional operations.

Presented examples are American lessons learned; however Special Forces of many other countries have similar or close capability that can be employed to unconventional operations. Australian Special Air Service Regiment probably in the early 70 ‘s have already developed “wing of non-conventional operations”.

46 H. Kennedy, Will Special Ops Success Change the Face of War?, National Defense Magazine, [access 12 February 2012], www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/article.cfm?Id=721.

47 S. Biddle, Afghanistan and Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy, US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle, PA, 2012, pp. 8–10.

48 Kennedy, op. cit., similar unconventional task were conducted in Iraqi Freedom Operations 2003.

49 A. Finaln, Warfare by Other Means: Special Forces, Terrorism and Grand Strategy, Small Wars and Insurgencies, vol. 14, no. 1, 2003, pp. 92–108.

50 Special Operations force Posture Statement, op. cit., pp. 28.

51 Erckenbrack, op. cit., pp. 8.

52 Schoomaker, op. cit., pp. 3 in 1997 average number of forces deployed was 4760 weekly.

53 See T. Shanker, Conduct of War is Redefined by Success of Special Forces’, New York Times, 21 January 2001 or R. Scarborough, Pentagon Uses Afghan War as Model for Iraq, Washington Times, [access 4 December 2011],

It was based on American team “A” special forces concept and initially used U.S. doctrine⁵⁴. David Horner has documented involvement of these forces in a quasi- nonconventional operation in the 70’s and 80’s of last century. Examples of such tasks identified by Horner included training of land and security forces in Thailand and Indonesiaby Special Air Service Regiment personnel⁵⁵. Australian experience in training of local forces back to war in Vietnam when army training teams trained local forces. Although unconventional operations are now shadowed by Global War on Terror and offensive actions to combat terrorism, but in the future it may prove to be extremely effective method in combating threat of weak states and non-state actors. Dean Newman believes that in war on terror Special Forces unconventional operations striking the non-state actors are extremely attractive alternative to traditional concepts of use military force. Newman among reasons of growing importance of unconventional operations in achieving objectives emphasizes reduced funds requirements, benefits of economic and historical examples of success⁵⁶.

Another important element contributing to Special Forces transformation is their organizational structure and way of training as well as new approaches to operations. Nature of special operations since end of World War II required combination of land and air assets operating simultaneously in a multidimensional way. Preliminary analysis of conventional armed forces selected alliance member states shows that in most cases they still cling to their own military service doctrines. Concurrently analysis of Special Forces shows that in many countries they transformed into a true organization of joint forces. Emphasis put on joint forces means that in terms of command and control (and even tactical cooperation) Special Forces use task forces and task groups not one service forces. Also great emphasis has been placed on developing interoperability with international Special Forces and increasingly non-governmental organizations which was already evident in peacekeeping operationsin 90’s of the last century. As a result of these changes today’s Special Forces are at forefront of many coalition and joint operations conducted within the framework of the global war on terrorand international peacekeeping. In turn, analysis of ways of conducting operations by special forces show a steady growth, high specialization andwide diversity of tactical procedures for operations in high-risk environments. Noteworthy are two new concepts in which Special Forces operate at tactical level. One of them relates to the combination of efforts land force special elements with Air Force. Second concerns use of network-centric in special operations.

Both concepts point out growing role of information and increasing use of advanced technology at an individual level.

The theory and practice of joint operations refers to “synergistic application of exceptional abilities and capabilities each of service forces in such a way, that the final result is a capability that is greater than the sum of its parts”⁵⁷. Striving towards joint operations caused by two factors: natural advantages of services forces and changes in global strategic context. Substantial impacts have also civil and political requirements which necessitate a more precise application of combat power⁵⁸. Joint operations involve series of interoperability problem that relate to four key areas: culture (modus operandi), technology, division of functions and organizational structures⁵⁹.

According to experts, conventional forces always struggled with these problems while Special Forces now reaping benefits of this, that are already inherently joint forces on several levels.

Firstly, special operations are usually multifaceted nature and for this reason require engagement, collaboration and synchronization the Army, Navy and Air elements.

54 D. M. Horner, SAS: Phantoms of War, op. cit., pp. 398–404.

55 Ibid,pp.421.

56 D. Newman, Operation White Star: A UW Operation Against an Insurgency’, Special Warfare, vol. 17, no 4, April 2005, pp. 28–36.

57 M. Noonan, M. R. Lewis, Conquering the Elements: Thoughts on Joint Force Organization, Parameters, fall 2003, pp. 31.

58 Ibid, pp. 33.

59 C. Call, US Army Special Forces Operational Interoperability with the US Army’s Objective Force—the Future of Special Forces Liaison and Coordination Elements, Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College, Ft Leavenworth, KS, 2003, pp. 8.

Because of that are becoming more interoperable with conventional forces i.e. “mutually provide services in a way allowing effective joint operations”⁶⁰. Interoperability has been achieved through proper education and training system focused on jointness. Special Forces now have extensive experience in planning and executing joint operations in a wide spectrum of conflict. Moreover interact closely with other government agencies (border guards, customs, police and intelligence services), international organizations (UN or NATO), non-governmental organizations and private companies paramilitaries. For more than a decade U.S. special forces have been leading main role in adapting doctrine, education and training system for joint operations requirements.

It happened after 1986 when Congress of United States expressed concern for the position and status of Special Forces within overall United States defense planning. This was result revealed shortcomings and deficiencies of these forces after failed attempt to rescue hostages in Iran in 1979 during Operation Eagle Claw and problems during operation Urgent Fury in Granada in 1983. These concerns led to establishment of U.S. Special Operations Command authorized by an amendment to the Cohen-Numme Authorization Act amendment Department of Defense in 1987⁶¹. This law enabled creation of joint command supervising all special forces, responding directly to Secretary of Defense on budget, equipment, training and doctrinal issues⁶². U.S. Special Operations Command is one of nine “joint combat commands”. As such, it is also responsible for planning, command and control of special operations and ensuring Special Forces support from Geographic Combatant Commander in area of security cooperation⁶³. Currently approximately 49 000 personnel serves under the Special Operations Command. It is divided into three component commands, which constitute majority of Special Forces units such as Army Special Operations Command, Naval Special Warfare Command and Air Force Special Operations Command. There is also one Joint Special Operations Command, which provides an analysis of special operations requirements and compatibility between services forces. Oversees standardization of equipment, develops doctrines and tactics of joint operations, and ensures coordination with conventional forces⁶⁴. Another case is changes in 2003 done by Australian Defense Forces. A new command for special operations was created and approved by Minister of Defense Robert Hill on 5 May 2003⁶⁵. It was response to bombings carried out in Bali in October 2002. In this way intentions of government in improving the ability of Australian Special Forces were confirmed and meet increasing joint capability needs to fight against terrorism. Australian Special Operations Command is truly joint command equal to land, sea, air and combined logistics commands. Commander of Special Operations is in charge directly to Chief of Defense Forces for operations against terrorism and Head of Joint Operations for support of Special Forces for all other operations. Command consists mostly of land special forces units with supporting elements such as organic logistics and air forces. What is more command operates in coordination with other elements of government and liaise with other organizations. Perhaps the best example displaying joint character of Special Forces and their role in wider activities can be operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. Most experts agree that Special Forces played a major role there. Anthony Cordesman presented analyzes stating that general Franks deployed in Iraq from 9 to 10,000 Special Forces that constituted approximately 8% of total number fighting forces⁶⁶. In Iraq there were present all three service special forces units including previously mentioned special tasks forces, as well as a significant Australia and United Kingdom forces.

The multinational forces were grouped in Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command), which subordinate directly to U.S. Central Command as a Geographic Combatant Command.

60 Ibid, pp. 7.

61 Schoomaker, op. cit., pp. 3.

62 Special Operations Force Posture Statement 2003/04, op. cit., pp. 8–10.

63 A. Feickert, US Special Operations Forces (SOF): Background and Issues for Congress’, Library of Congress Congressional Research Service (CRS), CRS Report For Congress, 15 August 2003, pp. 3.

64 US Department of Defense Joint Publication 3-05, Doctrine for Joint Special Operations, [access 17 December 2013], www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new_pubs/jp3_05.pdf.

65 Minister for Defense Media Release 47/2003, New Special Operations Command, 5 May 2003

66 Cordesman, op. cit., pp. 362.

Special Forces units operating in Iraq used doctrine and principles of joint operations on several levels. First it was organization of a combined and joint character, in which partners from different countries have been fully integrated into a single command structure however with their national command elements. Secondly units conducted an independent, autonomous of small-scale operations, such as capturing airfields, coastal protection terminals supplying oil and previously mentioned search for Iraqi leaders. In one of recent work Michael Noonan introduced these “autonomous” operations as a characteristic feature of contemporary action and pointed out that the Special Forces, although small in number, reaching a disproportionately large result in achieving goal. There are three reasons for this: high standard of tasks accomplishment, experience and freedom in conducting such tasks⁶⁷. Thirdly, Special Forces increasingly play role of a key component in operation area collaborating with land and air elements as well with nonmilitary one.

Examples this kinds of cooperation can be: tasksto find a rocket launcher (Scud Hunting) conducted by Australia and UK special forces western Iraq⁶⁸, creation of combat teams, consisting of special forces with small armored elements including tanks, interaction with army units as U.S. 173 Brigade Airborne and 45 British Royal Marine Commando⁶⁹.

Combat operations in Iraq have shown already maturity of joint forces, “for the first time [...] integration enabled conventional forces (air, land, sea) use of Special Forces full capabilities and counter asymmetric threats, while allowing precise targeting in the same space. A similar situation occurred with respect to Special Forces, which used conventional forces to increase scope and enable fulfillment of special tasks. In fact Component Command Joint Forces Special Operations in Iraq at the same timeconducted operations on three fronts, performing tasks with different objectives and specific requirements.

In northern Iraq Special Forces units played supporter role. Main task was to prevent Iraqi units deployed in this region to strengthen defense of Baghdad. In western Iraq special forces supported Air Force component removing SCUD launchers. Whereas in southern Iraq supported coalition land forces allowing them quick approach to Baghdad. So Special Forces acted both as a supporter and supported component, which required a completely new approach in integration of joint forces. In experts and analysts opinion this approach has been successful. It should be expected that as such will probably be considered as a model for future operations⁷⁰.

Special Forces abilities to conduct joint operations led also to specific innovations in their tactics. Probably the most important, yet most successful achievement was integration of Air Force with troops operating on the ground. It consisted in use of number techniques and tactical procedures developed in order to improve Special Forces operations called “Human sensors” for realization of strategic air force tasks. This kind of relationship “sensor with firing” also related use of Air Forces to provide a joint fire support for Special Forces acting as maneuvering forces⁷¹. Americandoctrines concerning joint special operations indicate two tasks (missions) which define scope of Special Forces support to Air Forces i.e. direct actions and special recognize.

Within direct actions tasks Special Forces direct and point defined in targeting process targets at strategic and operational level and then these targets are destroyed by precision guided air missiles. In recognize tasks special forces define nature and specificity of targets, assessment and recognition of area after bombing⁷². Johnny Huster proposes other possible innovative ways of using Special Forces. He says namely that joint forces commander can deploy Special Forces components that would act as a combat weapons system. Huster suggests in the process of targeting to take into account, special forces combat capabilities and consider them as so “Alternative option” intargets neutralization by air or missile Tomahawk means⁷³.

67 Noonan, op. cit., pp. 37.

68 T. Ripley, Iraq’s Western Desert Special Forces Playground, Jane’s Defence Weekly, 9 April 2003.

69 Noonan, op. cit., pp. 31.

70 P. Braganca, Joint Forces Evolution, Military Review, January-February 2004, pp. 50–3.

71 M. Findlay, R. Green, E. Braganca, SOF on the Contemporary Battlefield, Military Review, May–June, 2003, pp. 10.

72 US Department of Defense Joint Publication 3-05.5, Joint Special Operations Targeting and Mission Planning Procedures, 10 August 1993, pp. II-1.

73 J. Hester, Integration of Special Operations Forces into the Joint Targeting Process, US Army Command

However in the opinion of many experts application of this concept is limited by actual capabilities both forces components.

While strike on stationary targets with high precision in case of Air Forces is feasible, however locating and attacks against mobile targets, operating at critical time is still a very difficult task. Of course, use of Special Forces to find and eliminate operational and strategic level targets as part of air operation is nothing new. Many on this subject can be found in William Rosen publications who wrote on use of U.S. Special Forces “behind enemy line”. Both during Vietnam War, as well as in Persian Gulf. Their activities concentrated on searching especially important targets and calling for air strikes⁷⁴. Rosenan emphasizes that in both cases, these turned out to be much less successful than officially considered. The main reason of failure resulted from application by opposing side effective preventive measures. An additional problem was shortage in appropriate technical assets equipment and lack of situational awareness. It should be noted that role of such problems increases considering vast area and difficult terrain⁷⁵. The need for a greater number of so-called human sensors on the ground appeared again during Operation Allied Force - (air operation), directed against Serbia at the end of the 90’s last century. Static targets such as bridges or factories were destroyed by Tomahawk missiles and attacks by air means to destroy or interfere mobile or hiding Serbian forces in Kosovo posed serious problem. Covered support for Kosovar Liberation Army has been provided by United States and Great Britain Special Forces. Some sources indicate relatively small success of the U.S. Air Forces for which land activities targeting were a significant part of hidden support⁷⁶.

It should be emphasized that since Kosovo tactics and technics related to Special Forces and air forces joint operations have developed significantly. This was reflected in operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

David Sullivan has evaluated method of operations in Afghanistan and commented that “the combination of special and air forces in warfare is a transformation in operational art use of force”⁷⁷. In case of United States beginning of a new synergy may be found in concept of Joint Vision 2010 and precise impact based on effect based precision engagement⁷⁸. Air operations in particular those conducted in Afghanistan shows that U.S. Special Forces and their coalition partners have made significant progress and development in joint operations integration area. Sullivan points out that change in the nature of air operations in Afghanistan and Iraq is a direct result of “technical progress and evolution in joint operations doctrines”⁷⁹. A new approach to operations is mainly based on use precision weapons, provided by air means operating at safe altitudes supported by special force teams which observe and pointed out targets on the ground. These units are equipped with modern optical laser systems, indicating the location, portable computers and various means of communication. In this way Special Forces teams are able to identify targets invisible or undetected by unmanned reconnaissance assets. This fact alone contributes significantly to improving decisive impact of bombing and air strikes in Afghanistan.

Also innovative was tactical coordination, command and control special and air forces. Both targeting and fire support in joint operations are highly complex process. In practitioners and experts opinion are even more challenging due to non-contiguous nature of modern battlefield in particular that in Afghanistan. During Operation Enduring Freedom Special Forces units and headquarters elements were not able to accurately predict deployment and location of enemy groups and mobile targets. This situation meant that operations could not be planned in advance and there was no clearly defined area of operation.

and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth KA, 2003, pp. 3.

74 W. Rosenau, Special Operations Forces and Elusive Enemy Ground Targets: Lessons from Vietnam and the Persian Gulf War, RAND Publication MR-1408-AF, RAND Corporation, Arlington, VA, 2001

75 Ibid, pp. 2.

76 A. Cordesman, The Lessons and Non-lessons of the Air and Missile Campaign in Kosovo, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, 1999, pp. 250–6.

77 D. Sullivan, Transforming America’s Military: Integrating Unconventional Ground Forces into Combat Air Operations, US Naval War College, Joint Maritime Operations Department, Newport, RI, 4 February 2002, pp. iv.

78 US Department of Defense, Joint Vision 2010, pp. 21.

79 Ibid, pp. 9.

In order to overcome these problems, already during the operation coalition forces have developed and implemented a number of interesting methods worth mentioning.

First, developed operational design always contained two fundamental elements i.e. task and designated area of operations. Different from the previous one was combat space geometry since operating units were off each other and there was no line of separation. The fire support coordination elements included areas without fire, restricted areas of fire and kill- boxes⁸⁰.

Second in most cases, instead of pre-planning fire support increased use of direct fire control and indicating targets by Special Forces. If distinct teams came into unexpected contact with the enemy could expect immediate direct air support.

Alternatively, they could receive support of directed fire that could observe and adjust accordingly. In fact combat aircraft flying into area of operations, received target's position data only when teams operating on ground reported enemy positions in real time⁸¹. Such method was continued in Operation Iraqi Freedom, where one of Special Forces strategic importance key tasks was search for SCUD missiles and related installations in western Iraq.

They were often mobile and well hidden targets, so destroy them based on specified previously coordinates was possible only if location of targets has been confirmed by Special Forces reconnaissance elements operating in the area⁸². The ability to call for immediate air support meant that Special Forces units could operate in remote areas without support of heavy artillery and other land-based support elements⁸³.

Special Forces capabilities in identifying and destroying enemy command and control C2 SCUD missiles elements were extended by use of joint reconnaissance assets such as aerialunmanned vehicles. These means being at Combined Forces Air Component Commander disposal, routinely operated with Special Forces.

They were used to locate, identify, track and destroy such kind of targets. Video recordings were then transferred to other aircraft platforms such as the AC -130 "Spectra" - providingtargeting information already inengagementphase⁸⁴. Moreover Special Forces teams used widelyBlue-Force system which strongly improved situational awareness and reduced friendly fire. Blue- Force is an automated tracking system that sends coded information every five or ten minutes, identifying units and giving their location in GPS coordinates. Tracking makes full use of Special Forces in the own plans framework. These measures also provide Special Forces teams' continuous communication with other land forces units and most importantly being recognizable by its own air assets⁸⁵.

Unmanned flying assets and Blue-force are excellent examples of growing interdependence special forces from advanced technology. A small team or even one soldier now have access to unprecedented levels of battlefield communications, data exchange intelligence and reconnaissance allowing build up so-called situational awareness.

Network Centric warfare by use advanced technology and proper tactics provides full advantage of information and enables quick and flexible deployment and use of all available means of combat. As for Special Forces they have adopted network-centric warfare with a great enthusiasm, which contributed to the fact that outcome of many special operations is now achieved even at individual soldier level.

There is a misconception that network-centricwarfare is merely a combination of different computer systems. In fact it relies on use both material factors (technical) as well as human resources.

80 S. Jackson, *Tactical Integration of Special Operations and Conventional Forces Command and Control Functions*, monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College, Ft Leavenworth, KS, 2003.

81 Ibid.pp. 11.

82 I. Bostock, *Australian Forces go SCUD Hunting in Western Iraq*, *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 July 2003, pp. 87.

83 T. Ripley, *Iraq's Western Desert a Special Forces Playground*, *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 9April 2003, pp. 35.

84 C. Bradley, *Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance in Support of Operation Iraqi Freedom: Challenges for Rapid Maneuvers and Joint C4ISR Integration and Interoperability*, Joint Military Operation Department, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 9 February 2004.

85 Cordesman, *Lessons of Iraq*, op. cit., pp. 363.

Accurate explanation of network-centric warfare concept is statementsaying that it is “strong relationship concept of warfare and linked military capabilities which includes three joint warfare domains(physical, information and cognitive) in order to generate increased combat power by achieving greater speed in command and increase lethal capability assets,survival opportunities and response to the situation⁸⁶. Another definition propose Alberts, Garstka and Stein who describe network-centric warfare as “[...] a phenomenon that is characterized by ability of geographically dispersed forces to create a high level of sharing combat space awareness which can be used by synchronization and other network-centric operations in order to achieve commanders intents”⁸⁷.

Special Forces embody this vision, as network-centric warfare effectiveness results from the increased sensitivity special forces team to accumulate abilitiesand achievements of the entire “network” therefore enhance overall combat strength and accelerate decision process⁸⁸. In a recent work Greg Gagnon presented results on network-centric warfare research in special forces operations, which proves that it can increase likelihood of victory on three ways: by simplicity and innovation in planning, security, repetition and speed, surprise and adaptability in execution⁸⁹. He observed that both favorable opportunityas well as resources and capabilities can now occur simultaneously, allowing tactical element to achieve strategic aim - situation that was unlikely in industrial period warfare. Most concepts describing network-centric warfare phenomenon and Special Forces capabilities have found practical application in recent operations. It was expressed by common situational awareness, very good connectivity and better utilization of sensor-shooter relationship. United States and coalition special forces operating in Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, have achieved a high level of success. This success is largely attributed to network-centric warfare abilities. This new concept has become so important that U.S. Special Operations Command believes that it dramatically changes way of carrying out tasks by Special Forces⁹⁰. Network Centric Warfare is expressed in three operational areas: situational awareness, precision fires and increasing operational “transparency” combat space⁹¹.

86 US Department of Defense, Network Centric Warfare: Department of Defense Report to Congress, Department of Defense, Washington, DC,27 July 2001, pp. 3–10.

87 D. Alberts, J. Garstka, F. Stein, Network Centric Warfare: Developing and Leveraging Information Superiority, Command andControl Research Program, Washington, DC, 2000, pp. 88.

88 E. Smith, Effects-based Operations: Applying Network Centric Warfare in Peace, Crisis and War,Command and Control Research Program, Washington, DC, 2002,pp. 65–97.

89 G. Gagnon, Network-centric Special Operations: Exploring New Operational Paradigms, Air and Space Power Chronicles, 4 February 2002.

90 R. Ackerman, Special Operations Forces Become Network-centric, Signal, March 2003, pp. 17–21.

91 D. Lewis, Inside and Outside the Battlespace: Understanding the Rise of Special Operations in Australia, AustralianArmy Journal, vol. I, no 2, December 2003, pp. 53–8.