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Cover Image: Do Your Part! A call to action and a central theme from this year's writing competition. *(Image credit: Dylan Hooker)*

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Our shared purpose as ARSOF professionals is to relentlessly sharpen our readiness in support of the Army and the Joint Force. As the Army continues to drive change across the force, this ARSOF publication shepherds professional discourse for our formations. Thinking, writing, and professional dialogue help inform modernization efforts and prepare our formations and the force as a whole for the next fight, ensuring we maintain an advantage over NDS-prioritized adversaries. As you read, we challenge you to take one concrete action: Will you write, experiment, or mentor a peer to strengthen our readiness? Make your commitment now and help drive the evolution our Army needs!

This issue of the *Special Warfare Journal* highlights the top three winners of the 2025 SOCoE Writing Competition, where authors from across our enterprise submitted papers that inform the ongoing Army Transformation Initiative / Continuous Transformation Campaign Plan. This year's winners discuss in great detail different uses of drone technology, combat communications, and the adaptation of tactics for the modern battlefield. To underscore what is at stake, peer adversaries have leveraged swarms of networked drones to dominate the urban skyline, challenging our freedom of maneuver and raising the stakes for every mission. If we fail to accelerate adaptation, we risk ceding our competitive edge.

Also included are thought-provoking and innovative articles related to SOF in LSCO, split-team operations, leadership, joint combined exchange training, and the SOF-Space-Cyber Triad. These are the conversations we need to have to stimulate thought and adaptation. We encourage you not only to share your insights but also to challenge prevailing assumptions and propose alternatives. The journal is a forum where dissenting and unconventional ideas are welcomed as essential to our collective growth. We ask that you engage with our ARSOF professional bulletin to develop and harness ideas that drive positive change within our formations. We owe it to ourselves and the Army to do so.

- Veritas et Libertas -

- *Special Warfare Journal* Editors-in-Chief

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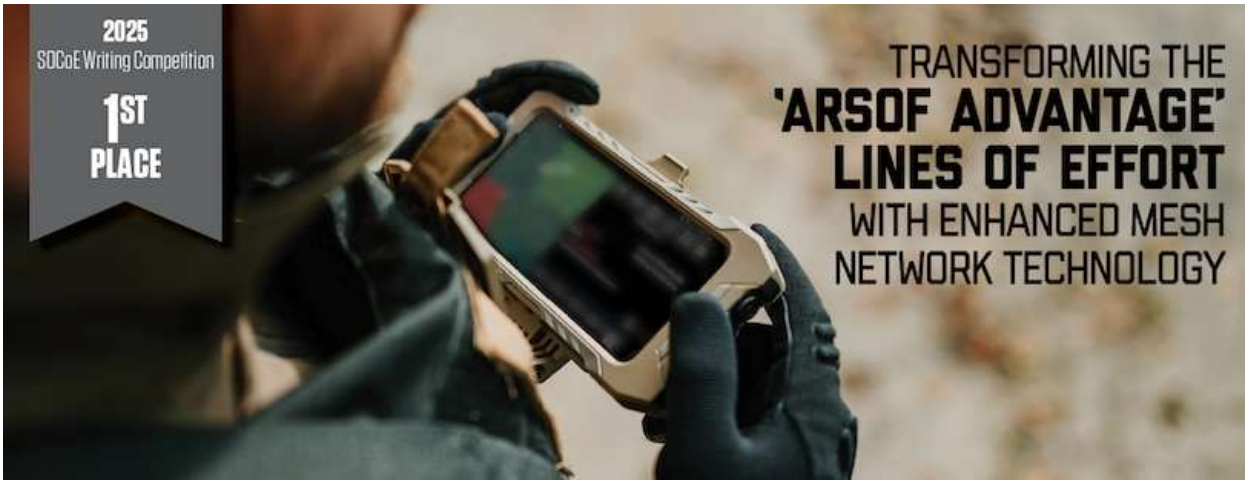

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Transforming the 'ARSOF Advantage' Lines of Effort with Enhanced Mesh Network Technology

By Dr. Daniel Ross

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Introduction

Mobile, secure, and scalable mesh network technology significantly increases U.S. Army special operations forces' (ARSOF) communications flexibility, operational security, resilience, and survivability during high-risk missions in hostile, denied, or contested operational environments. The purpose of this article is to explore an innovative tactical communications capability that can help inform the Army Transformation Initiative and enable "the ARSOF Advantage" five lines of effort by providing "ARSOF in Contact" with secure, off-grid mesh network technology.[01] Contested or degraded operational environments require next-generation processes and capabilities that provide resiliency, interoperability, security, and agility for ARSOF teams navigating the contemporary competition-crisis-conflict continuum.[02] For example, Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alphas (SFOD-As) routinely employ technical collection and communications equipment, such as the Remote Advise and Assist Virtual Accompany Kit (RAA/VAK) to support partner force operations forward of friendly lines.[03] Most recently, U.S. special operations forces (SOF) and British SOF have conducted remote, advise, and assist operations and provided RAA/VAK-enabled over-the-horizon support to Ukrainian partners during large-scale combat operations (LSCO) against Russia.[04] The problem is that the current RAA/VAK configuration lacks a cost-effective mesh network component that allows ARSOF to maintain near real-time situational awareness, communications (texting), and tracking of partner force operations in austere conditions. As modern warfare increasingly relies on unmanned or machine-based systems and decentralized communication, integrating a low-cost, low-footprint, and secure mesh network radio component, such as the goTenna Pro X2, into the current RAA/VAK directly enhances ARSOF's future relative advantages executing the five ARSOF

lines of effort in support of joint force offensive and defensive combat operations.

Operational Context: ARSOF in Contact

The U.S. Army implemented a comprehensive transformation strategy in April 2025. The Army Transformation Initiative charged all leaders to reexamine standing requirements to eliminate obsolescence and make the force leaner, more lethal, and more adaptable for fighting future wars. The lines of effort for the Army Transformation Initiative include:

1. Deliver critical warfighting capabilities.

2. Optimize our force structure.

3. Eliminate waste and obsolete programs.

The Army Transformation Initiative builds upon the concept of transformation in contact that encourages the rapid integration of new technologies and capabilities at the end-user level. The transformation in contact initiative allows soldiers to innovate, experiment, and make changes in real time.[05] ARSOF "in Contact" helps inform the ongoing Army Transformation Initiative through the delivery of critical SOF warfighting capabilities and the integration of new technology that generates an "ARSOF Advantage."

ARSOF policymakers recently identified five lines of effort imperative to creating an "ARSOF Advantage," or value proposition, to the joint force for how ARSOF can drive a transformational mindset and achieve strategic effects against peer adversaries during large-scale combat operations. The lines of effort include:

1. Conduct deep and denied area sensing.

2. Counter-C5ISRT (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Cyber, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Targeting).

3. Conduct deep area partner force maneuver.

4. PSYWAR (Psychological Warfare).

5. Enhance resilience, develop resistance forces, consolidate gains.

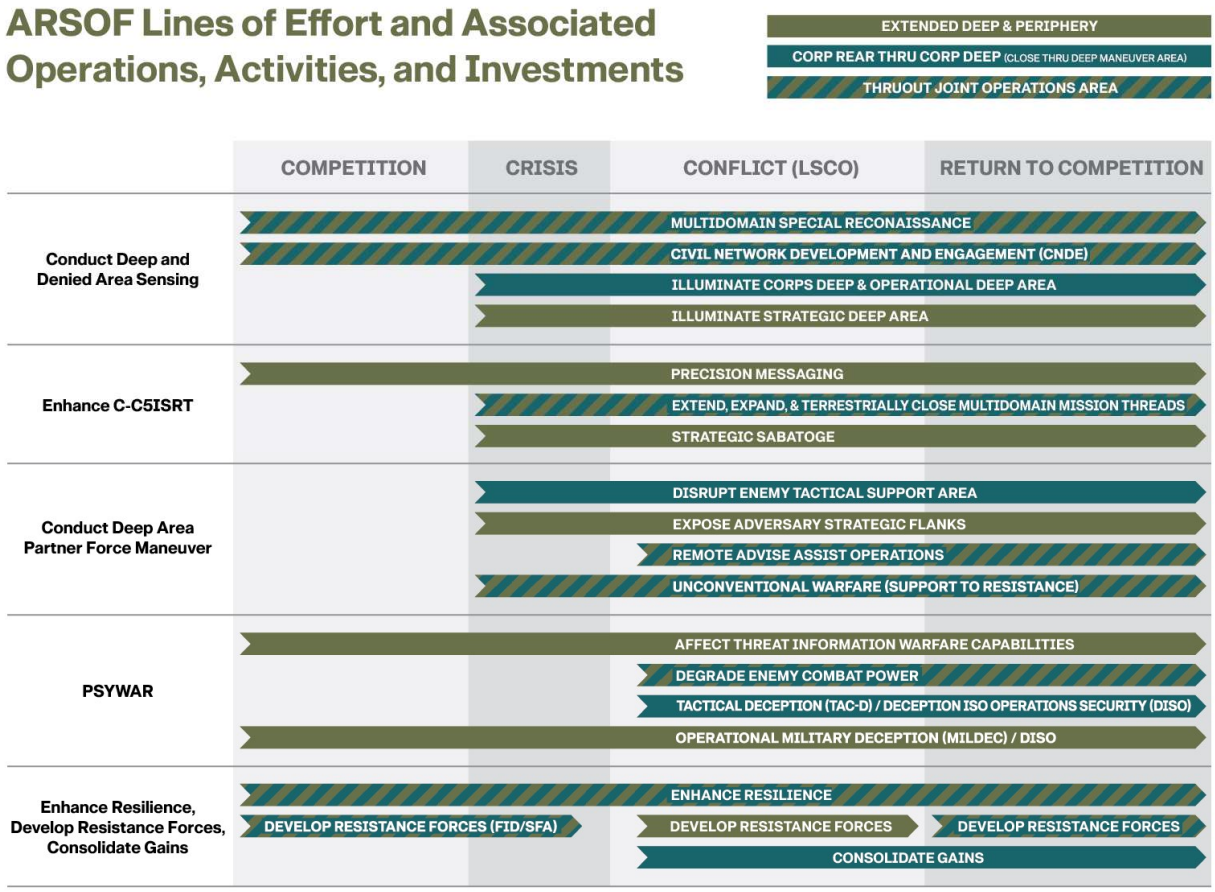

Figure 1. ARSOF Lines of Effort and Associated Operations, Activities, and Investments from 1st Special Forces Command (SFC) G5, "How ARSOF Fights," 2025.[06]

Integrating a secure mesh network radio component into the current RAA/VAK boosts ARSOF's ability to execute these lines of effort and their associated operations, activities, and investments (See Figure 1). This technology better enables ARSOF to maintain connectivity during multi-domain operations and integrate the autonomous systems, unmanned platforms, and machines used by partner force conducting SOF-enabled missions in deep areas typically denied by enemy C5ISRT systems. Though the RAA/VAK has evolved and improved over time, the addition of this technology has the potential to transform ARSOF capabilities to support the new operational concept of "ARSOF in Contact."[07]

RAA/VAK Evolution and Wireless Mesh Networks

In June 2014, U.S. national policy restricted SOF operators in Iraq from accompanying partner forces in combat against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In response, SOF reverted to an advisor role, employing a remote, advise, and assist operations concept to work with and through partner force. They leveraged ad-hoc cellular networks, Android devices, beyond line-of-sight communications, and other software to provide remote support. These early RAA/VAKs proved highly effective in enabling operations, despite some initial design limitations. The RAA/VAKs continued to develop and evolve throughout the Global War on

Terror era and stand to benefit from upgraded equipment to meet the modern operational environment.[08] The modern versions of the kit (See Figure 2) are designed to provide a suite of tools for mission planning and execution, command and control of partner forces, and access to real-time data to improve situational awareness and de-conflict operations.[09] Integration of mesh networking radios into the RAA/VAKs can directly enhance the asset's utility across the full spectrum of special operations.

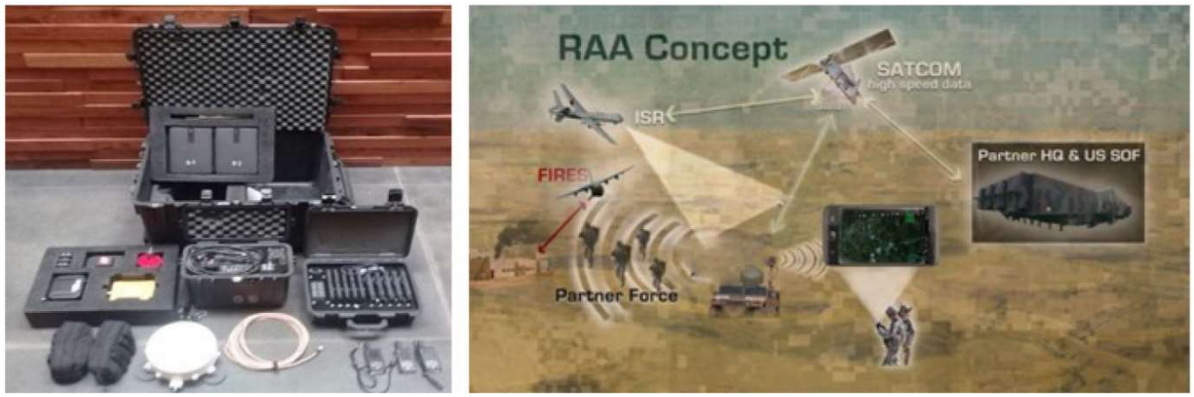

Figure 2. Historical Remote Advise and Assist Virtual Accompany Kit (RAA/VAK) and Remote Advise and Assist (RAA) Concept from SOF AT&L TCC Brief. (Note: Photos/Contents of most current operational kits omitted due to operational security. More detailed history of the program between 2017 and 2025 considered to be controlled information).[10]

Wireless mesh networks are not a new idea.[11] Modern wireless mesh networks trace their origins to extensive U.S. military research and development.[12] They enable direct device-to-device communication without relying on centralized infrastructure. These decentralized systems route data through multiple "hops" and have evolved under various names and uses over the past several decades. Their flexibility allows nodes to remain stationary or mobile, supporting operations in austere environments where conventional networks fail.[13] The addition of mobile or wireless mesh networks closes various identified RAA/VAK capability gaps by providing secure, low-signature, and infrastructure-independent communications and tracking.

Current RAA/VAK Capability Gaps

ARSOF has employed the RAA/VAK in numerous conflict zones over the last decade. This asset has assisted SFOD-As in capturing and transferring near-real-time data, providing battlefield situational awareness through the remote training and monitoring of partner forces.[14] Despite the clear operational value of the RAA/VAK, numerous capability gaps remain unaddressed. The current system still only provides limited secure communications with partner forces, carrying with it an inherent risk of compromised sensitive communications during battlefield use. The kit also does not contain a low-SWaP-C (size, weight, power consumption, and cost), non-infrastructure-based alternative for line-of-sight communication.[15]

Notably, the current kit lacks a near-real-time tracking solution for military free-fall parachute infiltrations.[16] Contemporary ARSOF partners increasingly train on high-altitude high-opening (HAHO) and high-altitude low-opening (HALO) free-fall operations to maintain interoperability and better integrate tactics and approaches to problem-solving in unconventional warfare.[17] The kit also has inadequate signal detection mitigation measures and lacks integrated radio frequency awareness tools for spectrum dominance.[18] Finally, a significant shortcoming, given current operational environments, is the absence of unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) or unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) integration capability to extend a potential mesh network's range on the battlefield.[19] These capability gaps highlight areas where specific improvements can contribute widely across ARSOF's current lines of effort to enable the Army and the joint force to fight and win in LSCO environments.

Wireless Mesh Network Solution

A wireless mesh network radio, such as the goTenna Pro X2 (See Figure 3), can enhance ARSOF capabilities by addressing critical limitations present in the current RAA/VAK. These commercial-off-the-shelf available devices are cost-efficient, have superior frequency range and transmission distance, and allow for operational flexibility and autonomy. This commercial-off-the-shelf solution allows for rapid acquisition and integration into existing ARSOF workflows with minimal logistical burden. The radios are approximately one-third the cost of comparable 900 MHz radios, making them a highly cost-effective option without sacrificing performance.[20]

Figure 3. Wireless Mesh Network Radio and Android Tactical Assault Kits (ATAK).[21]

Operating within the 445 to 480 MHz range, goTenna devices demonstrated point-to-point communications of over 150 miles under ideal conditions. This field test to pass Position Location Information (PLI) traffic occurred between two mountain peaks (7,600 and 8,800 feet above sea level) in Arizona. The range far exceeded that of many systems operating at 900 MHz or higher, which often fail to reach more than 500 meters under comparable circumstances. However, it is important to note that the field test is more of a proof of concept for using aerial assets (UAV or UAS) equipped with a Pro X2 in relay mode to assist ground troops in mitigating ground-to-ground limitations due to topography.[22]

Like other communications technology, the radios may be restricted by topography, but not by power or radio frequency propagation. The low-frequency advantage is essential for remote, advise, and assist operation missions, where ARSOF must sustain secure links with partner forces over distances typically exceeding a kilometer and frequently extending several kilometers. goTenna's infrastructure-free architecture eliminates the need for gateway nodes and technical support for server IP changes, enabling fully decentralized and dynamic operations. This independence allows ARSOF to execute multiple missions concurrently with various partner forces without relying on external support or pre-established networks.[23]

Regarding military free fall operations, the goTenna technology features preconfigured mission toggles that allow seamless transitions from free-fall operations to ground-based communications. This feature ensures near real-time tracking of operators or a partner force during and after military free fall infiltrations.[24] The technology requires very minimal initial training burden and already integrates with the widely used operator Android Tactical Assault Kits (ATAK). The Pro X2 also allows for backhauling through other already employed tactical communication systems (TrellisWare, Silvus, L3Harris, MPU-5), as well as beyond line-of-sight capacity using the high frequency goTenna Skywave module (See Figure 4).[25]

Figure 4. High frequency modules provide beyond line-of-sight high frequency capacity to wireless mesh networks.[26]

From an operational security standpoint, the Pro X2 provides secure end-to-end communication across mesh network “hops” by incorporating advanced encryption standard (AES) 256-bit encryption.[27] This level of encryption is crucial for data protection in contested LSCO environments. Layered encryption further ensures operational security by compartmentalizing mesh network visibility and data access.[28] This enables secure communication with vetted partner forces while safeguarding ARSOF advisors. The device also includes a “remote commander” feature that facilitates the wiping of compromised devices through the mesh network, thus preventing network compromise.[29]

The goTenna Pro X2 offers several other features that can significantly enhance the RAA/VAK’s functionality in demanding and restricted environments. The listen-only mode allows for the complete elimination of an operator's electromagnetic signature while still receiving vital mission updates. The device functions as a 5-watt, short-burst data radio that utilizes a transmission randomization protocol, "jittering," to offset transmissions by up to 25 percent before or after the scheduled interval, thereby enhancing low probability of interception, low probability of detection, and countering adversarial direction-finding efforts. Furthermore, the relay mode enables the device to extend coverage beyond physical obstructions, enhancing the resilience of the communication network. Integrated spectrum analyzer capability allows for the detection of radio frequency interference or jamming attempts in real time, improving frequency management and communication effectiveness.[30] Additionally, the system has been successfully tested for integration with UAS, operating as a lightweight (300 grams), line-of-sight wireless mesh network communication device.[31] Overall, these potential mission-enabling wireless mesh network capabilities that address the RAA/VAK’s current limitations provide significant relevance for ARSOF in future LSCO environments.

Operational Relevance for ARSOF in Large-Scale Combat Operations

This tactical communication solution has the potential to directly support ARSOF's core and enabling missions. The technology enhances ARSOF's ability to conduct deep and denied area sensing (ARSOF Line of Effort 1) through a surrogate or a partner force. Long-range, low-visibility SOF team tracking and messaging capabilities facilitate multi-domain operations special reconnaissance and civil network development. Moreover, the capabilities contribute to increased situational awareness for the joint force in the operational and strategic deep areas by leveraging partner placement and access, and the advantages produced by the SOF-Space-Cyber triad. Better communication integration with partner forces and resistance networks enables ARSOF to more successfully prepare and manage these elements when conducting special operations in the enemy's deep areas during LSCO. This solution supports command control of resistance forces through its low probability of intercept and low probability of detection and reduces the risk of fratricide during complex and ambiguous operations behind enemy lines.[32]

10th Group SFOD-A utilizes wireless mesh network technology for a deep strike mission during training operations in Estonia. Connecting ATAK devices via wireless mesh network radios, the SFOD-A successfully facilitated close air support for partner force missions on enemy high-payoff targets. (Photo provided by Dr. Daniel Ross)

The wireless mesh network technology provides the greatest advantages to ARSOF in the realm of countering C5ISRT (ARSOF Line of Effort 2) and conducting deep area partner force maneuver (ARSOF Line of Effort 3). Secure partner force communications that do not compromise ARSOF data support strategic sabotage operations against high-payoff and high-value C5ISRT targets out of reach for conventional forces. The near real-time situational awareness, communications, and tracking in politically sensitive or denied environments facilitates remote, advise, and assist operations between friendly, partnered, and indigenous units. These remote, advise, and assist operations efforts strengthen partner forces' development and help set the conditions for unconventional warfare activities when the environment dictates. Unconventional warfare requires discreet, at times covert or clandestine, communication capabilities for ARSOF to successfully create dilemmas for and impose outsized costs on an adversary. Wireless mesh network technology extends tactical communication contingency plans well beyond current RAA/VAK limitations. This capability, paired with unconventional warfare activities, improves the ability to conduct deep partner force maneuver, disrupt enemy tactical support areas, and expose adversarial strategic flanks.[33]

Way Forward

Retrofitting goTenna Pro X2 radios into the RAA/VAK provides a critical upgrade to the existing

communications infrastructure. This low-cost, low-footprint augmentation provides ARSOF considerable gains in tactical communication flexibility and operational security, ensuring resilient command and control during multi-domain operations in contested operational environments. The concurrent testing and fielding of a beyond line-of-sight high frequency solution such as the SkyWave Module further expands the RAA/VAK capability by enabling secure, long-range connectivity in austere or denied environments. Collectively, these advancements enhance ARSOF and partner force survivability. Moreover, they increase the likelihood of mission success in future high-risk special operations in enemy deep areas during LSCO. The addition of this technology directly supports the Army Transformation Initiative's line of effort to "deliver critical warfighting capabilities," while synchronously contributing a decisive component to the "ARSOF Advantage" for the joint force during future competition, crisis, and conflict.

Author's Note: Dr. Daniel W. Ross serves in the U.S. Army Special Forces. He teaches graduate-level university courses related to homeland security, homeland defense, and emergency disaster management. Dr. Ross has been published in ProQuest, Special Warfare, Small Wars Journal, and the NCO Journal. The views, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

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Loitering Munitions in Modern Combat: Addressing Tactical Gaps at the Small Unit Level
By Captain B.V. Williams

In the dynamic landscape of modern warfare, the bedrock of U.S. special operations forces (SOF) has always been its unparalleled adaptability. Yet, as the character of conflict undergoes a quiet but profound revolution, there exists a critical vulnerability within the tactical small unit. The current gap within SOF units is the lack of an organic and expeditious package capable of conducting precision strikes and providing direct intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). Loitering munitions can address this gap.

While SOF detachments meticulously train on a spectrum of weapon systems, from machine gun employment and demolitions to mortar systems and anti-armor weaponry, they also integrate advanced capabilities like close air support, indirect fires, and electronic warfare. However, the pervasive absence of loitering munitions from routine training and widespread fielding at the lowest echelons represents a significant deficiency in our capabilities. Our forces face numerous competing training demands, yet we have only a limited amount of time to address them. This raises an important question: Are there tactics or equipment we continue to rely on simply because they were effective in past conflicts or because we are comfortable with them? And, more critically, will these methods and tools equip our forces to survive and adapt to the challenges posed by emerging technologies as the historical shift from bayonets to machine guns did?

Currently, the importance of loitering munitions is not lost on the Department of War or combatant commanders. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth signed a memorandum in July 2025, increasing funding and development of drones and loitering munitions to unleash U.S. military drone dominance.[01] The Special Forces groups have already begun rapid drone fielding within their respective formations. However, current plans and implementation do not provide a solution for the mass production and deployment of organic systems, nor for training at the company and detachment levels. To further compound the problem, training opportunities on loitering munitions and drones are limited. Due to well-established Federal Aviation Administration air corridors, many ranges across installations heavily restrict drone use, further

imposing hurdles for all units across the U.S. Army to learn and integrate these weapon systems at the lowest levels.

Advantages of Loitering Munitions

Loitering munitions, often referred to as “kamikaze” or “suicide” drones, are unmanned aerial systems designed to hover over a target area, enabling operators to identify and engage dynamic or time-sensitive threats with precision. These systems bridge the gap between guided missiles and drones, offering both strike lethality and real-time surveillance. What makes these drones so powerful is that they can be scaled down to be handheld and deployed from anywhere.

Their ability to bring air power directly to small units without reliance on external support has already proven decisive in modern conflicts. For instance, Ukrainian forces have successfully employed loitering munitions like the Switchblade to target Russian positions, effectively giving intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and strike capability at the squad and platoon level. This potential force multiplier remains underutilized in U.S. military doctrine, particularly among Special Forces.

The appeal of loitering munitions lies in their expeditionary and organic strike capability. Teams can move these systems deep behind enemy lines at the tactical edge and conduct precision strikes without higher echelon assets or support. Additionally, their standoff capability ensures soldiers can operate safely from cover while guiding the munition, thereby reducing personnel risk. Their small size and low radar signature make them ideal for SOF operations, allowing forces to strike from blind angles and evade detection.

The ability to integrate these systems at the small unit level offers a paradigm shift in combat effectiveness. These systems enable ground force commanders to exercise tremendous flexibility in surveying the battlespace and making rapid decisions against enemy targets. Much like how shoulder-fired anti-tank missiles empowered infantry against armored threats, loitering munitions enable squads and platoons to conduct precision strikes independently. However, despite these advantages, significant gaps remain in their adoption and deployment within U.S. forces.

Drawbacks and Challenges

One significant drawback is the cost per unit of the U.S. Army's Drone Systems. According to the Department of War Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Estimates, 294 Switchblade 600s will be purchased at a per-unit cost of $170,000.[02] These bespoke, overengineered systems are too expensive to mass produce and to establish a meaningful war magazine. Cheap-to-produce drones that can easily integrate into existing military technology can rapidly increase the pace of deployment and decrease the time to train. The Switchblade uses a proprietary launcher system, but what if the Switchblade or emerging loitering munition technology could be launched from existing stock, such as the Javelin command launch units? Infantry and SOF units are well-trained and

familiar with the operation of the Javelin, which would drastically reduce training time and the cost per unit of loitering munitions.

Operational integration poses additional hurdles. Units require training to effectively operate these drones and coordinate their use with other assets. The upfront cost to outfit units down to the squad level would require a large investment of funds. When units plan for their fiscal year training expenditures, loitering munitions are not available for small units to request in their annual ammunition training allocation. Instead, loitering munitions are opportunistic assets reserved for the upper echelons. Using a loitering munition during a once-a-year training exercise or employing these drones at a static range does not replicate the real-world application. How will a small unit's loadout change with the new addition of loitering munitions? What current equipment or ammunition will be reduced or omitted to make room for the new munitions? The units explicitly tasked with working with drones may have an answer, but the SOF units with competing training requirements will be far behind the curve.

Another set of challenges revolves around the inherent design limitations of loitering munitions, which impact their effectiveness and survivability on the modern battlefield. For example, small models like the Switchblade 300 carry limited warheads and have constrained ranges, typically less than 10 kilometers. This makes them less effective against heavily armored or fortified targets. Larger systems, such as the Switchblade 600 or Israeli Harop, offer greater lethality but require vehicle launchers, reducing portability for dismounted forces.

Another concern lies in their one-time-use design. Each strike expends an entire drone, raising concerns about cost-effectiveness when targeting low-value assets. Training with these systems is also expensive and logistically demanding as live practice shots result in lost drones. Countermeasures further complicate their deployment. Adversaries equipped with electronic warfare systems can jam or hijack drones, while low-altitude radar and interceptor drones are increasingly capable of neutralizing loitering munitions. In Ukraine, improvised defenses like cage armor on vehicles and decoys have reduced their effectiveness.

Global Proliferation and Use Cases

Despite these challenges, loitering munitions continue to be rapidly adopted globally, demonstrating their tactical value in real-world conflicts. The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War marked a turning point with Azerbaijan employing Israeli Harop drones to devastating effect against Armenian forces.[03] These drones overwhelmed air defenses and destroyed tanks and artillery, showcasing the potential of loitering munitions to shift the balance of power decisively.

In Ukraine, both sides have leveraged loitering munitions extensively. Russia's Lancet drones have targeted Ukrainian artillery and vehicles, while Ukraine has utilized Western-supplied Switchblade systems and repurposed commercial drones with massive success.[04]

Changing Tactics and the Modern Battlespace

The rise of loitering munitions is reshaping battlefield tactics and forcing armies to adapt. In Ukraine, the constant presence of loitering munitions has driven forces to rely on camouflage, decoys, and dispersed operations. Armies have developed improvised defenses such as cage armor on tanks to mitigate top-attack drones and mobile anti-drone teams equipped with jammers and interceptor drones to counter aerial threats.

Psychologically, the battlespace has become "transparent," with units struggling to hide from persistent surveillance. This has slowed the operational tempo and pushed combatants to embrace trench networks and underground positions reminiscent of those of World War I.[05] The battlefield's "low-altitude air domain" is increasingly critical, requiring coordination of ground forces, drones, and electronic warfare units to maintain dominance.

U.S. Military Adoption and Policy

Key initiatives include the Low Altitude Stalking and Strike Ordinance Program (LASSO), aimed at fielding loitering munitions across U.S. Army brigades, and the Marine Corps' plans to deploy squad-level drones by 2027. Defense firms are exploring recoverable loitering munitions to reduce costs, while the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) experiments with swarming functions enabled by artificial intelligence for coordinated drone attacks.

Doctrinal shifts emphasize counter-drone strategies, such as electronic jamming and interceptor drones, as well as the integration of loitering munitions into networked warfare frameworks like the Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2). However, bureaucratic resistance and a focus on high-end bespoke projects could delay full adoption, risking a disadvantage against adversaries who embrace drone technology.

The Road Ahead: Future Trends and Outlook

Loitering munitions are rapidly evolving and poised to change significantly in the coming years. This will take a significant investment to ramp production, implement across the force, and maintain our lead on the precipice of this quiet arms race. Future conflicts will likely see loitering munitions integrated into every aspect of military operations. The "atmospheric littoral," or low-altitude airspace, will become a contested domain, requiring innovative tactics and technologies to maintain superiority. The kill web will be greatly expanded, as future systems integrate artificial intelligence to coordinate drone swarms on targets. This requires a heavy investment not only in loitering technology but also in production facilities and the establishment of robust acquisition chains.

Conclusion

Loitering munitions have transformed modern combat by enabling precision strikes at the small unit level. While their limitations and countermeasures mean they are not a silver bullet, their

widespread adoption underscores their value in 21st-century warfare. The lessons of history urge militaries to adapt quickly to technological shifts. Those who embrace loitering munitions and develop robust counter-drone strategies will gain a decisive edge, while those who resist change, or are slow to implement change, risk catastrophic losses.

Author's Note: Captain B.V. Williams is a pseudonym for a Regular Army Special Forces officer. He currently serves as a Headquarters Support Company Commander. He is a graduate of Norwich University, and his Army background includes field artillery and special operations. The views, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

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Special Warfare Drone Networks for the Modern Battlefield

By Staff Sgt. Samuel S. Overton

"I want to speak about bodies changed into new forms."[01]
Ovid (Metamorphoses)

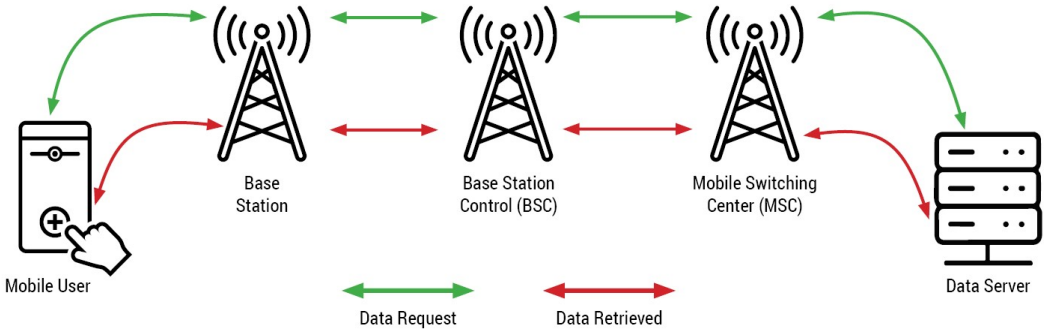
As the U.S. military evolves to meet the complexities of modern warfare, the looming threats of conflict can sometimes overshadow the essential preparations needed to address future challenges. One critical requirement for the modern soldier is connectivity, whether for an infantryman, a pilot, or an intelligence analyst. The question then arises: How can U.S. forces maintain connectivity in denied, degraded, or disrupted environments during large-scale combat operations (LSCO)? This article explores how an unmanned system (UxS) network can provide reliable connectivity to the forward line of own troops (FLOT) in combat scenarios.

The first step in addressing this issue is to recognize the complexities that electronic warfare introduces to connectivity on the modern battlefield. Near-peer nations, such as China, Russia, and Iran, possess modern electronic warfare capabilities that can affect U.S. forces' ability to operate in the electronic/communications environment. From mass jamming to data collection, electronic warfare capabilities significantly impact a front-line soldier's ability to fight.

The U.S. military possesses a wide array of tools to address the challenges of modern warfare. Among these tools are UxS, which include not only aerial drones but also ground, maritime, and space-based platforms. To ensure battlefield connectivity, advances in network technology and architecture now make it possible to deploy connectivity solutions directly on UxS platforms, enabling critical communications in contested environments. Additionally, by employing a multi-domain approach, U.S. forces can mitigate some of the risks posed by adversary electronic warfare to these systems.

To better understand how this concept works, we can take a closer look at the physical network architecture required to enable connectivity. When a user opens an app on a smartphone, the phone emits a signal that a nearby base station receives. Civilian base stations are usually

located on cell towers, rooftops, or streetlights. The next step is for the base station to transmit the data request to the base station control (BSC), which manages base station requests. Then the BSC transfers the data request to a mobile switching center (MSC), which is also found on cell towers or rooftops. This MSC routes data services and ensures seamless handoffs across multiple user requests. The MSC will transmit data through various MSC nodes until it reaches the data server requested by the app. Once the data server confirms the transmission, the data returns to the phone via MSCs, BSCs, and the final base station (see figure below).



Physical Topography of Wireless Network

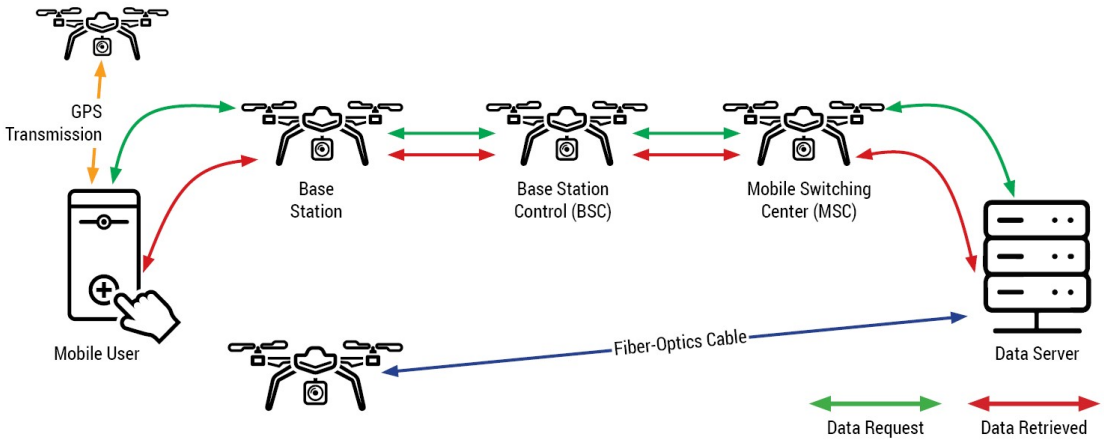
Each of these key components in a physical cellular wireless network can be placed onto various UxS platforms. They are lightweight enough to be used as payloads or can be integrated into the platform during manufacturing.

Imagine that, in the near future, U.S. forces are digging into a trench along the FLOT to fortify a position against a near-peer nation-state military. How can U.S. forces maintain connectivity to their command-and-control (C2) in contested electronic warfare positions? Can these soldiers rely on civilian cell networks to communicate if adversary electronic warfare begins jamming known military frequencies? What information could be given to these troops that would give them a decisive advantage over the enemy?

Now imagine, in this same scenario, a UxS team at a tactical operations center (TOC) launched a series of drones to support connectivity along the FLOT. One UxS, equipped with a BSC, is positioned 200 feet in the air near the troops. A second UxS, carrying an MSC, is deployed a few miles further back. To establish a physical connection, the team launches another UxS trailing a fiber-optic cable. This UxS lands five miles from the TOC in a trench along the FLOT, remaining connected to the TOC via the fiber-optic cable. Soldiers can plug their laptops or phones into the UxS to access critical updates, including a common operating picture, imagery of enemy and friendly positions, orders for the next 24 hours, and an updated request for information (RFI) list.

When the troops encounter a GPS-degraded environment, the commander alerts the TOC. In response, the TOC UxS team launches two additional drones equipped with atomic clocks. These drones transmit precise timing data using GPS software to supplement the limited space-

based GPS coverage. As a result, U.S. forces along the FLOT receive updated positional data on their phones and critical updates on their laptops, restoring situational awareness.



Physical Topography of UxS Wireless Network

This scenario portrays a drone network used to connect a command-and-control node to the FLOT. Each UxS can be configured to operate like a traditional cellular network and provide communications capabilities to the FLOT in a degraded, disrupted, or denied environment. The scenario also highlighted another key element of modern warfare: adaptability. Placing the physical architecture of a network on UxS enables U.S. forces to create a dynamic network that can be employed, retrieved, and repositioned in real time. As U.S. forces advance, the network can push forward to ensure continuous connectivity. Now, a drone enabled network can adapt to match the complex, ever-changing environment along the FLOT.

Such a drone network can be useful at scale within conventional U.S. Army units; however, it can also be utilized as a special warfare drone network (SWDN). Given the same equipment, small teams of UxS operators can launch a series of drones behind enemy lines and provide a temporary network for resistance forces partnered with a Special Forces Operational Detachment – Alpha (SFODA). The same UxS team can then re-task the SWDN to provide a Psychological Operations team with a means through which to transmit information to resistance forces about newly discovered enemy propaganda. Finally, after resistance forces recapture a key city, the same SWDN can be used to provide a temporary network for U.S. forces and civilian leaders until critical infrastructure is restored.

A critical aspect of constant transformation is transformational infrastructure. Transformational infrastructure is as simple as a concrete or asphalt road. Concrete and asphalt roads enabled vehicles to grow in size, weight, and payload while spurring automotive innovation, such as advances in tires, shocks, steering, and braking. Another simple transformational infrastructure arrived in the form of shipping containers. Standardized shipping containers allowed ships to be designed around a known number of containers, enabling container managers to estimate the weight and available space on each container more accurately. All of these transformational infrastructures provided greater stability in the global supply chain. These factors then lead to a

greater transformation of limited economies and limited supplies into the current interconnected global economy.

The concept of an SWDN is a transformational infrastructure. Having a dynamic cellular/digital network that enables U.S. special operations forces to constantly innovate and adapt to the modern battlefield is a key component of success in modern warfare. Having a dynamic SWDN enables the transmission of significantly more data to front-line soldiers and provides new avenues for operations, deception, and information collection. The SWDN is an enabler that enhances U.S. operators' survivability and lethality in large-scale combat operations.

About the Author

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PERSPECTIVE:

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES VALUE PROPOSITION TO THE CONVENTIONAL FORCE IN LARGE SCALE COMBAT OPERATIONS

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Perspectives: Special Operations Forces Value Proposition to the Conventional Force in Large Scale Combat Operations

By Chief Warrant Officer 2 Benjamin Wharton

Introduction

To avoid fighting "the last war," strategic planners have tried to characterize the next fight, particularly as it relates to optimizing conventional forces and special operations forces (SOF) to be adept at large-scale combat operations (LSCO). However, a clearly articulated vision or guidance on how to evolve has not been consistently communicated. This article will identify three functions by which SOF will provide value to the conventional commander in a modern competition or conflict environment, and one recommendation for ensuring "Conventional Forces and Special Operations Forces Integration, Interoperability, and Interdependence" (CF-SOF I3). Additionally, the article will highlight two historical vignettes in which SOF supported conventional forces, which operational through tactical-level leaders can use as a framework for shared understanding of CF-SOF I3. The purpose is to enable operational—tactical leaders to extrapolate what a SOF-enabled LSCO mission or concept may look like, and more easily articulate how SOF operational lines of effort would tie into strategic value propositions for joint force commanders. This contributes to a shared understanding of CF-SOF I3 across the competition continuum.

For over 20 years, during the Global War on Terrorism era, SOF were often a supported force; however, in LSCO, SOF will most likely be in a supporting role to conventional forces. Despite a shift in roles, the decades of invaluable Global War on Terrorism experience gained within the SOF community in critical areas such as fires, targeting, and partnered operations should not be cast aside. The application of these experiences will prove even more vital in LSCO. Furthermore, SOF's persistent global placement and access will be critical to providing decision space and options to conventional commanders planning or executing a LSCO fight.

Three Main Functions

For leaders to best prepare their formations, it is necessary to create a baseline for how SOF can operate in a battlespace dominated by conventional forces. The following are three main

functions SOF would enable in a LSCO environment.

FIRST, persistent SOF engagements with host nation partners around the globe to build partner capacity remains key to enabling successful LSCO. This function refers to security cooperation and its payoff for the U.S., as opposed to a specific fiscal and statutory authority. Build partner capacity initiatives include a wide array of U.S. Code Title 10 and Title 22 programs designed to advance partner nation capacity and capabilities through the provision of training and equipment, and through some humanitarian-based programs that support national security objectives through soft influence. Although improving partner nation militaries have secondary benefits to the U.S., the real power of these partnerships is the access and placement they provide during competition, and even more so during escalation into crisis or conflict. Forward-deployed SOF, with access to partner forces and networks, positions U.S. forces in strategically important areas with proximity to critical infrastructure that would be invaluable during crisis or conflict.

The **SECOND** function is deep sensing and access. Through an enduring presence in their assigned areas of operation, SOF units gain invaluable familiarity with human and physical terrain. This presents an opportunity when considering the realities of an escalation from competition into crisis, or even conflict. Planners should anticipate that once a crisis escalates to conflict, contested areas will likely become inaccessible to conventional forces. However, SOF can serve in a stay-behind role or leverage their surrogates to maintain access to denied terrain, thus providing a deep sensing option to conventional forces and facilitating the targeting of high-payoff targets. Additionally, SOF units retain access and placement along the periphery, where they can conduct shaping operations either unilaterally or via surrogates if that terrain is denied to conventional forces.

THIRD, SOF units of action can enable the final application of national-level multidomain assets. Some space and cyber capabilities require proximity to the physical target. Through a smaller footprint or surrogate network, SOF could be called upon to close that final distance, allowing multidomain capability-convergence at the decisive point. This can facilitate the destruction of prioritized targets critical to the enemy and ease the opening of air/land/sea mobility corridors for joint force access.

Although these functions offer significant benefits, developing a shared understanding of CF-SOF I3 in LSCO faces challenges. These stem from traditionally distinct roles and missions, separate certification, verification, and validation processes, and limited opportunities for combined training. To best prepare the entire Joint Force for success in LSCO, there must be a mutual understanding of how forces will integrate. Persistent engagement between SOF and the combat training centers would advance collaborative and continuous development of this understanding. Participating in exercises at combat training centers alongside conventional forces allows SOF to demonstrate their capabilities and broaden conventional force understanding of potential support, informing strategic planners' conceptualization of SOF employment in a LSCO campaign. As SOF consistently exceeds expectations and adds value at the combat training centers, trust and credibility will be built with conventional forces.

Furthermore, SOF's dynamic and adaptive thinkers can and should contribute to solving complex problems in a dynamic future operating environment.

Historic Examples

Vignettes can often be more effective than doctrine at conveying complex concepts, enabling leaders to visualize potential SOF-enabled missions and concepts within a LSCO framework. As such I will provide two historical vignettes which demonstrate SOF's value in LSCO. The first vignette is about Lt. Gen. Walter Krueger, commander of the Sixth Army during World War II, and his formation of the Alamo Scouts as a specialized unit in 1943 to conduct raids and reconnaissance work in the Southwest Pacific. Throughout the war, the Alamo Scouts conducted the doctrinal missions of special reconnaissance, direct action, foreign internal defense, and unconventional warfare. Notably, they operated in areas inaccessible to conventional forces, enabling capability convergence and even establishing a resistance force nested within the Sixth Army's campaign to achieve mass effects and divide enemy resources. The conventional forces commander specifically force-generated the unit after the identification of an operational gap. The Alamo Scouts Training Center was set up and tailored to the specific needs of producing capabilities for the supported commander. In this vignette, the SOF unit filled operational gaps in direct support of the conventional force commander, which the conventional forces, at the time, could not cover. Furthermore, the SOF unit was integrated into the commander's campaign plan, their lines of operation nested within a broader framework, much the way future operating concepts envision SOF as a supporting element. The Alamo Scouts demonstrated value to the commander through deep sensing and partner-building.

The second vignette comes from Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – North, also known as Task Force Viking, which operated in northern Iraq during the 2003 invasion. Task Force Viking was composed of joint SOF personnel and Kurdish Peshmerga fighters. Its primary objective was to support the Kurdish Peshmerga in securing key cities and infrastructure in northern Iraq, while also conducting unconventional warfare and direct-action missions against Iraqi forces. Task Force Viking secured Kirkuk, Mosul, and the northern oil fields, preventing 13 Iraqi Army divisions from defending Baghdad or reinforcing defenses against advancing American and British forces in the south. In addition to unconventional warfare and direct-action missions, Task Force Viking conducted artillery forward observer and special reconnaissance missions to disrupt Iraqi forces arrayed along the "Green Line." Additionally, the task force provided reception, staging, onward movement, and integration for insertion of the 173rd Airborne Brigade into the battlespace. From this example, the SOF task force supported the main effort during the invasion of Iraq, a LSCO campaign. They played a significant role in employing fires, fixing enemy ground forces, and setting conditions for follow-on conventional forces to be introduced into the battlespace. Furthermore, they leveraged their unique expertise in partnered operations–specifically, building partner capacity—by employing the Kurdish Peshmerga as force multipliers.

Bottom Line: Embrace CF-SOF I3

These vignettes demonstrate the value proposition of SOF to the Army and the joint force in modern competition, crisis, and conflict environments, characterizing how actions taken during those contexts directly contribute to the success of conventional forces. Three functions by which SOF can provide value to the commander have been laid out: building partner capacity, deep sensing and access, and enabling the final application of national-level multidomain assets. The argument has also been made for the importance of CF-SOF I3, recommending that SOF involve themselves in combat training center exercises and other training venues early and often to build trust and credibility with conventional forces. In the future operating environment SOF can play a critical role in providing decision space and options to Army and joint force commanders. By understanding the value of SOF, operational and tactical leaders can ensure shared understanding of how best to integrate SOF into multidomain operations to achieve operational objectives. By using the unique capabilities and expertise of SOF, conventional commanders can enhance their ability to compete and win in a rapidly changing global environment.

Author's Note: Chief Warrant Officer 2 Benjamin Wharton is a pseudonym for an active-duty Special Forces Warrant Officer. He wrote this article as part of the Warrant Officer Advanced Course graduation requirements. The views, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent the position of the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

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Perspectives: Realigning Joint Combined Exchange Training within the ARSOF Readiness Model

By Chief Warrant Officer 2 Edward Tripp

Introduction

The Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) program, a longstanding cornerstone of U.S. special operations forces (USSOF) training, has faced tensions between the force provider components and the theater special operations commands (TSOCs). Per U.S. Code Title 10, Section 322, the primary purpose of JCETs is to train special operations forces. While JCETs can supplement TSOC theater campaign plans, they are often used as a convenient solution to achieve objectives outside the scope of training authorities. Therefore, the current sourcing and execution of JCETs are misaligned with the Army special operations forces' readiness model.

The Army special operations forces' readiness model is a framework used by the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) to manage the training cycle of its subordinate units of action. It cycles through three phases: red (low readiness, individual tasks and recovery from the previous cycle being the primary focus), yellow (moderate readiness, training events focus on preparation for certification and unit-level battle tasks), and green (ready, final training events focused on mission preparation, validation before deploying, and the deployment itself). In this model, JCETs are used as an example mission during deployment, and units frequently execute multiple JCETs during the green phase. However, as stated earlier, JCETs are a training authority. This represents a deviation from the intended purpose of JCETs. Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alphas (SFODAs) should be executing JCETs during the preparation phase. This allows them to train on their unconventional warfare and foreign internal defense mission essential tasks.

The Imperative of Proper JCET Employment

JCET misalignment can cause confusion among operators regarding the program's purpose.

Many become focused on training and increasing the capability of the partner nation force, which violates the U.S. Special Operations Command JCET program business rules. The policy is clear that partner-nation forces can only receive an incidental training benefit, and they cannot be the primary focus. USSOF is the training audience. Instead, if JCETs were aligned in the preparation phase of the Army special operations forces readiness model, SFODAs and their individual operators are more likely to focus on the training value they receive from working with a partner force multiple times bigger than their own, where the SFODA must coordinate all the logistical requirements, all while in a foreign country. No other environment can replicate these types of conditions.

As budgets decrease, SFODAs are increasingly losing access to training events and large exercises, where they can achieve the same level of training as JCETs. With the U.S. facing an increasingly complex and competitive global security landscape, with a growing focus on preparing for large-scale combat operations against near-peer threats, the reduction in training resources elevates the importance of JCETs and increases demand for them. However, this increased reliance on JCETs places a greater burden on the program to deliver high-quality training, which is not always possible given the constraints and limitations that often accompany these bilateral exercises.

Finding the Right Balance

The requirements imposed by TSOCs while SFODAs plan and execute JCETs frequently detract from the training potential. For example, partner force selection can limit the level of training achievable, as SFODAs are often tasked with teaching individual tasks to new recruits rather than conducting collective tasks with more proficient units. This can result in a watered-down training experience that fails to challenge detachment operators and push them to their limits. Location selection by the TSOCs can restrict available training areas and ranges, further limiting the training potential of JCETs. By prioritizing operational considerations over training objectives, TSOCs are inadvertently undermining the value of JCETs as a tool for developing the skills and proficiency of SFODAs. This forces detachments into a program of instruction regardless of whether it meets their specific needs. When combined with the Army special operations forces' readiness model – where training calendars are at capacity and time is limited – this situation leads to long-term consequences for a SFODA's proficiency and effectiveness.

Even more concerning is the tendency of TSOCs to "operationalize" JCETs, using them to achieve outcomes where other authorities would be more appropriate. This practice is contrary to the JCET authority. For example, a common misuse of the authority is using JCETs to build partner nation capacity, which is more appropriately the role of U.S. Title 10, Section 333. Furthermore, TSOCs often utilize JCETs to secure SOF participation in joint chiefs of staff exercises, essentially serving as the financial vehicle to support attendance when the exercise does not have sufficient resource allocation for USSOF. Additionally, JCETs may become a band-aid when trying to forward-posture forces on a persistent basis to prepare for crisis. By using JCETs in this way, TSOCs not only diminish the value of the program as a training tool but also risk changes to the

fiscal and legal authorities associated with JCETs. Ultimately, the continued misuse of JCETs undermines the goal of this training authority, threatening the required targeted training and resource allocation that SFODAs need within their Army special operations forces readiness model to meet emerging global challenges and counter threats from near-peer actors.

Conclusion

The JCET program, a critical component of USSOF training, is facing significant challenges that threaten its effectiveness and alignment within the Army special operations forces' readiness model. The loss of access to larger training events and other fiscal authorities due to budget constraints has increased the importance of JCETs to force providers. However, TSOC requirements and their tendency to "operationalize" JCETs diminish the return on investment for SFODAs and detract from the overall training potential. As a result, SOF units of action may conduct lower-quality training while on JCETs, which they need to develop and maintain their unconventional warfare and foreign internal defense mission essential tasks. To ensure the long-term readiness and effectiveness of USSOF, we must realign JCETs within the Army special operations forces readiness model, prioritize training objectives while executing JCETs, and prevent the misuse of JCET authorities to achieve outcomes that are outside the scope of the program.

Author's Note: Chief Warrant Officer 2 Edward Tripp is a pseudonym for a Regular Army Special Forces Officer with more than 16 years of service. He wrote this as part of the Warrant Officer Advanced Course graduation requirements. The view, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent the position of the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

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Getting Small: Institutionalizing Split-Team Operations for Large Scale Combat Operations
By Chief Warrant Officer 3 Greg Urbanski

Introduction

Modern battlefields are characterized by intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR)-saturated and electronic warfare (EW)-contested environments. Large formations are vulnerable to drone swarms, rapid counter-battery fire, and automated targeting, making agility, dispersion, deception, and timely action critical for survival. Special Forces (SF) employ these necessary characteristics of modern warfare through split-team operations – dividing into small, independent elements, even down to singleton operators – to achieve stealth, autonomy, seamless integration with joint fire support, and increased operational coverage.[01] Institutionalizing this approach requires more than tactical rhetoric; it demands codified standard operating procedures for operating behind enemy lines in modern combat. Consequently, leaders must prioritize training focused on stealth and evaluating success based on survivability and sensor-to-shooter latency, so that operating in split-teams becomes a repeatable institutional competency rather than a boutique skill. In essence, studying and training split-team operations will foster the operational characteristics SF must adopt for modern warfare, driving tactical innovation and enhancing both survivability and lethality in large-scale combat operations (LSCO).

The central claim of this article is that split-team employment should be re-institutionalized as SF's default organizing principle for both training and employment for LSCO. Doing so aligns ODA force design with detachments that can infiltrate, persist, sense, and rapidly cue joint effects in the deep, extended-deep, and periphery fights.[02,03] This paper examines the historical effectiveness of small teams in combat, drawing lessons from World War I through the current conflict in Ukraine to illuminate enduring principles of maneuver warfare. It then translates these historical insights into training implications, advocating for a renewed focus on mission command, signature control, non-standard sustainment, and specialized fieldcraft. Finally, the paper proposes adjustments to combat training center rotations to better prepare units for the realities of modern small-unit operations and fully capitalize on their potential.

Historical Precedent: Small Unit Effectiveness

Throughout a century of warfare, small, highly adaptable units have consistently achieved disproportionate impact on the battlefield. During World War I, German stormtrooper detachments overcame the stalemate of trench warfare by combining short, intense artillery barrages with decentralized mission command – known as *Auftragstaktik* – and specialized small-unit tactics for close-quarters combat.[04] Stormtroopers infiltrated enemy lines under the cover of a creeping artillery barrage, bypassing fortified trench lines to disrupt enemy artillery, command posts, and communications in rear areas. *Auftragstaktik* empowered junior leaders and individual soldiers to make rapid, independent decisions amidst the chaos of battle. This demanded flexibility, as small unit leaders could not depend on detailed, timely orders from higher headquarters once the assault began. The tactic relied on decentralized execution and initiative from junior leaders operating in a high-threat environment. However, stormtrooper tactics also had limitations. Units often advanced beyond the reach of their supply lines and supporting artillery fire. Despite these drawbacks, stormtroopers pioneered a revolutionary approach to warfare, trading lengthy battlefield scenarios for rapid, decentralized assaults that prefigured modern infantry tactics.[05]

Half a century later, SOF reconnaissance teams refined small unit tactics through partnered, deep-penetration operations in Laos and Cambodia. These teams operated for days, relying on stealth, cunning, and strict discipline in signature control, fieldcraft, and mission command.[06] This allowed them to gather critical intelligence and strike the enemy in highly contested areas. Reconnaissance teams prioritized remaining undetected and completing their intelligence missions without engaging in firefights. Their effective tactics, techniques, and procedures were developed through hard-won experience and formalized through training and in-unit knowledge sharing – tailored explicitly for operations in denied terrain. These small, combined U.S.-indigenous teams prioritized avoiding contact while converting observation into precise targeting data. Rigorous and repetitive fieldcraft was essential, including meticulous kit and personal sanitization, off-trail movement, spoor management, establishing caches for extended operations, and utilizing discreet signals for planned extraction and evasion.[07] Mission success depended on continuous, intensive training in immediate action drills for various potential contact scenarios.

Currently, Russian reconnaissance units in Ukraine employ the same small-unit logic under ubiquitous sensors, probing defenses with four- to six-person elements and rapidly cueing artillery, one-way attack drones, and glide munitions.[08,09] These small units have had marked success in exploiting terrain for concealment, slipping behind front-line defenses and striking vulnerable rear areas, disrupting Ukrainian logistics and troop rotations.[10]

For modern Special Forces split-team operations, these historical cases converge into clear design principles. Success hinges on decentralized execution – empowering junior leaders with a clear commander's intent – combined with rigorous training in stealth, fieldcraft, and signature control.[11] These units excel at infiltrating defenses, gathering time-critical intelligence, and/or rapidly cueing precision fires. Therefore, the consistent success of these small units across

diverse conflicts indicates that their effectiveness is not simply a matter of technology or tactics. It is a product of specific, repeatable skillsets and leadership approaches that Special Forces must deliberately cultivate through realistic training.[12]

Forging Split-Team Operators: Training for the Deep

Training must prioritize skills critical for small team success: mission command, signature management (controlling electronic, infrared, radio frequency, and thermal signatures), non-standard logistics (establishing and utilizing caches), rapid target development, and secure reporting in denied communications environments (using low probability of detection/low probability of interception communications, off-axis relays, terrain masking, and courier networks).

Mission Command for Split-Team Operations: Effective split-team employment requires empowering non-commissioned officers to exercise independent leadership and initiative. Staff sergeants and sergeants first class must be prepared to lead isolated elements on independent missions. SF training must emphasize mission command at all levels, teaching non-commissioned officers to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty, synchronize actions with minimal guidance, and assume responsibilities traditionally held by officers. Training exercises should routinely place junior leaders in command of split detachments to build confidence and sound judgment. Split-team training must challenge leaders to operate with near-zero emissions, validate targets to joint standards, and execute clean breaks from contact when compromised.

Signature Management as Daily Discipline: Developing proficiency in signature management requires a shift from infrequent training events to continuous practice focused on evading detection and maintaining operational security. EW and unmanned systems (UxS) should be considered constant environmental factors, not temporary training injects. Training should prioritize low probability of intercept/low probability of detection communications, communication windows, directional antennas, and non-emitting control measures as primary techniques, utilizing voice and data communications only when opportunities arise. Continuous challenges from the Red Team UxS, thermal optics, and software defined radio (SDR)-based jamming will build proficiency in rapid detect-mask-move immediate action drills. This approach cultivates units that maneuver primarily by terrain and time, treating communications as brief, pre-planned events. Split teams should be able to operate for days with minimal emissions, practicing strict communications discipline under EW conditions.

Non-standard Logistics: Split-team missions often occur in remote and austere environments, such as mountainous regions, jungles, or expansive rural areas, requiring teams to be self-sufficient for extended periods. Training should therefore re-emphasize robust fieldcraft and sustainment skills reminiscent of those used in long-range reconnaissance patrols. This includes living off the land or utilizing caches, navigating without reliance on GPS, and maintaining prolonged covert hide-site occupation. Teams

must practice emplacing, authenticating, and recovering caches, as well as rehearsing joint precision airdrop system and UxS handoffs for clandestine resupply. Proficiency in recovery and contested exfiltration is also vital, including practicing exfiltration under denied airspace or coordinated handoffs with auxiliary or other units.

Distributed Sensing to Joint Effects: Teams must be able to collect, validate, and rapidly disseminate targeting-quality intelligence to cue joint effects without compromising operational security. This requires a thorough understanding of authentication and fires-deconfliction procedures to ensure SOF effects are synchronized with conventional force operations to minimize the risk of fratricide.

Objective Measures of Effectiveness: Assessing split-team effectiveness necessitates a shift from subjective evaluations to objective, data-driven metrics that focus on survivability and lethality. Objective assessment frameworks should replace broad after-action reports with measurable standards tied to split-team outcomes. Key metrics include exposure time after detection by unmanned aerial systems, PACE message delivery under jamming, cache emplacement/recovery times with zero detectable signature, sustained operations exceeding 96 hours, and sensor-to-shooter latency. Training must also validate casualty care and evacuation procedures for prolonged field care without relying on motorized or air transport, reflecting the realities of deep operations. Data collected from these measures should continuously inform refinements of standard operating procedures (SOPs), equipment sets, and training curricula.

Refining the Approach: Testing the tactical and operational utility of Split-Teams at CTCs

To maintain their specialized skills, SF require dedicated training environments that replicate the challenges of denied operating areas. This training must focus on core SF competencies – stealth, human intelligence gathering, distributed sensing, and independent decision-making – and include regular integration with conventional forces to ensure seamless coordination of fires, targeting, and maneuver. Combined training centers provide the ideal opportunity to rehearse these complex operations at scale.

In 2024, the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) conducted its first rotation focused on Special Operations (24-06J), involving an entire Special Forces Group and other SOF elements operating within a large-scale combat scenario. This rotation, described as “breaking new ground… at an unprecedented scale,” allowed Army special operations forces to test their ability to fight in future high-intensity conflicts across all echelons, from individual detachments to joint task forces. Building on this success, combined training centers should incorporate split-team scenarios into their rotations, allowing ODAs to practice link-ups, passage of lines, and fires integration with conventional forces.

Integrating SOF into Combined Training Center Scenarios:

Dedicated SOF Lanes: Each rotation should include two dedicated SOF lanes integral to the corps plan: (1) an extended-deep lane that requires non-standard logistics sustainment for special reconnaissance that cues joint effects and (2) a periphery lane for deception operations with a partisan force. Each lane should replicate an actual denied environment – GPS degradation, persistent UAS/ wide area motion imagery (WAMI), enemy signals intelligence, and human terrain noise – and grade units on detection rates, emission control violations, cache recovery percentages, and sensor-to-joint effects timelines.

Decisive SOF Tasks: SOF tasks should be designed as decisive enablers, targeting critical enemy vulnerabilities to enable joint forcible entry, penetrate anti-access/area denial systems, and delay and/or degrade enemy advances.

Realistic Threat Replication: Combined training centers must simulate a truly denied environment, including GPS denial, persistent ISR from UAVs and acoustic sensors, EW, and unreliable human intelligence. This will force SOF to utilize signature mitigation techniques, including land navigation, terrain masking, camouflage, and concealment of hide sites.

Hybrid Resupply Testbeds: Incorporate realistic resupply scenarios utilizing joint precision air drop system (JPADS) drops, unmanned aerial system (UAS) sorties, and pre-placed caches. Scenarios should require authentication procedures and strict pickup windows. Introduce potential failure modes, such as missed drops or jamming, to force teams to execute contingency plans.

Dispersed Operations and Command & Control: Advanced operations base (AOB) command and control architectures must be evaluated for their ability to effectively task and sustain dispersed elements for extended periods, utilizing deception, caches, auxiliary networks, and time-based logistics.

Embedding these challenging conditions in combined training center rotations at scale will align special operations training with the demands of modern large-scale combat operations and re-establish split-team proficiency as a core institutional competency within the Special Forces.

Conclusion: Shared Horizons- Partnered Sensing for Over-the-Horizon Reach

Institutionalizing split-team operations aligns Special Forces with this enduring logic: train it as the default, test it under denial at combined training center s, and resource it with the tools and authorities it requires. The payoff is units of action that can persist in the deep, remain below the enemy's detection thresholds, and deliver decisive effects for the conventional force in modern LSCO. Historical precedents and current battlefields alike confirm that well-trained small units, operating under mission command, can achieve decisive effects. By integrating the split-team concept into SF training and culture, the Army will cultivate leaders and units that are comfortable with autonomy and stealth in high-threat environments. Split teams will markedly

enhance the force's ability to operate in contested environments where large conventional force formations are constrained.

Leveraging our proven success in training allies and partners in Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency, Special Forces must now prioritize mastering split-team operations for deep reconnaissance. Developing this expertise will enable SF to expand its training to partners, thereby building a wider network of distributed sensors capable of operating in challenging environments and extending operational reach. This initiative will demonstrate SOF readiness and ability to integrate effectively with joint forces and indigenous partners. As the military faces the challenges of large-scale combat against near-peer adversaries, making "getting small" a core competency ensures that America's Special Forces remain a decisive strategic asset capable of outthinking and outmaneuvering the enemy when it matters most.

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On Leadership: 10 Rules of the Road from Senior Army Leaders

By Chief Warrant Officer 4 William Bryant

For the past three decades, the Army Values (**Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage**) have provided a constant guardrail for professional Soldiers as they navigate their careers. Yet, oftentimes we see Soldiers challenging, arguing against, or failing to adhere to these values in and out of uniform. Over the years, I've found that sticking to these precepts is often a recipe for a successful career. However, those who stray from the Army Values may need to reorient their compass and make a course correction, or they risk falling into legal, moral, or ethical problems.

I've been fortunate enough to have served alongside many excellent subordinates, peers, and superiors in the Army. Many of these outstanding Soldiers have imparted their wisdom and experience, from which I have collected 10 life lessons or "Rules of the Road." These rules serve as an additional set of tools that complement the Army Values.

This article presents the 10 rules as they have been compiled over the years, serving as a foundation of solid principles to help balance vision, drive, integrity, resilience, and humility. These rules act as a compass for anyone aspiring to lead, or just trying to be a better person. Each one is simple at face value, but profound in application:

1. Always look for the silver lining.

Setbacks are inevitable in life, but it is essential to always look for positive aspects among unfavorable situations. Good leaders understand that adversity may often reveal opportunities that are not readily visible. Conversely, negativity is like a cancerous tumor that grows and spreads throughout an organization. When you maintain a positive attitude and focus on what can be gained, you and your team will be better prepared to persevere, innovate, and overcome life’s challenges. This positive mindset transforms obstacles into stepping stones. Looking for the silver lining fosters resilience and builds a can-do attitude that keeps the individual or organization charging forward to mission accomplishment.

2. Bring hope.

Leadership is so much more than *leading*; leadership is about inspiring hope. Army leaders recognize that hope fuels morale and builds resilience. Hope adds to an individual's perseverance, which in turn uplifts their units by helping others see beyond immediate difficulties. Hope is contagious; it fosters determination and confidence, and it bolsters the efforts of change agents. Leaders who bring hope create psychological safety for their teams to thrive amid adversity.

3. If you set your bar high enough, success will find you.

When I was in high school, my best friend kept a poster of a Boeing 777 cockpit on the wall in his room. One of his life goals was to fly a 777, and he quickly earned his private, commercial, and airline transport pilot certificates as a young adult. It took decades of training and hard work before he was able to pilot a 777, but along the way he built a very successful career as an airline pilot with a major carrier. As an airline captain, he has logged thousands of hours of flight time. He is type-rated in multiple commercial jet aircraft, including Boeing and Airbus models. The point of this is that if you set and strive for high goals for yourself, don't be too disappointed if it takes a long time or you are unable to achieve them – you will gain a hell of a lot by just trying to reach those high goals. The more difficult the journey, the greater the reward.

4. Define what success means to you and adjust as necessary.

As a leader, you should be able to chart your own path, knowing what success looks like personally and professionally. And if you can't manage your own success, you probably aren't suited to guide and manage the achievements of others. Just like military planning, your own success should be planned with an end state or objectives in mind. Identify your goals and establish a desired state, regularly reevaluating these defined criteria in the midst of changing circumstances and new insights. Your path to success should include flexibility to account for branches (what if?) and sequels (what next?). This flexibility ensures that goals remain relevant and motivating, and it provides options as you navigate life's challenges.

5. Always have a plan (and a backup).

Good Soldiers understand the necessity of a PACE plan (primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency) for communication plans, medical coverage, etc. Just as with a solid PACE plan, you should have a plan and backup plans for every challenge or mission you undertake. Planning and preparation are crucial for achieving a challenging objective. When objectives or desired states are difficult to achieve, good leaders know that chaos is often the enemy of clarity. This chaos can be mitigated through meticulous planning, while also recognizing that plans are only as good as their flexibility (think, branches and sequels). That's why they always develop contingency plans—backup options that can be executed when the unexpected occurs. This readiness minimizes surprises and keeps things running smoothly, demonstrating that foresight

and adaptability are the hallmarks of a true leader.

6. Be a learner for life.

A commitment to learning enables leaders to remain adaptable and stay ahead of the curve. Being a lifelong student involves continued self-study, professional military education, training, and civilian education, as well as challenging your intellectual growth. Soldiers should strive to be perpetual learners; expertise is fleeting without continuous self-development. A lifelong learner will cultivate skills that empower themselves and others to achieve success through learning new technology, expanding strategic thinking, and developing emotional intelligence.

7. Don't stop yourself from trying (don't close the door on yourself / don't self-select).

Remember this: Others may be quick to close the door on you - don't ever close the door on yourself. Fear of failure or self-imposed limitations can be significant barriers to personal and professional growth. Great leaders never close the door on opportunities because of self-doubt or complacency. There is often great benefit in leaping into the unknown, where you can embrace uncertainty, take calculated risks, and learn from your mistakes. Know that true growth happens when you push yourself beyond your comfort zone, and a winning attitude can often turn setbacks into eventual triumphs.

8. Be a good dude / be a good person.

Army leadership is fundamentally rooted in the Army Values, and being a good person generally aligns you with those values. Being a good person builds trust and loyalty, and it helps keep your moral compass aligned. If you ever find yourself in need of a course correction, refer back to this rule. And remember this simple equation:

Trust + Credibility = Freedom of Maneuver (T + C = FoM).

9. Don't ever think that you've made it.

Brash, cocky, or arrogant attitudes are detrimental to unit cohesiveness (refer to a 2025 *Special Warfare Journal* article, “Perspectives from the Force: No More Hot-Dogging” which highlights Col. Charles Fry’s article on quiet professionalism). We've all experienced this behavior, whether in garrison, in the field, or in combat. For the most part, people do not appreciate this kind of behavior, and humility can go a long way in building trust. The moment you believe you've "arrived" is the moment you stop improving. Good leaders understand that there is always room for growth, and they focus on continuous self-assessment and feedback. Leaders who stay humble remain open to new ideas and are eager to learn and adapt.

10. If you hang out with dogs, don't be surprised if you catch fleas (you are who you associate with).

Misery loves company, and this is especially true with whom you choose to follow or hang around. If you associate with negative, dishonest, or toxic individuals, you will oftentimes be dragged down to their level. The solution is to surround yourself with positive, dedicated, and principled individuals who elevate your standards and integrity. Leadership reflects your environment; choose wisely with whom you associate, and don't be surprised when your influences shape your outcomes.

Conclusion

I compiled these 10 rules over the span of a quarter-century of service, drawing on the knowledge and experience of senior Army leaders. To those leaders: I offer my humble gratitude. To the readers who find this useful: Stay optimistic, define your success, plan meticulously, aim for victory, keep learning, embrace risks, act with integrity, stay humble, inspire hope, and surround yourself with the right people. The art of leadership can be a demanding yet profoundly rewarding endeavor. Lead with purpose and resilience, and you'll find that the road becomes clearer and your influence deeper.

Strength in Knowledge and Be All You Can Be.

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A Team Room Discussion on the SOF-Space-Cyber Triad

By Capt. Michael Lami and Capt. Brett Benedict

The Special Operations Forces (SOF)-Space-Cyber Triad marks a critical evolution in how U.S. Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) prepare for strategic competition, crisis, and conflict.[01] It is a practical concept that weaves space-based capabilities, cyber effects, and deep-sensing platforms into Detachment-level operations. The emphasis is not on developing bespoke technology for its own sake, but to extend the operational reach, survivability, and decision-making agility of forward Detachments. This is not a theoretical effort. Transformation is already underway across the force.[02]

Yet, whenever the Regiment evolves, we must also pause to ask why it is changing and toward what end. ARSOF's strength has always rested on its human-centric foundation, particularly its ability to conduct unconventional warfare at the ODA-level (Operational Detachment-Alpha) in its most basic, irreplaceable form.[03] The task is clear: pursue technological advancement without compromising the core activities that make ARSOF Detachments invaluable.[04]

The Wars We Imagine vs. The Wars We Keep Fighting

SOF-space-cyber convergence lies at the intersection of two contrasting yet influential views of modern warfare. Works like *Ghost Fleet* envision near-future wars dominated by satellite denial, devastating cyberattacks, artificial intelligence, and armed autonomous systems. Much of what these novels portray is already unfolding on the modern battlefield. Our adversaries share a similar vision–China invests heavily in "intelligentized warfare," combining artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and persistent sensing to achieve a decision advantage.[05] Meanwhile, Russia employs sophisticated hybrid approaches by integrating cyberwarfare, information operations, and proxies alongside conventional forces to blur the lines between peace and war.[06]

History, however, offers a sobering counterpoint. Drawing on nearly 600 cases of ground combat from 1942 to 2022, Ben Connable's *Ground Combat: Puncturing the Myths of Modern War* shows that modern conflict remains dominated by infantry, armor, and artillery.[07] Despite the appearance of "technological transformation," tactical outcomes continue to hinge on the same uncertain, friction-laden, and human-centric contests of will that have defined ground combat for generations.[08]

Regardless of how we envision the next fight, one truth remains: the contested spaces behind enemy lines where ARSOF Detachments must thrive have not disappeared. The deep fight has just become significantly more challenging due to advances in detection and sensing. However, persistent surveillance and full-spectrum sensing are not absolute. The idea that "if you turn something on, you're dead" has become a dangerous training maxim for Detachments that could have devastating implications if taken as an absolute truth. Even in places like Taiwan, neither China nor Russia can achieve perfect 24/7 satellite coverage.

ODAs must exploit maneuver windows in contested deep areas to enable the joint force; exquisite technology helps, but it will not do the job alone.[09] As innovation accelerates, Detachments now face a dilemma: modernize without overestimating technology's ability to solve the enduring human demands of special operations.

Technology, Modernization, and Risk Aversion

The Army Transformation Initiative recognizes that modern Detachments cannot simply bolt new capabilities onto existing problem sets.[10] They must fundamentally reshape how they analyze, decide, and act in contested environments. Technological integration positions SOF Detachments as critical nodes—bridges where advanced sensing, cyber effects, and space-enabled communications merge with ARSOF's traditional core tasks.[11]

However, modernization brings with it a temptation: risk aversion.[12] Military organizations often respond to new technology by investing in standoff capabilities that promise distance, precision, and control. While these tools provide real advantages, overreliance on them creates a false sense of security and risks distancing Detachments from the face-to-face engagement essential to unconventional warfare and strategic battlefield effects.

The more we rely on advanced systems that replace human presence, the more we potentially erode what sets ODAs apart: being human-forward, adept at navigating ambiguity, and lethal in the gaps and seams others ignore.[13] Detachments must not fall victim to overreliance on emerging technologies, both in training and operations. ARSOF's identity continues to reside in its unique ability to operate in politically sensitive and denied environments along the conflict continuum, moving deep behind enemy lines, working by, with, and through partner forces, and ensuring Commanders have options for joint forcible entries and deep fires.

Cutting-edge technology should enable calculated risk-taking, not risk avoidance. Detachments must continue to view standoff technology as one option in a larger toolkit, prioritizing ways of delivering lethal effects *alongside* our partner forces wherever possible.

Preserving Human-Centric Warfare at the Detachment Level

The challenge is immediate and practical. Detachments today already face zero-sum training decisions between emerging technological skills and fundamental human competencies. This

reality demands disciplined risk assumption: accepting that some training will be sacrificed to preserve lethality in the core activities that make ODAs unique. Commanders must not only prioritize training tasks but also explicitly communicate what will not be trained, based on comprehensive, threat-informed assessments of the current operational environment.

Detachments must accept less-than-perfect proficiency with emerging systems to preserve their comparative advantage. The alternative, which dilutes human-centric training to accommodate every technological advancement, represents far greater risk.

Building this proficiency requires immediate access to resources, infrastructure, and authorities for effective home-station training. Combat Training Centers (CTCs) are invaluable proving grounds for developing tactics, techniques, and procedures, and for integrating ARSOF detachments into large-scale combat operations. However, CTC rotations alone are insufficient.

To build lasting proficiency in space, cyber, and sensing integration, units of action urgently need persistent access to realistic scenarios and training environments at the local level. Equally important, they need ample opportunities to develop judgment about when these capabilities enhance mission success, and when they risk undermining trust and rapport with partner forces.

In resource-constrained environments, Detachments must find creative solutions to meet training objectives, ensuring that imperfect training environments are not the enemy of a good solution. Effective training requires disciplined experimentation and psychologically safe environments that reward calculated risk-taking as Detachments learn to exploit the gaps and seams of contested terrain.[14] Accordingly, the best reps are in home-station training with cutting-edge systems—building muscle memory and the judgment to employ them selectively. This also allows ODAs to balance their time and resources against other core tasks that make ARSOF unparalleled in lethality.

Rounds Complete

The SOF-Space-Cyber Triad is not a break from ARSOF's past. It is a necessary step in its evolution. Space, cyber, and deep sensing technologies expand the Regiment's reach, resilience, and decision advantage. However, they cannot replace the trust, adaptability, and cultural fluency that only ODAs provide. Preserving unconventional warfare as the Regiment's foundation ensures that technology enhances rather than erodes the human-centric values that make ARSOF unique.

Our advantage has never been tied to having the most sophisticated systems. It lies in our ability to operate in contact, adapt under pressure, and capitalize on opportunities others miss. ODAs must embrace technology as a tool that sharpens our edge, not one that redefines our identity.

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Military Culture Shift: The Impact of War, Money, and Generational Perspective on Morale, Retention, and Leadership

Reviewed by Command Sgt. Maj. Rodger M. Kissane

"It is far too easy to get lost in the responsibility of people management rather than the often-messy dynamics of leading and caring for people."
– Corie Weathers, LPC.

How often have you heard the phrase, "Today's generation is so different?"

With four generations of Americans serving across the joint force, a key challenge is the "messy dynamic" of leading and caring for them regardless of age, experience, or beliefs.

The presumption of significant generational variation has become a kind of folklore, providing a pretext for rationalizing communication difficulties between leaders and subordinates.
In *Military Culture Shift*, Corie Weathers asks us to consider how much more influential leaders might be if they asked rather than presumed; listening to what other generations think, bridging and even transcending generational differences.

In this remarkably well-researched, incisive book, Weathers argues that the armed forces are at a cultural inflection point. A licensed professional counselor and military spouse who has counseled and advised elements across the special operations enterprise, she points out the "wicked" problems created by 20 years of war. Among her most insightful observations is the recognition that each generation imprints itself on the institution in ways that reflect its life experiences. One of the "messy dynamics" leaders confront is synthesizing the various perspectives, ideals, and values into a cohesive whole for success. The generation that unlocks a door is not necessarily the same generation that walks through it.

Weathers shows the intergenerational dissonance associated with the pace of operations, the inherent stress of the profession, and the intricacy of military traditions. Though she recognizes that dissonance creates complex leadership challenges that have compounded over the last two

decades, Weathers' book is rooted in a profound sense of hope, grounded in inspirational stories from self-aware leaders she has met over 15 years of research. *Military Culture Shift* includes an extraordinarily useful tool: tips for engaging younger generations that emphasize transparency, authenticity, and empathy. Professionals in special operations forces (SOF) pride themselves on nurturing sincere relationships with partners; we should do the same with our troops.

Weathers also analyzes the challenges posed by cultural differences between service members, who view military service as a profession, and their families, who see it as a lifestyle and identity. SOF members and their families know better than most the rewards and costs of our profession, and Weathers speaks with empathy (and personal experience) to the challenge of perseverance military spouses face, given the unique relationships they have with both their service member spouse *and* with the service as an institution. Weathers celebrates their herculean efforts to improve military families' quality of life and the pride and pain they share throughout their military journey.

The first SOF Truth, "humans are more important than hardware," emphasizes SOF's number one primary advantage: our people. I recommend this book to any SOF leader looking to connect at a deeper level with both their multi-generational organizations and the support systems that keep them in the fight—their families. Weathers compels leaders to ask themselves if relationships are truly the priority within their formations and provides invaluable guidance for navigating those "messy dynamics of leading and caring for people."

Book Author's Note: Corie Weathers is a licensed mental health clinician, consultant, award-winning author, and sought-after speaker who has spent the last two decades specializing in motivations, cultural dynamics, and generational perspectives of military culture – particularly as it relates to war and global conflict. Focusing on the unique needs of this community, she uses a strengths-based approach to train teams in communication, conflict resolution, marriage enrichment, and multi-generational leadership development.

Book Reviewer's Note: Command Sgt. Maj. Rodger M. Kissane currently serves as a Battalion Command Sgt. Major in the U.S. Army. The views, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent the position of the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

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Call for Feedback: Help Shape the Future of Civil Affairs

By Lieutenant Colonel Colin Blair

Have you ever observed a capability gap and advocated for a change, only to see your thoughts and ideas go nowhere? All too often, units develop important insights from training events and generate extensive after-action reviews, only for these products to sit at the team or company level – of little to no use to the broader enterprise.

The Civil Affairs Proponent at the U.S. Army Special Operations Center of Excellence is rebooting its lessons learned program to better capture insights from the operational force! Your insights are critical to modernizing Civil Affairs doctrine, training, and capabilities to meet the demands of large-scale combat operations.

By sharing your hard-won lessons and experiences, you can help identify capability gaps, update doctrine and training, validate best practices, and help the Civil Affairs Proponent develop the branch as we adapt to an evolving operational environment.

In the past, lessons learned have helped to inform and define capability gaps within the branch, eventually leading to changes such as the introduction of the Civil Affairs task force unit of action, the transformation of Civil Affairs' core competencies, and the emphasis on the importance of civil knowledge over civil information. These changes improved and clarified the capabilities which Civil Affairs provides to supported units across the competition-crisis-conflict continuum.

What We're Looking For:

We want to hear about your experiences involving civil affairs forces, including:

- **Operational Lessons**: Insights from deployments, exercises, or training events.
- **Capability Gaps**: Areas where Civil Affairs forces lacked tools, training, or resources.
- **Best Practices**: Techniques that improved Civil Affairs effectiveness.
- **Emerging Trends**: Observations on how Civil Affairs forces must adapt to evolving environments.

How to Share Your Feedback:

Submit directly to the Special Operations Center of Excellence Civil Affairs Proponent.

--or--

Submit applicable lessons learned either to the Quick-Fire Application or the Joint Lessons Learned Information System (JLLIS).

The Civil Affairs Proponent's efforts will eventually merge into a larger Special Operations Center of Excellence lessons learned system to inform changes across doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy. This may provide other opportunities for the operational force to leverage their observations into improvements to the force.

Conclusion

Your voice matters. By sharing your lessons learned, you contribute to the readiness and effectiveness of Civil Affairs forces in addressing the problems of today and preparing for the challenges of tomorrow. Help us build a stronger, smarter, and more adaptable Civil Affairs force—submit your feedback today!

Author's Note: Lieutenant Colonel Colin Blair is an Active Guard Reserve Civil Affairs Officer leading the Doctrine Division of the Civil Affairs Proponent at the Special Operations Center of Excellence. He is a native of Anchorage, Alaska with over 15 years of service in the active and reserve components. The views, opinions, and analysis expressed do not represent the position of the U.S. Army or the Department of War.

Article Submissions

We want to hear from you!

The *SWJ* covers a broad range of topics of interest to the U.S. Army and the broader special operations community. It offers a platform for innovative ideas, emphasizing thought-provoking articles authored by knowledgeable writers. Its goal is to engage military professionals with accessible, enjoyable content that addresses significant issues in special operations and support to conventional forces.

We accept scholarly articles, perspectives, and book reviews for consideration.

Articles should be submitted as an attachment via email to specialwarfare@socom.mil from .mil or .gov accounts. The document must be submitted in Microsoft Word (Microsoft 365-compatible version).

Please see our full submission guidelines on our main website: https://www.swcs.mil/Special-Warfare-Journal/Article-Submissions/

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