

## **Special Operations: A Way Ahead** **By Walter S. Zapotoczny Jr.**

Many lessons can be learned from our current Special Operations Force (SOF) forefathers. William H. McRaven's book, *Spec Ops. Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*, examines eight historical cases and provides an analysis of each. He identifies six principles of special operations that he uses for his analysis: simplicity, security, repetition, surprise, speed, and purpose. While the student of special operations can learn from an examination of each, repetition is a lesson that has stood the test of time. McRaven writes, "In the preparation phase, repetition, like routine, is indispensable in eliminating the barriers to success. Certain combat units, such as counterterrorist teams, strategic bombers, and SEAL delivery vehicle teams, perform standard mission profiles as a matter of routine. This routine hones those tactical skills to a degree that allows quick reaction to a threat."

McRaven illustrates this point by describing the extent to which the air force task group involved in the San Tey raid practiced formation flying with C-130 and UH-1 aircraft. The benefit of repetition and full-dress rehearsals of the mission is illustrated by the British preparation to sink the German battleship *Tirpitz*. The mission called for small dry submersibles to be towed for eight days across the Atlantic by conventional submarine. McRaven writes how towing was particularly taxing on the crews and was only conducted for short durations during rehearsals. During the actual mission, the tow line broke. If the British had towed the boats for the entire time, they would have discovered that the lines would break. McRaven makes the point that repetition hones individual and unit skills, while full-dress rehearsals unmask weaknesses in the plan. Both are essential to success on the battlefield. In the case studies examined by McRaven, those operations were repetition and full-dress rehearsals were conducted fared better than whose operations that took did not.

After the Vietnam War experience special operations forces transformed itself and became, a viable force that is currently employed properly by our nation's military and civilian decision makers. In the early 1990s, Special Forces operatives tapped into the clan network in Somalia to serve as an early-warning system for the international humanitarian effort. The use of Special Forces in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars was a result of a rebuilding process that began after the Vietnam War. The Special Forces in Afghanistan, with less than 100 soldiers, were successful in defeating the Taliban regime in less than a month. In Iraq, the 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group led a division's worth of Kurdish surrogate forces and secured northern Iraq against thirteen divisions, and also destroyed key Ansar al-Islam terrorist bases. In the south, 5<sup>th</sup> Group raised other allies inside Iraq who helped capture the cities, and in the west it secured the western desert with the aid of its allies in the sky. Later the Special Forcer provided valuable intelligence that led to the arrest of nearly half of those wanted from the former Iraqi regime. The use of U.S. special operations forces as they are currently employed by our nation's military and civilian decision makers appears to be a proper use of the force in light of the current world dynamics.

In her book *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces*, Linda Robinson writes that the military's emphasis has changed from counterinsurgency in the 1960s, to major European combat operations in the 1970s and 1980s, to multiple theater-level wars in the 1990s, to counterterrorism today. It is logical that the military and the Special Forces community should change its orientation and training to meet the current demands. Tactics and techniques will have to adapt to the terrorist and the Special Forces community will have to adapt to fight the new threats. A robust prevention policy can reduce the chance that preemption will be required. Preemption is often seen as cavalier by the rest of the world. Special Forces in future operations could work covertly with the CIA, providing

discrete, unilateral actions to remove a specific threat or to capture or kill a leadership figure.

General Bryan D. Brown, Commander U.S. Special Operations Command, in his article for Joint Force Quarterly titled *U.S. Special Operations Command: Meeting the Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, writes about the steps being taken to position the special operations community for the future. He writes, "In Program Objective Memorandum (POM) 2006, USSOCOM radically refocused, choosing to equip operators with the best and latest technology at the expense of important aviation modernization. Individual operator equipment, including the latest body armor integrated with modular load carrying systems, miniature day/night weapon sights, extreme climate clothing, and the latest generation night vision devices were identified and fully funded within our budget. With the help of Congress, acquisition was accelerated through supplemental funding, delivering this and other critical equipment rapidly to the battlefield. Additional USSOCOM force structure requirements, focusing on growth in appropriate skills to the right size without losing quality, were also identified and validated. While the command is planned to grow by nearly 2,300 personnel, this approved and funded growth is less than required. Limited by its relatively small budget (1.7 percent of the DOD total), the command continues to reassess and reprioritize force structure requirements.

The ongoing Quadrennial Defense Review may direct new resources to USSOCOM for additional appropriate growth. As POM 2008 is constructed, the command is emphasizing training in critical skills, education, and increased regional focus to ensure not only that its warriors have the technical capabilities, intellectual skills, regional expertise, and language and cultural proficiency to win today's conflicts, but also that they remain prepared to face the uncertainties of tomorrow. To remain a synergistic and decisive force, SOF warriors will need to remain globally engaged and postured to respond on short notice against diverse targets. Modernization of aviation assets, the arrival of the Special Operations variant of the tilt-rotor Osprey aircraft (CV-22), and maritime mobility assets such as the Advanced SEAL Delivery System will ensure SOF are ready to respond. Among its future goals, the command is focusing on objectives that will guide the development of a global SOF network.

The goal is to position and manage SOF, in conjunction with other DOD, interagency, and partner assets, in simultaneous operations around the world against terrorist organizations along with their allies and sponsors. This will necessitate the synchronization of global information to gain persistent visibility and coordination while integrating the command and control of all SOF. Identification of operators, leadership, and infrastructure across the spectrum of terrorist networks requires an integrated and adaptive blue force network. Special Operators will remain essential in this role while they continue to develop indigenous capabilities to fight terrorists and rogue regimes. By positioning and networking SOF in key locations to obtain and disseminate information, supported by specialized equipment and advanced technologies, USSOCOM continues to develop ever greater situational awareness throughout vital regions to enhance its effectiveness in combating terrorist networks and remain a force multiplier.

Long-term success depends on the continued ability to employ a sustainable mix of capabilities rapidly. In addition to finding and eliminating terrorists, civil affairs and information operations forces will conduct stabilization, construction, and reconstruction operations early on to help partner nations reduce or eliminate the underlying conditions that feed terrorism. Civil affairs personnel are involved in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, working with conventional forces to win hearts and minds through construction projects, medical assistance, education, and placing a friendly face on the U.S. presence."

In order to be successful in the ongoing Global War on Terror U.S. special operations forces focus on combating terrorists using asymmetric tactics. A comprehensive understanding of today's threats must be gained. Language skills will need to be improved and the inclusion of women and foreign nationals alongside the classic special operations soldier will enable the force to reach better parts of the target population. An increase in the force size with a few small technically specialized units to enhance Special Forces effectiveness would be a plus. Increased investment in intelligence training and specialized equipment, such as the M-4 rifle, lighter-weight body armor, robots and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), will further enhance the Special Forces soldiers' ability to combat the enemies of the future.

## **Bibliography**

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