

# Army Special Operations Forces in Multi-Domain Operations

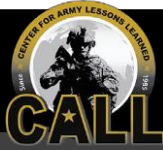
*Catalog*



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## ARSOF IN MDO: A CALL RESOURCE GUIDE

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## Introduction

Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) are a vital component of multi-domain operations (MDO). Defeating great power enemies requires defeating the enemy's entire warfighting systems. This means defeating capabilities in all domains, the electromagnetic spectrum, and the information environment (IE); including personnel, command and control (C2) architecture, intelligence, logistics base, and the enemy's means of using data. Finally, one must defeat the enemy cognitively by destroying the will to fight. The systematic defeat of an enemy demands an in-depth understanding of the opponent's strengths and vulnerabilities. More importantly, defeating an enemy's system requires defeating their logic—the reason the system functions the way it does.

Throughout the competition continuum, ARSOF support MDO by providing unique capabilities to advance partnerships, influence adversary behavior, execute special operations, and respond to crisis. ARSOF provide unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment, and training for operations that are often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments. These operations are often high risk, time sensitive, clandestine, or low visibility. Operations are often conducted with and through partner forces, thereby requiring regional expertise.

ARSOF can play a significant role in the Army's execution of the tenets of MDO (calibrated force posture, multi-domain formation, and convergence) as discussed in Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) pamphlet 525-3-1, *Multi-Domain Operations*. ARSOF's calibrated force posture provides a dynamic mix of forces that adapt as dictated by the strategic environment: forward presence forces (U.S. and partner SOF), continental United States (CONUS)-based forces that provide operational support to the combatant commands in the information space (SOF and interagency units and capabilities), and expeditionary forces (Army and joint units and capabilities) in coordination with national-level cyberspace capabilities, space-based platforms, and strike capabilities. ARSOF's inherently multi-domain formations possess the combination of capacity, capability, and endurance to generate cross-domain effects through independent maneuver, lethal and non-lethal fires, and SOF-unique intelligence functions. Convergence will require that ARSOF rapidly and continuously integrate multi-domain capabilities to gain cross-domain overmatch in decisive spaces. This will generate advantages over the enemy and influence the outcome of operations.

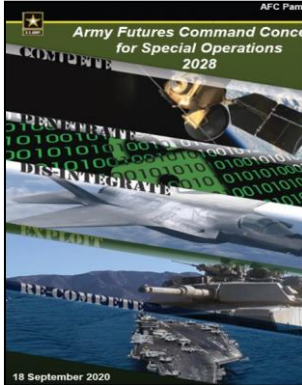
Special Operations Joint Task Force (SOJTF) and 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne) (1st SFC) provide operational-level C2 for joint and multinational SOF (the only ground maneuver forces in the deep fires areas), which creates a physical point of presence for the convergence of intelligence, information, cyber, space, and fires effects in conflict and in the return to competition. The 1st SFC's Information Warfare Center (IWC) provides a unique competition-focused capability designed to converge psychological operations, other information-related capabilities (IRC), and intelligence functions against adversaries in the information space.

Through persistent engagement during competition, ARSOF build relationships and advance partnerships to create leverage and advantage for the United States. In armed conflict, ARSOF are postured for crisis response and, as necessary, to execute precision targeting operations supporting our nation's priorities.

## Products and Resources

### Army Futures Command Concept for Special Operations 2028

AFC pamphlet 71-20-4, 18 September 2020

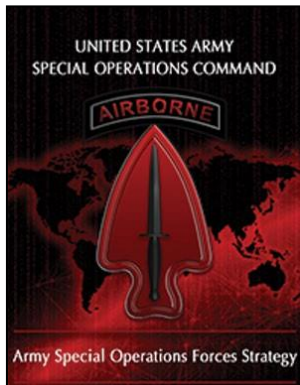


This concept describes the key challenges, solutions, and supporting capabilities required to enable ARSOF to support MDO across the competition continuum against near-peer competitors to accomplish campaign objectives and protect U.S. national interests. It serves as a basis for modernization actions for ARSOF organizations and capabilities. This concept also identifies implications for other supporting and enabling functions. It will inform development of other concepts, experimentation, capabilities development activities, and other future force modernization efforts to achieve the MDO AimPoint Force. Available at

<https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2021/01/05/bdd61c44/20200918-afc-pam-71-20-4-afc-concept-for-special-operations-2028-final.pdf>

### Army Special Operations Forces Strategy

October 2019 for FY20-FY35



The ARSOF strategy aligns efforts to achieve the 2018 Army vision and synchronize with United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) strategic guidance. Great power competition means the nation is in conflict right now. USASOC remains ready and engaged against violent extremist organizations while also adapting to compete against Russia and China, and preparing for war as part of the Army team. Available at

[https://www.soc.mil/AssortedPages/ARSOF\\_Strategy.pdf](https://www.soc.mil/AssortedPages/ARSOF_Strategy.pdf)

### Evolutionary Strategy to Combat Strategic Atrophy

Army War College War Room podcast



In the realm of national security, few elements remain stagnant and those that do are relegated to irrelevance. COL Bryan Groves from the USASOC G-5 discusses the latest iteration of USASOC's command strategy, examining how ARSOF intend to execute its mission in support of the national defense amongst general purpose, joint, and coalition forces against ever changing adversaries. Available at

<https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/podcasts/usasoc-strategy/>

## The Indigenous Approach

### 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne) podcast series



This series examines the role of the Nation’s Premier Partnership Force across the competition continuum, from cooperation to conflict and everything in between. Topics include the 1st SFC(A) vision, ARSOF-SFAC integration, narrative and psychological operations, ARSOF cross-functional teams, special forces identity, and more. Available at

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-indigenous-approach/id1534621849?form=MY01SV&OCID=MY01SV>

## Knowledge Wins—Great Power Competition

### USAJFKSWC podcast series



COL Bryan Groves and MAJ Steve Ferenzi from the USASOC G-5 discuss ARSOF’s role in “great power competition.” COL Groves and MAJ Ferenzi describe how USASOC is approaching the simultaneous challenge of executing daily counter-violent extremist organizations (C-VEO) operations, competing against China and Russia below the level of armed conflict, and preparing to support the Army and Joint Force in future large-scale combat operations (LSCO). The discussion highlights ARSOF’s irregular warfare efforts across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and examines the utility of C-VEO as “a way” to compete.

Part 1: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfjAuUkcg\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfjAuUkcg_s)

Part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7QMj59GTClc>

Part 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6GVFPFw0gY>

## USASOC Capability Developments Integration Directorate Special Operations Joint Task Force Handbook

### Version 1.2, 10 March 2020



The purpose of this handbook is twofold. First, it provides a guide for employment of the special operations joint task force (SOJTF) in LSCO that enables joint and Army commanders to leverage the power of ARSOF to achieve operational and strategic advantages for the nation. Second, it describes the processes and functions that support the SOJTF commander’s decision cycle in LSCO. To survive and win in the future operating environment, ARSOF must hone the SOJTF’s ability to design, plan, and conduct special operations campaigns that integrate the full spectrum of joint SOF, conventional forces, joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational capabilities at the operational level of war. Available at

<https://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/publications/17979.pdf>

## The Information Warfare Task Force Concept (CAC login required)

USASOC Lessons Learned, March 2021

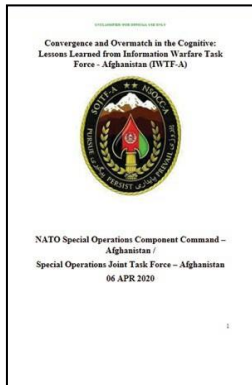


“Although information warfare (IWAR) is not clearly defined in Army or joint doctrine, this article explains why consolidating information-related capabilities into a task force construct, in conjunction with tactical and operational maneuver, is necessary to compete and win in MDO. Peer and near-peer investments in the IE are yielding extensive capabilities that adversely affect the Army’s ability to conduct MDO.” Available at

[https:// www.milsuite.mil/book/groups/usasoc-lessons-learned](https://www.milsuite.mil/book/groups/usasoc-lessons-learned) or  
<https://call2.army.mil/toc.aspx?document=18117>

## Convergence and Overmatch in the Cognitive: Lessons Learned from Information Warfare Task Force—Afghanistan (IWTF-A) (CAC login required)

NSOCC/SOJTF-A, April 2020

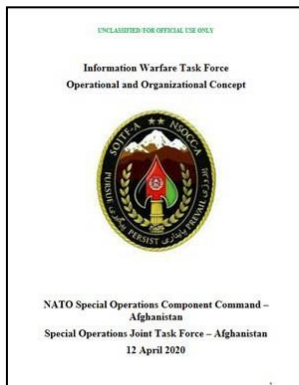


“During its recent 2019-2020 deployment to Afghanistan, NATO Special Operations Component Command—Afghanistan (NSOCC-A) and Special Operations Joint Task Force—Afghanistan (SOJTF-A) conducted an MDO mission command pilot to develop principles for MDO that could apply outside Afghanistan. While acknowledging the unique nature of the conflict in Afghanistan, there remains critical lessons learned for the Army and the Joint Force.” JLLIS ID 225916. Available at

<https://www.milsuite.mil/book/docs/DOC-911996>

## Information Warfare Task Force Operational and Organizational Concept—NSOCC-A/ SOJTF-A (CAC login required)

NSOCC-A/SOJTF-A, April 2020



“This document provides the operational and organizational (O&O) concept for the Information Warfare Task Force (IWTF) refined during 2019-2020. Operations in Afghanistan provide a ‘combat battle lab’ to test new ideas, concepts, and technology rapidly and share them with the Army and the Joint Force. NSOCC-A and SOJTF-A created the task force to compete in Afghanistan’s increasingly dynamic and complex IE, while also experimenting with IWAR capabilities and organizations.” JLLIS ID225196. Available at

<https://www.milsuite.mil/book/docs/DOC-911994>

## SOF Paradigm in Great Power Competition

DeRosa, Doherty, Elwell, Fiala, Maloney, McBride, Spencer, Spitaletta, Uherka, Walton, Worrall, October 2017



“The purpose of this invited perspective paper is to explore the implications of the Special Operations Forces (SOF) paradigm in the emerging great power competition (GPC) space. It resulted largely from the ‘SOF paradigm in GPC’ speaker series as part of the Joint Staff Global Competition and Conflict Strategic Multilayer Assessment. Like the speaker series, this concept paper evaluates more than existing special operations capabilities focused on C-VEO efforts.” Available at [https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/SOF-Paradigm-Invited-Perspective FINAL3.pdf](https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/SOF-Paradigm-Invited-Perspective-FINAL3.pdf)

## How to Win an Asymmetric War in the Era of Special Forces

Keith Pritchard, Roy Kempf, Steve Ferenzi, 12 October 2019



ARSOF shape the terms and tempo of competition by leveraging irregular warfare capabilities to enable other instruments of statecraft to prevail without resorting to war. Working with and through foreign partners, ARSOF develop the understanding and relationships required to wield the influence necessary to shape behavior. ARSOF do this through behavior reinforcement (unconventionally deterring adversaries and assuring partners) and behavior modification (compelling adversaries and inducing partner cooperation). Available at <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-win-asymmetric-war-era-special-forces-87601>

## Unconventional Deterrence in Europe: The Role of Army Special Operations in Competition Today

Bryan Groves, Steve Ferenzi, 16 April 2020



Russia challenges traditional deterrence by staying below the threshold of armed conflict through proxies and IWAR. ARSOF offer unconventional ways to deter such activities by preparing Europe’s population to fulfill its total defense responsibilities, which are defending national sovereignty through resilience to adversary subversion and regaining sovereignty through resistance to enemy occupation in war. At a fraction of the cost, unconventional deterrence supplements conventional deterrence by providing new ways to deny access and change Russia’s decision calculus. Available at

[https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2020/04/16/unconventional\\_deterrence\\_in\\_europe\\_the\\_role\\_of\\_army\\_special\\_operations\\_in\\_competition\\_today\\_115207.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2020/04/16/unconventional_deterrence_in_europe_the_role_of_army_special_operations_in_competition_today_115207.html)



## An Irregular Upgrade to Operational Design

Brian Petit, Steve Ferenzi, and Kevin Bilms, 19 March 2021



Operational design has a relevance problem. Five new design elements that integrate a broader understanding of influence can help optimize military approaches throughout all stages of competition. Irregular warfare is not a “special operations thing,” it’s a joint responsibility. An irregular upgrade to operational design will aid the United States in competing indirectly and asymmetrically to advance its interests without a catastrophic military confrontation. Available at

[https:// warontherocks.com/2021/03/an-irregular-upgrade-to-operational- design/](https://warontherocks.com/2021/03/an-irregular-upgrade-to-operational-design/)

## American Special Ops Forces Are Everywhere

Mark Bowden, April 2021

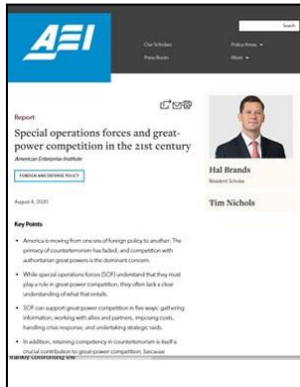


“Big ships, strategic bombers, nuclear submarines, flaring missiles, mass armies—these still represent the conventional imagery of American power, and they absorb about 98 percent of the Pentagon’s budget. Special Ops forces, in contrast, are astonishingly small. And yet they are now responsible for much of the military’s on-the-ground engagement in real or potential trouble spots around the world.” Available at

[https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/04/ how-special-ops-became-the-solution-to-everything/618080/](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/04/how-special-ops-became-the-solution-to-everything/618080/)

## Special Operations Forces and Great Power Competition in the 21st Century

Hal Brands, Tim Nichols, 4 August 2020



“We argue that preparing SOF for great power competition will first require four big shifts in that community...Once these changes are made, SOF will be well-positioned to support great power competition in five key ways: gathering information, working with allies and partners, imposing costs on authoritarian rivals, handling crisis response, and undertaking strategic raids.” Available at

<https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/special-operations-forces-and-great-power-competition-in-the-21st-century/>

## Special Obfuscations: The Strategic Uses of Special Operations Forces

Shannon Culbertson, Alice Hunt Friend, 6 March 2020

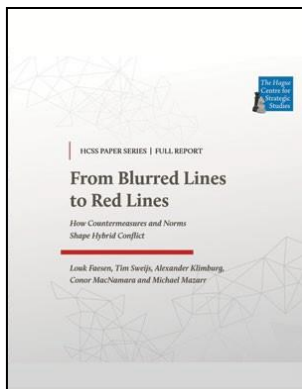


“On the high end of competition, SOF would provide its traditional support to war plans, ensuring interoperability with the general-purpose force, with its own services, and with allies and partners in preparing for and deterring interstate military conflict. In periods of high tension, SOF’s clandestine capabilities are an appealing tool for achieving military goals while avoiding escalation. If policy makers seek a limited demonstration of force to communicate American seriousness, such as destroying a target previously thought to be out of American reach, SOF may be the ideal tool for the job.” Available at

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/special-obfuscations-strategic-uses-special-operations-forces>

## From Blurred Lines to Red Lines: How Countermeasures and Norms Shape Hybrid Conflict

Faeson, Sweijs, Klimburg, MacNamar, Mazarr, September 2020



“This report has considered the strategic utility of norms in shaping adversarial hybrid conflict behavior. Norms function via an actor’s self-perception, interests, values, and fear of stigma or material costs from other adherents in the international community if they do not conform to the norm. It is crucial to gain a better understanding of how norms develop and what states can do to support this process.” Available from The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies: ISBN/EAN: 9789492102799

## Building Strategic Influence—The SOF Role in Political Warfare

Becker, January-March 2018, Special Warfare magazine

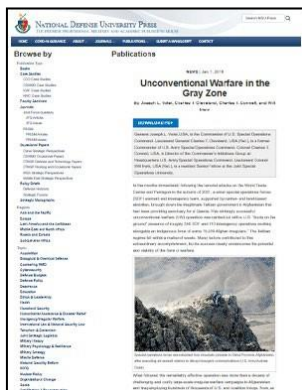


“If the Department of Defense (DOD) is truly going to lead in terms of strategic influence and hone its capabilities in case of war, it is going to have to develop new and innovative ways of getting Americans overseas into positions that matter. The special operations community should have a leading role in this effort.” Available at

<https://www.soc.mil/SWCS/SWmag/archive/SW3101/influence.pdf>

## Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone

Jospeh L. Votel, Charles T. Cleveland, Charles T. Connett, Will Irwin, 1 January 2016

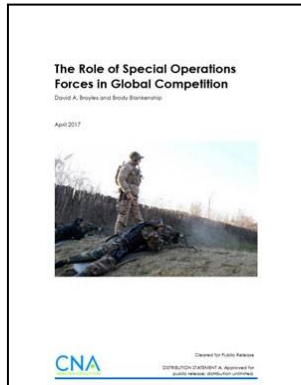


“Unconventional warfare (UW), whether conducted by the United States or Russia or any other state seeking to advance national interests through gray zone proxy warfare, has a rich history, but continues to evolve to meet changing global conditions. One certainty in a world of continuing disorder, a world bereft of Cold War clarity and relative ‘stability,’ where globalization has enabled almost continuous change, is that the UW mission must continue to adapt and so must those responsible for executing it.” Available at

<https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/Article/643108/unconventional-warfare-in-the-gray-zone/>

## The Role of Special Operations Forces in Global Competition

Broyles, Blankenship, April 2017



“Nations have a variety of options for exerting influence, such as through diplomatic, military, or economic means. In recent years, some nations have shifted to more ambiguous activities for exerting global influence, in attempts to achieve benefits normally obtained through conventional war, but without triggering such a war. In this report, the authors explored a different way of thinking about these ambiguous activities and their implications, which suggested a need to shift U.S. focus away from preparing to win tomorrow and toward winning today. From this shift, the authors described a different approach to U.S. activities in such competitive environments.” Available at

[https://www.cna.org/CNA\\_files/PDF/DRM-2017-U-015225-1Rev.pdf](https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/DRM-2017-U-015225-1Rev.pdf)

## Beyond Direct Action: A Counter-Threat Finance Approach to Competition

Sara Dudley, Kevin Stringer, and Steve Ferenzi, April 2021



Adversary use of economic statecraft and financial warfare demand a response beyond “kicking doors” within the gray zone of competition. Such challenges elevate the importance of using non-lethal irregular warfare activities as a way to compete. Applying counter-threat finance (CTF) toward financial access denial against China and Russia expand the range of military options to shape adversarial behavior short of war. Beyond sensational direct-action raids, this evolution of SOF offers a form of unconventional deterrence that ultimately puts the United States, its allies, and partners in a position of advantage to secure their interests while reducing adversary influence and leverage. Available at

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/103VY5zyhODAb8vG15xP3sXRu3eB1X\\_xE/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/103VY5zyhODAb8vG15xP3sXRu3eB1X_xE/view)

## SOF Civil Affairs in Great Power Competition

Travis Clemens, August 2020



SOF civil affairs (CA) is the only ARSOF “tribe” that specifically works with local institutions and civil organizations, and its population-centric orientation aligns it with competition below the level of armed conflict. SOF CA are specially selected and trained to build relationships in foreign countries, understand the environment and vulnerabilities that weaken societies and governance, and work across the spectrum of governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) to mitigate these vulnerabilities. This report outlines four principal roles for SOF CA: initial entry; reconnaissance; engage and influence; and support to resistance. Available at

[https://jsou.libguides.com/ld.php?content\\_id=56753304](https://jsou.libguides.com/ld.php?content_id=56753304)



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