CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF US SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES
5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the near unpredictable future, threats to U.S. interests are developing new dimensions. The US is increasingly challenged by regional instability, transnational problems, asymmetric threats and the likelihood of unpredictable events that are not easily addressed by simple force-on-force calculations. The recent attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon are clear indications\(^1\). In order to meet these challenges, the US must leverage the best capabilities and potential of their armed forces. The special operations forces (US SOF) have an important and growing role in addressing many of these challenges, and effectively satisfying the cost-benefit criteria. This chapter will look at the effectiveness of the US SOF. In so doing, it will also look at its achievements and failures as well as challenges facing US SOF. Some of its missions as elaborated in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 will be briefly revisited for analytical purposes. The current and future challenges confronting US SOF will also be analysed by highlighting why certain operations failed and why others succeeded.

5.2 THE STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL ROLE OF US SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

The US SOF had come a long way to be where they are today. They have distinguished themselves in the Second World War (where it all began), the Korean War, in

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\(^1\) "Why many hate America"; DM, The Malay Mail; Monday, September 17, 2001; p 12.
the Vietnam War, involved in various counter terrorism operations (such as the failed Iranian Embassy rescue in 1980), the Grenada intervention, the Gulf War and various peacekeeping operations after the Cold War.

During 1997, US Special Operations Forces (US SOF) were deployed to 144 countries around the world, with an average of 4,760 SOF personnel deployed per week. This was a threefold increase in missions since 1991\(^2\). US SOF consists of over 46,000 people, active and reserve, that are organized into a variety of land, sea and aerospace forces including the US Army Special Forces, the 75th Ranger Regiment, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), psychological operations units and civil affairs units, U.S. Navy Sea-Air-Land forces (SEALs) and the US Air Force special operations squadrons. These are basically the strategic dimensions of the US conventional forces.

The legislation that created USSOCOM (United States Special Operations Command) also specified certain US SOF activities and assigned the command specific authorities and responsibilities. These tasks, similar to those assigned to the Services, include manage a separate program and budget for US SOF-unique requirements; conduct research, development and acquisition of US SOF peculiar items; develop joint US SOF doctrine, tactics, techniques and procedures; conduct joint US SOF specialized courses of instruction; train all assigned forces and ensure joint interoperability; monitor the readiness of all assigned and forward deployed joint US SOF and monitor the professional

\(^2\) Interview with Major C. Douglas Dawson; United States Air Force, Deputy Chief, Security Assistance Office, Embassy of USA, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
development of US SOF personnel of all services. Hence US SOF plays a crucial role in developing the military.

The US's national military strategy requires their armed forces to advance national security by applying military power to help shape the international environment and respond to the full spectrum of crises, while also preparing now for an uncertain future. US SOF support this "shape, respond, prepare now" strategy by providing an array of expanded options, strategic economy of force, "tailor to task" capabilities and are particularly adept at countering transnational and asymmetrical threats. SOF expands the options of the NCA and CinCs, particularly in crises that fall between wholly diplomatic initiatives and the overt use of large warfighting forces. In this way, US SOF enhance its strategic role within the US armed forces.

Decision makers may choose US SOF as an option because they provide the broadest range of capabilities that have direct applicability in an increasing number of missions, from major theater wars to smaller-scale contingencies to humanitarian assistance. US SOF allow decision makers the flexibility to tailor US responses, lethal and nonlethal, to encompass this wide range of possibilities and reduce the risk of escalation associated with larger, more visible force deployments.

3. Interview with Major C. Douglas Dawson, United States Air Force, Deputy Chief, Security Assistance Office, Embassy of USA, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Consequently, US SOF may be the best choice for crises requiring immediate response or precise use of force, such as Operation Assured Response, the evacuation of 2,115 noncombatants from Liberia in 1996 with no loss of life. SOF may be most effective in conducting economy of force operations, generating strategic advantage disproportionate to the resources they represented\textsuperscript{5}. For example, combat-ready US Army Special Forces teams are routinely deployed around the world in support of peacetime engagement to prevent conflict and conserve resources. By training host-nation forces to provide their own security, US SOF foster stability and help prevent local problems from developing into threats to international security. In this way, US SOF contributes toward conflict reduction and confidence building\textsuperscript{6}.

During conflict, US SOF conducts operational and strategic missions that directly or indirectly support the joint force commander's campaign plan. Fully integrated into the joint campaign plan, US SOF can attack high-value, time-sensitive targets throughout the battlespace to assist in rapidly achieving land, sea, air and space dominance. US SOF also conduct information operations, train indigenous forces, assist conventional force management of civilians on the battlefield, and provide advisory and liaison capabilities to rapidly integrate coalition partners and leverage their unique qualities to enhance the capabilities of the entire force\textsuperscript{7}.

\textsuperscript{5} Interview with Major C. Douglas Dawson; United States Air Force, Deputy Chief, Security Assistance Office, Embassy of USA, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
\textsuperscript{6} "How does the U.S. Export Diplomacy?"; Center for Defense Information; August 21, 2000; http://www.cdi.org.
\textsuperscript{7} Interview with Major C. Douglas Dawson; United States Air Force, Deputy Chief, Security Assistance Office, Embassy of USA, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
During post-conflict situations, US SOF's training skills, coupled with civil affairs and psychological operations expertise, help speed the transition to normalcy, thereby allowing conventional forces to redeploy quickly. US SOF use these same skills during peace operations, such as Haiti and Bosnia, to defuse volatile situations.

US SOF is rapidly adaptable to a broad and constantly varying range of tasks and conditions. Even under the most austere conditions, US SOF can conduct 24-hour, multidimensional operations to penetrate sensitive areas and resolve terrorist activities, pre-empt the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction (WMD), or strike key targets with precision and discrimination. Although a potent military force, US SOF can often accomplish their mission without resorting to the use of force. US SOF training skills combined with language proficiency, cultural awareness, regional orientation and an understanding of the political context of their missions make US SOF unique in the U.S. military; true "warrior-diplomats."

During FY (fiscal year) 1997, US SOF had conducted 17 crisis response operations, 194 counter-drug missions, and humanitarian demining operations in 11 countries. In addition to these real-world requirements, US SOF maintained a robust exercise schedule, participating in 224 combined exercises for training in 91 countries around the world. This proactive peacetime engagement allows US SOF to help host

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11. Interview with Major C. Douglas Dawson; United States Air Force, Deputy Chief, Security Assistance Office, Embassy of USA, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
nations meet their legitimate defense needs while encouraging regional cooperation, maintaining U.S. access, and visibly demonstrating institutional and strategic flexibility in playing a variety of role in promoting US’s interests\textsuperscript{12}.

The threat of terrorism is also very high on US interests, not only on foreign soil but in her domestic front as well. The most recent attack on the World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York on September 11th, 2001, has left a scar on the US’s ability to counter terrorism. US SOF has a wide role to play here as their experience in counter terrorist and counter guerilla warfare can augment those of the internal law enforcement agencies responsible to the domestic security of US.

5.3 THE STRATEGIC REASONS FOR THE SUCCESS OF US SPECIAL OPERATIONS IN GRENADE AND IN OTHER MISSIONS

The US had deployed various special operations forces namely, US Army Delta Force, US Navy SEAL Teams and US Army Ranger Battalions in the Grenada operation. The US special operations in Grenada (1983) was a success. There were many factors that contributed to the success in Grenada.

The decisive factors were, contributed by many aspects. After the Vietnam war, the US Armed Forces had proceeded to change their style of training drawing from their bloody experience in the Vietnam War. Some of the more senior officers and enlisted

\textsuperscript{12} Special Operations Forces: Force Structure and Readiness Issues; Chapter Report, March, 24, 1994, GAO/NSIAD-94-105; General Accounting Office of USA, Washington D.C.
men in the US SOF community were combat veterans of the Vietnam War which ended a decade ago before the Grenadan Operation. The success in Grenada was partly contributed to the revamp of the training of special operations forces based on their experience in Vietnam and also the presence of some combat veterans in these units.

Also due to their experience during the Vietnam War that a need of a centralized command for all US SOF units of the armed forces in order to coordinate their operations, the Joint Special Operations Command was established in 1980 embracing all US SOF units. This was to avoid duplication of the past and ensure greater success that has sometimes accompanied US elite units. The Joint Special Operations Command provided vital coordinated planning and command during Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada. Under its auspices, all US SOF units that participated during the Grenada intervention performed professionally and contributed to the success of the operation.¹³

During the Grenada operation, the success of the operation had largely to do with the political will of the politicians. Although it is not a focal point this dissertation would choose to study on, but it is a very important factor in contributing to any operation. Consider the US politicians will at that time with Clinton’s administration during the Somali peacekeeping operation (1993). Quick decisive planning and decisions have provided the US SOF with a surprise and quick operation against the Grenadans, whom was eventually overwhelmed by the US forces.

¹³ Ed Magnuson; Time; D-Day in Grenada; November 7, 1983; p 8.
The US SOF involved had performed well considering some of the major setbacks beyond their control. The main difficulties encountered were not because of the lack of training in special forces personnel but lack of support and coordination from other main regular units, lack of good and precise intelligence and lack of advanced communications equipment. This was the first coordinated combat effort conducted under the Joint Special Operations Command. This Command would later in 1987 evolved into a more refined command known as US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM)\textsuperscript{14}.

Similar cases and situations appeared in the Panama special operation to arrest Pablo Escobar, the drug lord. US SOF again demonstrated the swift assault and surprise skills reminiscing of the Grenada operation. Escobar was successfully arrested and his drug cartel destroyed in 1989. Another swift operational example is during Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti. US SOF performed a number of key functions in Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti. US Navy SEALs used their skills to interdict embargo violators and intercept refugees during the long buildup. US SOF personnel were prepared to remove the illegal military regime by force. Capitalizing on their flexibility, US SOF changed their plan and made a rapid transition to a peacekeeping role\textsuperscript{15}.

\textsuperscript{15} Institute For National Strategic Studies; \textit{Strategic Assessment 1996, Instruments of U.S. Power}; New York, 1996; p 150.
5.4 AN ASSESSMENT ON THE FAILURE OF US SPECIAL OPERATIONS IN SOMALIA AND IN OTHER MISSIONS

Somalia represents a good case for failure in US SOF missions. The Somali special operation was a set of well-laid plans gone awry. The experience revealed a military force that underestimated its enemy. The assault was launched into the most dangerous part of Mogadishu in daylight, even though the Ranger and Delta forces were trained and equipped primarily to work in darkness, where their night-vision devices can afford a decisive advantage\textsuperscript{16}. Commanders also made the fatal mistake that Somalis could not shoot down helicopters saw five shot down (three limped back to base before crash-landing). Ground rescue convoys were also blocked for hours by barricades and ambushes, leaving at least five U.S. soldiers to die awaiting rescue, including two Delta sergeants who were posthumously awarded Medals of Honor.

The American soldiers were so confident of a quick victory that they neglected to take night-vision devices and water, both were sorely needed later. Carefully defined rules of engagement, calling for soldiers to fire only on Somalis who aimed weapons at them, were quickly discarded in the heat of the fight. Most soldiers interviewed said that through most of the fight they fired on crowds and eventually at anyone and anything they saw. Animosity between the elite Delta units and the Ranger infantry forces effectively created two separate ground-force commanders, who for at least part of the battle were no longer speaking to each other\textsuperscript{17}. Delta commandos took accidental fire on several occasions.

\textsuperscript{17} Mark Bowden; \textit{Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War}; Penguin Books, 2000; adapted from Philadelphia Online website.
from the younger Rangers. Poor coordination between commanders in the air and a ground convoy had sent vehicles meandering through a maelstrom of fire, resulting in the deaths of five soldiers and three Somalian prisoners.\textsuperscript{18}

The US military’s initial concerns about locating Aideed in the narrow dusty alleyways of Mogadishu had become a reality. At least four risky missions ended in failure because of bad intelligence, according to US commanders in Somalia. From the beginning, the US SOF had argued that without adequate intelligence, a Special Operations force would be useless\textsuperscript{19}. And military intelligence capability had been reduced as most US combat troops were withdrawn as ordered by Clinton three months earlier. The US SOF did not know that thousands of armed militias were waiting for them at Bakara Market.

However, there was a CIA team skilled in intercepting communications and other techniques was dispatched to Somalia. They were able to listen in on satellite telephone and radio communications with Aideed’s associates. But Aideed did not call them and went into deep cover. The CIA high-tech approach was useless in pinpointing Aideed because the warlord communicated by using walkie-talkies too low powered to be detected by the CIA.\textsuperscript{20} He also used an old, low powered transmitter aboard a truck to make

\textsuperscript{18} Interview with Lieutenant-Colonel Sani Ruyan, Royal Intelligence Corps, Malaysian Army.


\textsuperscript{20} Wanted warlord no. 1; \textit{Time}, June 28, 1993; p. 20.
mobile radio broadcasts to his followers. In addition Aideed’s forces kept an eye on helicopter operations at Mogadishu airport, where the Delta Force was based\textsuperscript{21}.

The withdrawal of most of the combat troops from Mogadishu had also left the US troops still there without armoured protection. To deal with the increasing threats, the US military commander had made a request for more heavy armour like M-1 Abrams tanks, Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles (IFV) and some heavy artillery. The request was turned down by the US Defence Secretary, Les Aspens\textsuperscript{22}. Without the required logistic support and heavy firepower, the US forces stationed in Somali were very vulnerable, what more to support a special operation.

Most of the Rangers who fought were only a few years out of high school. These young men were shocked to find themselves bleeding on the dirt streets of an obscure African capital for a cause so unessential that President Clinton called off their mission the day after the fight. This was contributed by the lack of experienced combat troops. At that time, most of the Vietnam War era veterans had left or retired from the armed forces. During the Gulf War, the US military relied heavily on high technological weapons that are able to destroy the enemy at standoff distances. This has contributed to the US SOF units especially the Rangers without any real combat experience especially close quarters battle.

\textsuperscript{21} Frontline: Ambush in Mogadishu: Readings: Learning from Aidid; 1998 PBS Online and WGBH/FRONTLINE.
\textsuperscript{22} Frontline: Ambush in Mogadishu: Readings: Did my son have to die?: PBS Online and WGBH/FRONTLINE; 1998.
It was also suspected that the raid was already known before hand by the Somalis. The failure of the previous five operations to capture General Aidid, had made the next likely attempt guess able. The presence of the SOF was also known. So was the taking off of helicopters taking these SOF troops out of their bases was being observed. So, it was a known fact at that time that the US forces were hunting Aidid. He was said to have planned that meeting at Bakara Market with his aids to lure the US forces to capture him, and then ambush them. All this lapse of operational security was partly contributed by the US forces’ arrogance and over confidence of their superiority in terms of their high technology weapons compared to the ill trained and armed Somali militia. This overconfidence on their part has largely contributed to their downfall.

The lack of political will also contributed to its failure. As noted above, Clinton’s administration was not keen on participating on an active scale in Somalia, hence the pulling out of US troops, had left the US SOF with a skeletal support staff. However, in strictly military terms, Mogadishu was a success. The targets of that day's raid, two obscure clan leaders named Omar Salad and Mohamed Hassan Awale, were apprehended. But the awful price of those arrests came as a shock to a young president. It led to the resignation of Defense Secretary Les Aspin. Aspin was most faulted for turning down the initial proposal to include heavy armored vehicles in the residual force the US was leaving after the Marines pulled out. Later, when Task Force Ranger was deployed, it did not ask for armor, for the excellent reason that they were not an armored group.
In sum, the failure was mainly due to these factors. The US SOF lacked the preparation for a full fledged firefight with the Somalis. They were overconfident of a quick victory, and this has contributed to them being not well prepared for a major battle with the Somalian militia. They did not bring enough medical supplies, ammunition and lacked support. The pullout of US troops from Somalia due to downsizing decisions in Washington has also contributed to the lack of logistic and fire support for the trapped US SOF men in Bakara Market. In the end, they have to request assistance from Malaysian troops based in Mogadishu to help rescue the trapped US SOF men.

News of the presence and the plans of the US SOF in Somalia had also been leaked out. It has lost all elements of surprise and the Somalis, especially General Aideed knew that the US SOF were looking for him. The importance of reliable intelligence is again shown in this special operation. Without precise and reliable information, special operations cannot efficiently carry out their missions. It was noted that the US SOF did not know that the Somalian militia numbering thousands were waiting for them. They also did not know that General Aideed would be definitely there.

Similar trends and patterns have also been demonstrated in other failures such as the US Army Special Forces raid and rescue of prisoners of war in Son Tay during the Vietnam war in 1970. A crack assault group of US SOF staged a daring raid on a North Vietnamese prisoner of war (POW) camp in Son Tay, only 23 miles from Hanoi. However, due to lack of precise intelligence, they did not know that the US POWs were moved out. They assaulted an empty camp but fortunately they suffered only one wounded.

23 "Shadowy fighters": Reuters: The Malay Mail; Thursday, September 27, 2001; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; pp. 18-19.
Another similar failure occurred during the US SOF rescue attempt in Iran in 1980 codenamed Operation Eagle Claw. The Iranians had taken the US Embassy hostage in Teheran in late 1979. A plan to rescue the 53 US hostages had been devised and the go ahead given. The rescue took place but however two of the six helicopters needed by US SOF failed due to mechanical reasons. Due to lack of logistical support, the mission was aborted.

5.5 THE CHALLENGES CONFRONTING US SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

US SOF is not without challenges. Some of the main challenges confronting them today are presented here. The US military establishment still eyes with suspicion on special operations forces. To a civilian the sight of swaggering "special" soldiers may conjure up memories of Hitler's SS, the apotheosis of elite units. Elite troops may seem to contradict democratic ideals; being elite means being better than everyone else. But despite the contradictions inherent in the concept of elite units in the armies of democratic regimes, such units have flourished since World War II. This seems to be the state of civil-military affairs situation here. However, the US public has a strong respect towards the armed forces, especially the special operations forces. This is quite different from the situation and feelings in France (which nearly suffered a coup d'etat by French elite paratroops in 1961).

However, there are more serious problems US SOF are facing today, that is inappropriate usage of special operations forces. Special operations forces are not usually
equipped with heavy weapons such as artillery and armour. When as in Somalia, deployed against vast number of armed militias, they were outgunned and as a result lost 18 men killed. History has shown also when special operations forces are used in sheer exuberance, they are usually caught and mauled by the enemy\textsuperscript{25}. However when used in coordinated roles with adequate support, they can achieve remarkable success as shown in the Grenada operation.

The failure occurred when the commanders and politicians thought that a quick victory could be achieved by relying on special operations forces alone. The root of the problem is the misperception of what special operations forces could do. They are best used as specialized reconnaissance, raiding and counter-terrorist troops, but poor at slogging it out in regular combat as compared to other infantry.

US SOF is just a tool for any policy. It needs reliable intelligence to act effectively. Without intelligence, US SOF is like blind. As has been demonstrated in the case study of Somalia, US SOF was badly mauled due to lack of precise intelligence. The Grenada operation also nearly ended in disaster due to a lack of a certain degree of intelligence.

US SOF also needs more advanced equipment to work effectively namely weapons, communications equipment and night fighting capabilities. However, due to thoughtful foresight in the Department of Defense, much research and funds have been


\textsuperscript{25} "Shadowy fighters"; \textit{Reuters: The Malay Mail}; Thursday, September 27, 2001; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; pp. 18-19.
channeled into USSOCOM to acquire new equipment. As mentioned, new submarine classes have been developed also with special operations in mind, for example like the Virginia class of attack submarines. Various new personal weapons like light machine guns have also been tested and purchased for special operations forces.

The usage of special operations forces as symbol of military excellence also poses a problem to US Special operations forces. There was too many Hollywood movies on US Navy Seals, Green Berets ie. "Rambo", John Wayne's "Green Berets", "G.I. Jane" and others had misled the public on the special operations forces. It had also led to the overconfidence of special operations forces. The US Special Operations Forces had cultivated their romantic image among the American public since the early 1960s. There had put on numerous parachute drops and demonstrations to admiring crowds. The special operations forces had alienated many regular soldiers by these repeated publicity stunts. This misleading romantic symbols of special operations forces distorted serious public and governmental discussion of complex issues, and these heroic antics can backfire as shown in the disaster in Somalia.

US SOF is also constantly faced with the challenge of maintaining its fiscal budget. With its own budget, which has averaged about $3 billion per year since fiscal year 1990, USSOCOM manages a force of almost 47,000 personnel of which 30,000 are active.

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duty servicemembers, 14,000 reserve and National Guard personnel, and 3,000 civilians. Of the 30,000 active duty servicemembers, 14,000 are special operations qualified personnel assigned to deployable units\textsuperscript{28}. The rest serve in functional areas such as maintenance or logistics\textsuperscript{29}. This high cost of special operations forces has caused certain quarters in calling of downsizing US Special Operations Forces. However, the effectiveness of special operations forces had managed to sustain the financial support it needed. In fact it has been noted that this budget is not enough to maintain the US Special Operations Forces in the future as it needs more funds for research and development of new weapons and equipment.

5.6 TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON US SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES MISSIONS

Since the Gulf War in 1991, the US military has constantly engaged in an intense debate on revolution in military affairs (RMA). The Gulf War has represented a harbinger of radical changes, transforming warfare as profoundly as mechanisation and the introduction of nuclear weapons. The interpretation of RMA is the transformation of combat through the appearance of advanced, high accuracy, precision strike weapons, advanced command and control systems, electronic warfare and computer simulation\textsuperscript{30}.

US SOF will continue to play a role in the defence of national interests in the world. It is an integral and important force in its arsenal. However, some of its roles might

\textsuperscript{28} Special Operations Forces: Opportunities to Preclude Overuse and Misuse (Letter Report, 05/15/97, GAO/NSIAD-97-85).
\textsuperscript{29} Special Operations Forces: Opportunities to Preclude Overuse and Misuse; Letter Report, 05/15/97, GAO/NSIAD-97-85; US General Accounting Office.
be modified in view of the rapid advances in technology. The most recent example of war would be the Gulf War in 1991. Here, the US military used high-technology weapons such as laser guided bombs and precision guided missiles\textsuperscript{31}. The traditional role of special forces raiding and sabotaging enemy vital installations may soon end. These high risks jobs had been a mainstay of SOF.

However, as the Gulf War had shown, that the role of US SOF might be limited in modern war. Instead of using US SOF personnel to obtain information behind enemy lines, the US had used various high technology satelites and unmanned aerial vehicles to obtain minute information of enemy positions\textsuperscript{32}. The usage of these new technology will lighten some of the traditional roles of special operation forces such as intelligence gathering and pathfinding. During the Gulf War, the massive use of laser-guided precision bombs had also reduced the need of US SOF personnel to go behind enemy lines and place demolition charges. The bombs had demonstrated that even the most micro target can be destroyed\textsuperscript{33}. During the recent Kososvo crisis, where the Nato launched Operation Allied Force in the Balkans in 1999, the Nato forces used satelite guided bombs or known more as the JDAM (Joint Direct Attack Munition)\textsuperscript{34}.

U.S. conventional military dominance encourages future adversaries and competitors ranging from established nations to non-state groups, such as terrorists, insurgents and new and unpredictable extremists, to avoid direct military confrontation with


\textsuperscript{32} Interview with Major C. Douglas Dawson; United States Air Force, Deputy Chief, Security Assistance Office, Embassy of USA, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

\textsuperscript{33} Huba Wass De Czege and Antulio J. Echevaria; \textit{Precision Decisions}; Armed Forces Journal International; October 2000; pp.54-56.
the United States. Instead, they will use asymmetric means such as weapon of mass
destruction (WMD), information warfare, terrorism, taking the fight to urban areas, or the
application of technological or operational surprise to offset their conventional advantages
and achieve their goals, even posing a direct threat to the U.S. homeland. Moreover, an
adversary already engaged in conventional warfare with the U.S. could still employ these
means to gain temporary or localized battlespace parity or asymmetrical advantage.

The asymmetric challenge with the gravest potential facing the U.S. today is
the threat posed by the global proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means
of delivery. In recognition of the significant dangers associated with weapons of mass
destruction, the Department of Defense assigned US SOF some specific responsibilities in
May 1995 in support of the broader interagency task of preventing the proliferation of
weapons of mass destruction. Today, counter-proliferation has been given top operational
priority at US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). Counter-proliferation includes
actions taken to locate, identify, seize, destroy, render safe or transport weapons of mass
destruction (WMD).

Another serious asymmetric reality is information-based conflict. The
power of information is growing exponentially and the increasing dependence of the U.S.
and its adversaries on information presents many vulnerabilities and opportunities. In the
past, information operations were the punctuation on the grammar of conflict, enhancing the

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"Interview with Major C. Douglas Dawson; United States Air Force, Deputy Chief, Security Assistance Office, Embassy of USA, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
"Grappling with demons: Armed Forces Journal International; November 200; pp.36-40.
impact of the military, diplomatic and economic effort. The Information Age has also opened up a wide range of new opportunities, seemingly endless possibilities and significant vulnerabilities for special operations forces. Accordingly, US SOF are examining new ways to enhance their capabilities to ensure uninterrupted information exchange, reduce an adversary's ability to use information and influence situations to support mission accomplishment. These capabilities range from passive defense to psychological operations to precision strike operations against key information nodes.

Equally important is the development and continued adaptation of definitive U.S. policy for addressing these and other emerging threats. These efforts will be critical to ensuring that US SOF have the resources and increasingly sophisticated capabilities required to dominate any form of conflict. US Special Operations Forces have also been involved in various peacekeeping operations. Among them are in Somali (1993), Bosnia and in Haiti (1994).

The United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) today faces an operational environment characterized by accelerating geopolitical change, rapid technological advancement, evolving threats, constrained resources and potential new roles. These factors require innovative thinking and new ways to shape change if the special forces are to provide the widest array of options in protecting America's interests.

37 Robert M. Nutwell and Danny Price; A common footing; Armed Forces Journal International; November 2000; pp. 32-35.
In order to be relevant in the future, US SOF must continue their transformation, while maintaining the readiness required to shape and respond to the world today. US special operations forces need to anticipate trends and future scenarios, conditioning themselves to not be surprised by surprise and the rapidity of change and the dynamics that follow. As new threats arise, US special operations forces must decide which of their current capabilities to retain or modify, which new ones to develop, and which old ones to discard. US SOF must focus on emerging threats that either exceed the capabilities of conventional forces or can be dealt with better by small, highly specialized units. They must carefully assess those threats and, as appropriate, provide an effective solution through strategic planning, resourcing, acquisition and operational support initiatives. As important, US SOF must identify those missions no longer relevant for US SOF and recommend shifting these missions to their conventional forces in order to better focus resources on critical special operations activities.

The role of US SOF is still vital as the US military research and development programmes continue to build weapons and technology peculiar to US special operations. One such fine example is the new Virginia class submarine which to be built for the US Navy to replace the current fleet of submarines. These Virginia submarines, apart from everything else, were also built to support special operations. These is an example of the importance of SOF. The US Navy had also developed a new infra-red and waterproof

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41 R.Admiral Malcolm Fayses; Weighing the options; Armed Forces Journal International; April 2001; pp. 52-55.
wetsuits for their SEAL teams. The US Army is also constantly testing new equipment for their SOF\textsuperscript{42}.

In order to promote a more professional SOF, the US Armed Forces have also approved the setting up of a Joint Special Operations University recently at Hulbert Air Force Base. The USSOCOM commander in chief has established Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) as a focal point for meeting the unique educational needs of special operations forces and enhancing the understanding of the utility of special operations to national security decision makers outside of SOF\textsuperscript{43}. JSOU's primary purpose, is to teach the integrated and synergistic application of these service SOF functions in accordance with joint special operations doctrine and to ensure the future leaders of SOF understand the joint employment of this potent force to satisfy operational and strategic objectives\textsuperscript{44}. JSOU is an example of the growing importance of US SOF. It will ensure that US SOF remain relevant now and into the future.

Special operations forces personnel are at the heart of all special operations; platforms and equipment merely help them accomplish the mission. US special operations forces cannot know with certainty who their foes will be or precisely what demands will be placed on them in the future. However, in a time of both uncertainty and opportunity, USSOCOM will continue to provide the United States with the means to protect their interests.

\textsuperscript{42} John G. Ross; "Smart" Seal suit. Armed Forces Journal International; February 2001; pp. 22-23.
\textsuperscript{43} Brigadier-General Kenneth P. Bergquist, USA; Spec Ops War College; Armed Forces Journal International, May 2001; pp 54-56.
\textsuperscript{44} Brigadier-General Kenneth P. Bergquist, USA; Spec Ops War College; Armed Forces Journal International, May 2001; pp 54-56.
5.7 TRENDS IN SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Special operations have seen an increasing trend not just in the nature of missions but also in the number of forces. For example in US, in 1991, active US SOF numbered a total of 12,860 people\textsuperscript{45}. However, in 2001, total number of active US SOF is reported to be at 30,000 people. This is a two fold increase over a span of one decade, demonstrating the growing importance of US SOF. Almost all the nations and states in the world has some sort of military special operations forces in its armed forces as recorded in The International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Military Balance (1993-1994). Almost all the countires’ armed forces listed there had some sort of special operations forces in their order of battle\textsuperscript{46}. These forces follows the trend of developed nations’ armed forces. As the US armed forces is one of the most advanced, experienced and large forces in the world, it is not surprising that a lot of developing nations such as Malaysia looks towards US as an example for its armed forces, especially in special operations.

As nearly all other nations had special operations forces, it is also important for us to look at some of their stunning successes to exemplify the need of special operations forces. Special operations forces is not only important in the US military, but to all armed forces that maintain it.

\textsuperscript{45} The International Institute For Strategic Studies; The Military Balance 1990-1991; Brassey’s, London; 1990; pp.24-25.
\textsuperscript{46} The International Institute For Strategic Studies; The Military Balance 1993-1994; Brasseys, London; 1993.
A lot of other states also maintain special forces. Malaysia, for example, has a Army Special Forces Group consisting of three regiments. The 11 Commando Regiment, 21 Commando Regiment and 22 Commando Regiment. It was originally formed in 1965 by the late Tunku Abdul Rahman to combat the communist terrorist threat in Malaysia. It has since then managed various successes in their fight against the communists. The Royal Malaysian Navy also has an elite commando unit trained in SEAL operations known as PASKAL (Pasukan Khas Laut). This unit formed in 1980 is well trained and equipped in maritime special operations including anti-terrorist and anti-piracy. In fact recently in March, 2001, the PASKAL had conducted a demonstration of hostage rescue and anti-piracy (Exercise Naga Emas) in the Straits of Malacca and had shown their efficiencies in this kind of risky military special operations. Similarly, Indonesia also has its own special forces unit known as Kopassus (Komando Pasukan Khusus). This unit has a major successful operation against the Woyla aircraft hijacking of a domestic airliner to Bangkok in 1981 in which all but one of the hijackers were killed along with a Kopasuss officer. In the United Kingdom, there exists specialized units dedicated to covert observation, intelligence-gathering, counter-terrorism and raiding. These units are known as the Special Air Service (SAS) and the Special Boat Service (SBS). SAS, the more famous entity has been involved in various missions, among the more famous ones, was the rescue of hostages in the Iranian embassy in London in 1980.
Special operations forces had seen mixed achievements throughout the history since the modern inception in Second World War. Special operations has always captured the popular imagination by the courage, daring and technical skills of the operations they undertake. As we have seen, special operations forces are well trained to perform covert observation, intelligence gathering, guerilla warfare, counter-guerilla warfare and counter-terrorist. With the current trend of armed forces’ restructuring in many armed forces in the world to rapid deployable forces, special operations forces again is an integral part of these Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) programmes.

They being highly mobile and deployable, makes them the nucleus of any rapid deployment force. For example in Malaysia, the first parachute battalion for Malaysia’s Rapid Deployment Forces, were originally trained by and consists of some members of its Army Special Forces\(^*\).

These strategic roles of special operations forces is still very much needed in today’s modern warfare. Their presence in modern armed forces adds an essential element of flexibility to military planning. Special operations forces must also have the intellectual agility to conceptualize creative, useful solutions to ambiguous problems and provide a coherent set of choices to the force commander, more often like Sun Tzu, less like Clausewitz.

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\(^*\) Interview with Colonel Shahrudin Abdullah at MINDEF on 20th of May 2001. He is attached to the Royal Engineers Regiment and has seen extensive service with the Malaysian Army throughout his 30 years career.
5.8 CONCLUSION

The small, self-contained special operations forces units can work swiftly and quietly without the noticeable presence of conventional military troops. Even under the most austere conditions, they are able to operate without the infrastructure often needed by a larger force. Because of this, they can penetrate enemy territory on missions such as personnel recovery; surgical strikes prior to conventional force operations; intelligence gathering; and pathfinding and target designation for air strikes. US SOF also employ an extraordinary inventory of sophisticated weapons and technology. Often US SOF units act as a proving ground for new equipment before it is transferred to conventional forces.

Since being created by the Cohen-Nunn Amendment to the DoD Authorization Act of 1987, the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) has provided highly trained, rapidly deployable and regionally focused SOF in support of global requirements from the National Command Authorities, the geographic commanders in chief, and American ambassadors and their country teams. US SOF are considered highly capable, elite forces that are trained and maintained to address critical US national security objectives. US SOF’s versatility, speed of deployment, and capabilities make US SOF ideally suited for today’s security environment, where significant dangers are created by regional conflicts, terrorism and other transnational threats.

This does not mean that US SOF are without challenges and problems. The problems and challenges varies according to the dimension of the crisis. The revolution in military affairs will also be of influence in enhancing the role of US SOF.