

IMPROVING CULTURAL EDUCATION OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

BY

COLONEL WADE OWENS
United States Army

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U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

IMPROVING CULTURAL EDUCATION OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

by

Colonel Wade Owens
United States Army

Colonel Paul Cale
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

ABSTRACT

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The Department of Defense has recognized the challenges posed by future conflicts and directed the services to increase their capabilities to meet these challenges. The United States Army's 2008 Army Training and Leader Development Strategy, states that "over the next decade or longer there will be a period of persistent conflict, during which the Army will operate with allied, coalition, and other government and non-government partners across the full spectrum of operations against networked, adaptive, asymmetric adversaries, in order to gain the support of indigenous populations and to positively influence them." SOF requirements to effectively work with partner nation security forces, indigenous peoples and other organizations to accomplish assigned missions will be greater than ever before. Current SOF language and cultural education programs need to be improved to meet the challenges of the 21st century. An improved SOF language training and education program should consist of improved initial language and culture training, advanced regional studies and in-country immersion.

IMPROVING CULTURAL EDUCATION OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

We live in a period of persistent conflict. A multitude of sources within the United States Government (USG), Department of Defense (DoD), think tanks and academia predict a future operational environment characterized by increasing conflict. This conflict will take many forms, but of note is the increase of violence and instability created by state and non-state actors using indirect and asymmetric means to achieve their objectives. The DoD has defined this type of conflict as Irregular Warfare (IW) and outlined the US military's execution of IW in the IW Joint Operating Concept (JOC). This concept has significant implications for Joint Special Operations Forces (SOF). One of the key premises of the IW JOC is that "People, not platforms and advanced technology, will be the key to IW success. The joint force will need patient, persistent, and culturally savvy people to build the local relationships and partnerships essential to conducting IW."¹ In addition, the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) states that Special Operations Forces need to adapt to address these future challenges:

SOF will increase their capacity to perform more demanding and specialized tasks, especially long-duration, indirect and clandestine operations in politically sensitive environments and denied areas... For unconventional warfare and training foreign forces, future SOF will have the capacity to operate in dozens of countries simultaneously. SOF will have increased ability to train and work with partners, employ surrogates, operate clandestinely and sustain a larger posture with lower visibility. SOF will sustain current language and cultural skills while increasing regional proficiency specific to key geographic operational areas: the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin America. Longer duration operations will emphasize building personal relationships with foreign military and security forces and other indigenous assets to achieve common objectives.²

These projections about the future operating environment and likely nature of future conflict promise to place greater demands on SOF than ever before. To meet the

challenges outlined in the 2006 QDR, SOF will need to focus more attention on developing the capabilities that enable indirect vice direct approaches to preventing or resolving conflict. Increasing SOF capability to “train and work with partners and employ surrogates” and build “personal relationships with foreign military and security forces” will require commitment of significant time and resources to achieve. More specifically, this effort will require increased command emphasis and improvement and expansion of current language and cultural education programs. Language and culture training for most SOF personnel currently occurs during initial qualification training. This initial training is largely focused on acquisition of basic foreign language skills with much less emphasis on cultural training. Beyond this initial training there is currently little opportunity for more advanced institutional training. While SOF units have language training resources available, most are focused on maintaining basic skills rather than improving language and cultural capabilities. Experience gained during operational deployments and self-study provides the only means for most SOF operators to increase their language and cultural expertise.

The famed T.E. Lawrence is often cited as an example of the quintessential unconventional warrior. In fact, Admiral Eric Olson, Commander, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) labeled his current initiatives focused on improving language and cultural capabilities within USSOCOM as “Project Lawrence.” T.E. Lawrence gained his advanced level of cross cultural competence through years of academic study and travel and work in the Middle East prior to the outbreak of World War I. His language and cultural education underscores the fact that achievement of advanced cross cultural competence takes years of dedicated study and lengthy

immersion in the target region. While achieving this level of expertise for all SOF operators is not feasible, significant improvements in language and cultural education for SOF operators can be accomplished. A model for achievement of this high level of cross cultural competence for SOF operators consists of three components. The first component is improved SOF initial acquisition language and culture training incorporating additional training and education on general and regionally specific culture. The second component is development and implementation of an advanced level language and culture training course for selected SOF officers and NCOs. The third component is to significantly increase language and cultural immersion opportunities for SOF operators.

Current Language and Culture Training Programs

The success of SOF personnel working by, with and through indigenous forces in recent operations is well documented. Current language and culture training programs provide operators with basic skills needed to accomplish their mission. However, progression beyond these basic skills to increased cultural expertise is largely an individual effort and is testament to our operators more than to our training and education programs. Current training programs conducted by the United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS) consist of 18 to 24 weeks of classroom based language training administered by Department of the Army civilian and contract instructors. The USAJFKSWCS trains Special Forces, Psychological Operations and Civil Affairs Soldiers in one of seventeen core languages as part of their initial qualification training programs. The current 18-week curriculum includes approximately 450 contact hours of language training compared to only 40

contact hours of cultural training. Furthermore, most of the cultural training is conducted using self-paced computer based instruction instead of traditional classroom instruction.

In addition, the limited cultural training included in the current curriculum focuses largely on regionally specific training. Clearly, this regional focus is important but it does not prepare SOF operators for deployments outside their target area. While most SOF are regionally focused, there are widely diverse languages and cultures within these target areas. In these cases traditional knowledge-based methods of regionally specific cultural training are limited and will be of little use in other regions of the world.

Teaching SOF operators facts about foreign cultures doesn't necessarily translate to adapting and effectively interacting with indigenous populations. In short, training knowledge-based, regionally specific culture skills, while important, should not form the foundation of cultural education. Education on general principles of cultural and cross cultural education would serve as a better foundation for cultural training. This type of education could be applied to a variety of environments (joint, interagency and multinational) and would ideally be augmented by regionally specific language and culture training in SOF training and education programs. Given the volatility and uncertainty of today's operational environment and our limited force structure, SOF operators could find themselves in many different regions of the world; dealing with radically different cultures than they were initially trained for. The out of area deployments by many SOF units to Iraq and Afghanistan are a case in point. Training SOF operators basic cross-cultural communication skills will enable successful mission accomplishment in a wide range of environments. Given the above mentioned

conditions, training and educating officers and NCOs on cultural skills that are transferable to multiple environments makes good sense.

The Foreign Area Officer Language and Cultural Education Model

A review of best practices of language and culture training conducted by other organizations provides insight for potential improvements to SOF training and education programs. In particular, the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) training and education program, with modifications, offers a useful model for the development of SOF language and cultural training and education. A review of the FAO job description as outlined in Department of the Army (DA) Pamphlet 600-3 bears a striking resemblance to the desired capabilities of many SOF operators. In DA Pamphlet 600-3, FAOs are described as “the Army’s Soldier-statesmen” requiring the following capabilities:

- (1) Expert military knowledge of a designated region combined with a cultural and political understanding, enabling leaders to increase success and reduce risk across the full spectrum of operations from stability operations to major combat.
- (2) The capability to foster understanding and interface with foreign militaries and governments at all levels. Enhanced capability to operate decisively, and often independently, in uncertain environments.
- (3) A cadre able to function across the Army, within combatant commands, with foreign armies and armed forces, with foreign governments, with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and with non-state representatives of indigenous populations.
- (4) Officers capable of effectively representing the Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary of the Army, Chief of Staff of the Army, combatant commanders, Army Service Component Commands, and the United States in foreign settings.³

While these capabilities are not required by all SOF operators, particularly in junior level positions, they are very similar to the capabilities needed by many senior SOF officers, warrant officers and NCOs. To develop these capabilities, FAOs undergo

a five-phased education and training period that includes the FAO Orientation Course, basic language training, in-country training (ICT), advanced civil schooling (ACS), and Intermediate Level Education (ILE).⁴ The core language and culture portions of this training program are basic language training, in-country training and advanced civil schooling. A review of these components provides a language and culture training and education format potentially suitable for SOF personnel.

Language training for FAOs is conducted at the Defense Language Institute (DLI) and ranges from 6 to 18 months based on the difficulty of the language. Minimum language proficiency required for FAOs upon completion of training is a score of 2/2/1+ on the listening, reading and speaking portions of the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT).⁵ While desirable, it is not practical to dedicate the time and resources required to train all SOF personnel to this level of proficiency during initial qualification training. However, SOF operators must be able to speak and understand their target language at a basic level and to successfully complete assigned missions. In addition, unlike FAOs, SOF personnel must also be capable of successfully interacting with indigenous peoples in areas where they do not speak the native language. Continued requirement for out of area deployments and the extensive language and cultural diversity within assigned regions almost guarantees that SOF personnel will be required to conduct operations with partner nation military or indigenous people in areas where they have limited language proficiency and limited knowledge of the local culture.

Upon completion of language training FAOs next conduct in-country training. ICT is a very important aspect of the FAO qualification program and is described in DA Pamphlet 600-3 as follows:

ICT is designed to immerse the officer in the local language and culture through attendance at a host nation professional military education (PME) course and living on the economy where possible. It is designed to also provide advanced language studies and develop in-depth knowledge of the region through a program of travel, research, and study. FAOs are expected to conduct extensive familiarization travel throughout the region and attain first-hand knowledge of national and regional cultures, geography, political-military environments, economies, and societal differences. Relationships developed during ICT at a foreign military school or via other contact with host nation military professionals are frequently maintained for years and enhance capability and effectiveness in future assignments. The duration of ICT varies, but is generally no longer than one year. During ICT, a FAO must continue to improve language capability with the goal of attaining general professional level (level 3) proficiency.⁶

In-country training would greatly benefit selected SOF personnel. This training could serve to greatly improve the language and cultural proficiency of SOF operators and also provide an excellent vehicle for “building personal relationships with foreign military and security forces” directed in the 2006 QDR. Attendance to a partner nation PME or special operations training course with follow-on assignment as an instructor or as an exchange officer or NCO to a partner nation military unit has great potential.

Following ICT, most FAOs also attend graduate schooling via the Army’s ACS program and earn a master’s degree in a FAO-related discipline with a strong regional focus. These disciplines include: international relations/affairs, area studies, international economics, international security studies, geography, geopolitics, government, regional history, Master of Military Arts and Science (MMAS) (with a FAO related concentration), national security studies, political science, social science, and strategic intelligence.⁷ Advanced language and cultural education similar to ACS could also greatly benefit SOF operators. While sending all SOF personnel to ACS is not practical, increasing these opportunities for selected personnel based on mission requirements is. In addition, development of USSOCOM institutional training and

education programs designed to increase the language and cultural proficiency would potentially benefit a much greater number of SOF personnel.

In total, FAO qualification training normally takes 3 ½ to 4 years and must be completed prior to an initial assignment in a FAO position.⁸ This construct makes sense for FAOs, as they will normally work on an individual basis with high level partner nation military personnel during their initial assignment. Most SOF operators (excluding some officers) do not operate individually or as unit leaders during their first assignment. Most SOF operators initially will serve under the supervision of more experienced senior officers and NCOs. As such, acquisition of an advanced level language and cultural expertise for SOF personnel does not necessarily need to occur during initial qualification training but can be gained incrementally as required during an operator's career.

Recommended SOF Language and Cultural Education Program

The FAO training model outlined above provides an excellent starting point for development of an improved SOF language and culture training and education program. The relevant components of FAO qualification, namely basic language and culture training, ICT and ACS, with appropriate modifications, form the three levels of this program. This model, adapted for SOF personnel would begin with basic language and culture training. This first level of training would be conducted during initial qualification training similar to current practices. The desired level of operator proficiency at the conclusion of this training would be 1/1 on the speaking and listening comprehension portions of the DLPT and an understanding of general cultural concepts and detailed cultural knowledge of their target region. Cultural knowledge is defined as exposure to

recent history of the target culture and basic cultural issues such as religion, significant groups, actors, leaders and customs.⁹ The next level of SOF language and cultural education would be advanced level language and cultural education. Achievement of this advanced education could be accomplished through increased ACS opportunities and development of USSOCOM institutional training programs for advanced language and cultural studies. Both of these options should include continued language training as well as graduate level cultural studies. The desired level of operator proficiency at the conclusion of this training would be 2/2 on the speaking and listening comprehension portions of the DLPT, an ability to employ critical thinking and negotiation skills and a good cultural understanding of their target region. Cultural understanding is defined as a deep awareness of the target culture that allows general insight into thought processes, motivating factors, and other issues that directly support the military decision making process.¹⁰ The final level of SOF language and cultural training and education would be in-country immersion. This would involve attendance at a partner nation military school (SOF or PME) with follow-on assignment to a selected partner nation military training institution or unit. The desired level of proficiency at the conclusion of in- country immersion would be 3/3/3 on the speaking, listening and reading comprehension portions of the DLPT, and in-depth cultural competence in the target region. Cultural competence is defined as the fusion of cultural understanding with cultural intelligence that allows focused insight into military planning and decision-making for current and future operations. Cultural competence implies insight into the intentions of specific actors and groups.¹¹ Achievement of this high level of cultural

competence would meet the 2006 QDRs stated intent for SOF capabilities and create modern day T.E. Lawrence's within the SOF community.

USSOCOM training institutions currently execute language training programs with good results. However, existing programs need to be modified to improve the cultural proficiency. A better model for future initial language qualification and cultural training and education would include instruction in core skills that would improve the ability of SOF operators to understand and adapt to different cultures followed by regionally specific culture and language training. The objectives of this initial qualification course should be two-fold. First, the course should produce a SOF operator capable of effectively operating in a variety of environments and cultures, working through an interpreter if required. Secondly, the course should produce a SOF operator well versed in regional culture and capable of speaking and understanding his target language at the 1/1 DLPT level. To accomplish this end-state instruction should begin with core skills that apply in nearly all cross-cultural situations. Regionally specific skills should then be trained, but built on this solid foundation.

A model for this type of cultural and language training was proposed by Dr. Allison Abbe of the U.S. Army Research Institute.¹² This model is composed of three major elements. These elements are cross-cultural adaptability, language training and regional culture. As discussed above, current initial qualification cultural training focuses almost exclusively on regionally specific culture and language and training, while the more general cross-cultural competence skills are largely ignored. These overlooked general cultural skills have been shown to be more important to success in cross-cultural situations than either language or regionally specific culture training.¹³

Therefore, cross-cultural adaptability should be the foundation of cultural training and education of SOF operators. Dr. Abbe further defined the components of cross-cultural adaptability as knowledge and cognition, motivation and skills.¹⁴

The primary element of knowledge and cognition education for SOF personnel should be cultural self-awareness. Cultural self-awareness is a critical first step in developing cross-cultural competence. According to Dr. Abbe, “understanding that one’s own beliefs, values, and behavior are embedded in a cultural context is necessary to understanding the cultural basis for others’ beliefs, values and behavior.”¹⁵ SOF operators, though generally older and more experienced than conventional troops, have a world view shaped by their culture, education and life experience. One’s own limited world view can often lead to mirror imaging as described by Richard Payne in his book, *The Clash with Distant Cultures*:

A common assumption, and one that is often erroneous and fraught with danger, is that those whose behavior we are attempting to influence are as rational as we are, and that our actions are rational. But such a conclusion rests on the dubious belief that the other side shares our values, has the same set of objectives, and reasons the way we do. What might appear to be reasonable and appropriate to the United States might be totally unacceptable to other societies and their governments.¹⁶

Improved self-awareness will help SOF operators understand how people from other cultures may perceive Americans. This knowledge can lead to better mutual understanding and actions and behaviors that refute the sometimes negative stereotypes of Americans and improve effectiveness in dealing with other cultures.

The next dimension of cross-cultural competence is motivation. Motivational aspects of cross-cultural competence include attitudes, initiative and empathy. Empathy and a willingness to understand and work with indigenous populations may not come naturally for typically aggressive, type-A, combat leaders who have been trained to

close with and destroy the enemy. However, SOF personnel must understand the potentially strategic impact their actions can have when dealing with local populations and that gaining the support of these populations is critical to mission accomplishment. Educating officers, warrant officers and NCOs on this linkage should motivate them to adopt a more positive attitude towards other cultures. SOF operators must learn that showing patience, understanding and a positive attitude when dealing with local populations and coalition partners will be invaluable to achieving assigned missions in multinational environments.

The final dimension of cross-cultural competence is interpersonal skills. Not surprisingly, good interpersonal skills have proven to be among the best predictors of successful performance and adjustment in cross-cultural settings.¹⁷ Good interpersonal skills can overcome a lack of language proficiency and specific cultural expertise in most situations. SOF personnel must understand the value of displaying openness, courtesy, respect and humility when interacting with people from other cultures. Excellent foreign language capability and detailed knowledge of local culture and customs is nearly useless if SOF operators demonstrate rude, obnoxious or arrogant behavior when dealing with indigenous people. At best, this type of behavior alienates the local populace. At worst, it creates new enemies or enemy supporters.

Building on the base of cross-cultural competence, SOF personnel should then receive regional specific language and culture training as part of their initial qualification. It is beyond the realm of the possible to educate SOF operators in all the languages they are likely to encounter in 21st century operations. However, the current practice of focusing on languages with enduring regional applicability will provide a solid capability

that will apply in priority regions. Regional specific language and culture training should also increase the number of contact hours dedicated to culture. As previously noted, in current language and culture training curriculums, language instruction accounts for the bulk of the course. Regional specific cultural information is interjected into the current curriculum without much thought about content or context. Further, the content is elementary in nature and geared more towards a tourist than a SOF operator. The cultural component of this regional specific training could be greatly improved by focusing on items that are more relevant to SOF personnel. For example, course content for students studying Arabic or Persian Farsi should include a general overview of Middle East history. However, in addition to this general overview, the course should also include more instruction on historical U.S. relations with Iran, U.S. support to Israel and Muslim perceptions of the long standing Israeli - Palestinian conflict. Focused instruction on topics like this would give students a greater appreciation and understanding of the attitudes and perceptions that Arabs and Iranians have about Americans and United States foreign policy.

Finally, initial SOF language and cultural training should include training on selection and use of interpreters. As previously described, SOF personnel will almost certainly be required to operate in areas where their target language is not spoken. This will require SOF operators to use interpreters. Often these interpreters are contracted local nationals with questionable allegiance. Understanding the potential vulnerabilities and challenges of working through interpreters will enhance the ability of SOF operators to successfully function in these situations.

Following initial qualification training there is currently little opportunity, beyond self-study and operational deployments, for SOF personnel to improve language and cultural expertise. To achieve the improved capability called for in the 2006 QDR, USSOCOM should expand opportunities for language and culture focused ACS and establish an Advanced Regional Studies Course (ARSC) at one or more of its training institutions. The end-state for this level of education should be a SOF operator who has an in-depth understanding of regional studies and is capable of speaking and understanding his target language at the 2/2 level as measured by the DLPT. The major subject areas of the ARSC should be critical thinking, negotiation and mediation, regional studies and language. In addition, graduates of the ARSC should have the demonstrated capability of applying their cultural expertise to a relevant operational problem.

The foundation for the ARSC should be instruction on improving critical thinking skills. Critical thinking is defined as the “use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desired outcome. It is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned and goal directed.”¹⁸ Improved critical thinking skills would enhance the ability of SOF leaders to effectively adapt to unfamiliar situations, including new cultural settings. Effective critical thinking requires SOF operators to consciously recognize their own point of view on problems as well as those of others. This method of thinking also emphasizes the importance of understanding and questioning assumptions or beliefs we hold to be true. Assumptions or ideas taken for granted by Americans often do not hold true in foreign cultures. Failing to recognize that our

assumptions may not be universally accepted or shared can lead to mirror imaging and misunderstanding.

The next major block of the ARSC should be instruction on the conduct of negotiation and mediation. Recent operations have reinforced the requirement for SOF operators to be skilled in interacting with, influencing and resolving conflicts with and among people from other cultures. This requirement will likely be increasingly important in future SOF operations. The fact that SOF personnel are currently conducting negotiation and mediation doesn't mean they are necessarily employing the most effective methods. Given the fact that the success in most SOF missions involves working though, by or with indigenous people, the value of training SOF operators on effective negotiation and mediation techniques is obvious.

Regionally focused studies would build on the foundation of critical thinking and negotiation and mediation. Advanced level regional studies education is not a new idea within USSOCOM. In fact, the USAJFKSWCS developed and executed a 13 week Regional Analysis Course (RAC) for Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations officers from 2003 to 2007. The course program of instruction (POI) was organized into discreet blocks of instruction on the physical, social, political, security, economic, informational, and infrastructure aspects of specific regions. In addition, students were required to prepare and brief individual and group presentations on regional issues. The existing RAC curriculum provides a solid start point but should be reorganized and updated to improve content and delivery. A possible framework for a modified cultural education POI is outlined by William Wunderle's in his book, *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness: A Primer for U.S. Armed Forces Deploying to Arab and Middle Eastern*

Countries. Wunderle states that the three main components that define culture are cultural influences, cultural variation and cultural manifestations.¹⁹ Heritage, history, religion, traditions and language are major cultural influences. However, Wunderle states that “what is most critical in terms of influence is typically not the factual history of a country or region, but the group’s collective memory and interpretation of that past.”²⁰ Cultural variations include behavior patterns, values and ways of thinking that are common to a culture. Cultural manifestations are outward, observable displays of thought and behavior that are the result of cultural influences and variances.²¹

Modifying the RAC curriculum to include the cultural influences, variations and manifestations described above would provide students with not only factual information about a region but also how indigenous people perceive this information and how it shapes their perspectives and actions. In addition to regional studies, students attending the ARSC would also continue training in their target language.

The advanced language and culture course should culminate with an exercise that requires students to plan a SOF operation in their target region. This planning exercise would require students to apply critical thinking skills as well as the regional knowledge gained throughout the course. Students could be organized into joint teams of ARSOF, AFSOF, MARSOF, NAVSOF operators for the planning exercise. Actively soliciting course attendance by selected interagency partners from CIA, Department of State, USAID, DEA, and others would add immeasurable value to the course as SOF operations will be conducted increasingly in conjunction with interagency partners. The culmination exercise should also include scenarios which require students to plan for

and conduct negotiations with partner nation role players, reinforcing previous negotiation and cultural training.

The third major component of an improved USSOCOM language and culture capability is development of a robust individual exchange program with selected partner nations. Building trust and lasting relationships with key members of partner nation security forces requires long term engagement. Fleeting contacts made during Joint Combined Exchanges for Training (JCET) or other training events, while useful, does not foster strong lasting professional relationships. Increasing opportunities for selected SOF personnel to participate in individual exchange programs would not only serve to immerse the SOF operator in a foreign culture, but also offer an exceptional means of establishing lasting personal and professional relationships with partner nation personnel. Attendance at foreign military professional education (PME) courses followed by duty as an instructor at that training institution or as an exchange officer or NCO with a partner nation security force would greatly improve language and cultural expertise and enable future cooperation. Individual exchange programs of this type are not unprecedented. For example, in the 1990s, Soldiers from the 7th Special Forces Group attended the Colombian Lancero Course and in some cases served as Lancero instructors under the Personnel Exchange Program (PEP) following graduation. Besides the obvious benefit to the Soldier in terms of improved language and cultural proficiency, relationships developed by these Soldiers undoubtedly facilitated the United States efforts to assist Colombia's internal defense and development efforts during the last 15 years.

As the Department of Defense designated proponent for Security Force Assistance (SFA), USSOCOM is now in a strong position to expand the PEP. In a recent interview published in the Joint Force Quarterly, Admiral Eric Olson commented on USSOCOMs role in SFA:

As the Department of Defense (DOD) joint proponent for SFA, USSOCOM will serve mostly as an extension of the Joint Staff in a synchronization role. We will be the machine that receives, reviews, and prioritizes SFA requirements, and then makes recommendations to the Joint Staff about force preparation and allocation. I expect that most SFA missions will comprise a mixture of SOF and General Purpose Forces, with other agencies of government participating whenever appropriate. This construct nests nicely within the processes already developed at USSOCOM to synchronize DOD planning against terrorist networks.²²

In this role, USSOCOM should work closely with the Geographic Combatant Commands (GCC) to identify, develop and recommend additional PEP opportunities to the Joint Staff. Expanding the PEP with priority partner nations would offer the multiple benefits of significantly improving the language and cultural expertise of selected SOF operators, building strong relationships with partner nation security force personnel and improving the capacity of partner nation forces. These relationships and enhanced operator expertise could prove to be invaluable in future operations.

The next several decades are likely to be characterized by persistent conflict against enemies who will attack our weaknesses using indirect and asymmetric methods. Containing or defeating these threats will require the integrated efforts of the United States Government along with allied, coalition, and other government and non-government partners. The Department of Defense has recognized the challenges posed by future conflicts and directed the services to increase their capabilities to meet these challenges. SOF requirements to effectively work with partner nation security forces, indigenous peoples and other organizations to accomplish assigned missions in the

future will be greater than ever before. Language and cultural proficiency are critical capabilities needed to achieve success. Current SOF language and cultural education programs, while adequate in the past, need to be improved to meet the challenges of the 21st century. An improved SOF language training and education program should consist of three levels. These levels are initial language and culture training, advanced regional studies and in-country immersion. Initial language and culture training should continue to be conducted as part of initial SOF qualification with improvements previously recommended. Completion of an Advanced Regional Studies Course and in-country immersion would be conducted as appropriate to meet mission requirements during the career of selected SOF operators. The language and education program proposed above would require increased command emphasis and additional resources but would greatly improve the capability and relevance of SOF for resolution of future security challenges.

Endnotes

¹ U.S. Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept, Version 1.0* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, September 11, 2007), 1.

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³ U.S. Department of the Army, *Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3, Commissioned Officer professional Development and Career Management* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, December 11, 2007), 255.

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