

Joint Training Must Reflect Combat Realities

Gaps remain in the integration of special operators, conventional forces

by Maj. William J. Carty, USA

In recent conflicts, special operations and conventional forces relied heavily on increased cooperation and mutual support. Consequently, it may be time for the Joint Forces Command, the U.S. Special Operations Command and the services to consider changes in future training and planning, to better reflect present and future scenarios.

Previously, joint SOF and conventional forces planners properly focused on "deconfliction" of operations when needed. But combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrated that there was a great degree of SOF-conventional force integration at all levels as well.

The capstone manual for employment of SOF is Joint Pub 3-05, Doctrine for Special Operations Forces. It serves as the overarching reference for application of SOF capabilities. The newest edition of JP 3-05, released in December 2003, has gone a long way in addressing doctrinal shortcomings in the previous version, but areas in need of greater emphasis still remain, as well as means of implementation for planning and training considerations.

Joint Pub 3-05 states that, among other things, SOF missions are conducted independently or in conjunction with conventional forces. Also on this topic, JP 3-05 says special operations can be conducted in support of a conventional force's tactical objectives when doing so will be critical to the achievement of strategic or operational objectives by that conventional force.

Another change to the role of SOF in conflicts is the direct result of the September 11 attacks. SOCOM transformed from a supporting command to a supporting and supported command, with the commander of SOCOM now having full responsibility for the conduct of the global war on terrorism. Within this context, special operations are conducted as an independent campaign, as an overarching strategy incorporating the geographical combatant commander's individual theater campaign plan. However, doctrine for conventional force support to SOF, as conducted in Afghanistan, is lacking or non-existent.

Throughout Operation Enduring Freedom, assets from conventional forces that SOF traditionally would have played a supporting role to regularly supported SOF. Army forces were used to secure SOF bases, and a Navy aircraft carrier served in direct support of SOF operations. Special

Forces and Air Force SOF employed strategic and operational-level air assets in tactical roles. Rangers parachuted into objective Rhino long before the Marines occupied it as their base, and Army Special Forces seized the U.S. Embassy and used an Explosive Ordnance Disposal detachment from the Army 10th Mountain Division to clear it, prior to turning it over to the Marines.

Lessons learned from SOF actions in Afghanistan were applied in Iraq, parceling out large portions of the area of operations to SOF forces, but this time in support of the Combined Forces Land Component Command. Western Iraq fell almost exclusively to SOF, with SOF in the north again, working with indigenous forces to set conditions for introduction of conventional forces.

To facilitate these activities, SOF in theater is, by doctrine, placed under a joint force special operations component commander, or under a joint special operations task force. JP 3-05 details the various levels of liaison that SOF is responsible for to better employ SOF at all levels of command within the JTF. These include a

special operations coordination element to Army corps and Marine expeditionary forces, special operations command and control elements at the division level, and added liaison elements below these levels as necessary.

The purpose of these elements is to advise, deconflict and coordinate SOF activities with conventional forces command elements, and when necessary serve as a C2 element within the area of operations. JP 3-05 addresses liaison between SOF and conventional forces as a SOF responsibility at all levels, but has little information on reciprocal conventional liaison to SOF, which is needed when the supporting-supported roles are reversed as they were in OEF.

Current conventional service doctrine on employment of SOF is limited. The most significant problem is that the majority of doctrine and traditional planning has primarily focused on coordination and deconfliction of SOF and conventional assets. No official reference, traditional training, or formal planning framework exist that address true SOF and conventional

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Growth in Civil Affairs Units Will Continue

The U.S. Special Operations Command plans to continue the expansion of Civil Affairs units. The goal is to add more than 1,000 positions within the next two years.

Discussions also are under way between SOCOM and the Marine Corps concerning the possibility of creating new Marine Civil Affairs units. A Defense Department official told Nation-

al Defense that, so far, those are preliminary discussions only, and no firm plan is yet in place.

The U.S. Army Reserve added a Civil Affairs battalion in 2003, another battalion will come on board in 2004, to be followed by another in 2005. A combination of restructuring existing units and the addition of new Civil Affairs specialists will result in 1,140 new CA Reserve positions. There are about 6,000 CA soldiers in the Army, most of whom are in the Reserves and the National Guard.

There is one active duty CA battalion in SOCOM, based in Fort Bragg, N.C. With currently authorized 215 slots, the battalion is scheduled to grow to 410 positions by fiscal year 2009, the Defense Department official said. "A major restructuring is planned for the future," he said. By fiscal year 2011, the CA active component will have four battalions, and one brigade headquarters, for a total of 783 authorized positions. —Sandra I. Erwin



Officers from the U.S. Army 388th Civil Affairs Brigade work on a water well in Hardania, Iraq. (Army photo)

force integration within the theater in any significant detail. According to current doctrine, SOF and conventional forces operations are conducted primarily in parallel, but this is not how it is occurring today. Both doctrine and training need to reinforce what has been learned on the battlefield.

All over Iraq and Afghanistan, SOF and conventional force areas of operation are overlapping, if not identical. In routine operations, a common operating picture of the presence of SOF and conventional forces can prove very useful beyond just deconfliction and fratricide prevention. For instance, a SOF element confronted by an enemy threat that exceeds its capabilities could call upon a local conventional unit rather than call for its present headquarters for reinforcement. Correspondingly, a conventional unit that runs into problems as a result of a cultural or language barrier could call upon a local SOF element to help resolve the situation.

Augmentation for specific missions is also becoming more common in both directions. Without a doubt, the very best example of this is the efforts to capture all three Husseins in Iraq. In the attempted capture of Uday and Qusay Hussein in Mosul, the 101st Airborne provided the cordon force, while SOF initially served as the search force. In the capture of Saddam Hussein, the 4th ID provided the cordon force, and again the search force came from SOF.

The premise that SOF liaison is for deconfliction and coordination, and not integration, indicates that long-term integration of SOF and conventional forces below the JTF is not seriously considered an operational method. The lack of detailed discussion in conventional force manuals reinforces this shortfall, compounded by the assumption that SOF-conventional force liaison is a SOF responsibility.

A clear example of this disconnect is in the Army's newly published Stryker manuals where SOF liaison is stated specifically not to be for physical integration.

Recent examples of SOF and conventional force integration have met with success, but have not been without problems. Issues of organizational culture, lack of understanding of roles and capabilities, doctrinal shortcomings, and training deficiencies have created friction between SOF and conventional forces—resulting in failures to exploit potential, missed opportunities, and in some cases, fatal errors. Anyone who reads news articles or popular accounts of SOF in history will find that a gap, if not a chasm, can exist culturally between SOF and conventional forces. By their nature, the two are fundamentally different. As such, the communities of conventional and unconventional warriors view each other at times with unease, and in worst cases, disdain. However, in a world of scarce resources, cultures must adapt.

Manpower becomes a significant issue. SOF's small numbers and high degree of specialization

make it difficult to allocate internal resources for their own physical security. SOF elements find it necessary to locate within conventional force bases or use conventional forces for security purposes. This has created challenges. In one case, a conventional platoon was sent to secure the base of an Army Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha in Afghanistan. The ODA instructed the platoon that as part of the defense of the location, the platoon was to conduct local security patrols outside the perimeter, a requirement of this role. This proved completely unacceptable to the conventional unit's headquarters, and the patrols were discontinued. Another conventional force unit was sent to serve as the Quick Reaction Force for a SOF command element, but the release authority for the QRF was retained at the higher command of the conventional element, and not delegated to the SOF unit it supported.

There are times when SOF and conventional forces do not understand what the other does, and thus do not seek to communicate and integrate capabilities. After-action reviews from both Iraq and particularly Afghanistan indicate that had the conventional forces better understood SOF capabilities and employment considerations, they would have integrated them more and earlier.

The first step to fixing problems and capitalizing on successes lies simply in awareness. Joint Forces Command, SOCOM, and the services are aware of these issues and are seeking means to address them. However, traditional planning and employment for integration at the JTF level is no longer the reality. Training driven by the old doctrine of assumed separation of operations below the JTF level is not meeting the needs of current operations.

The issue of integration also stems from one of the greatest challenges confronting SOF—there just are not enough assets to meet all the demands.

SOF and conventional force integration is occurring in ways not seen before, yet is still not effectively addressed in doctrine. For that reason, the lessons learned from operations must be institutionalized. Situations where lack of knowledge resulted in less effective employment are not acceptable. On the job training and discovery learning while conducting operations is a worthy reflection of the services' agility and flexibility, but other mechanisms exist to better prepare commanders.

As most integration of SOF and conventional forces occurs within the land component, Marine, Army, and SOF training needs to incorporate instruction on this at all levels. Junior and mid-level Non-Commissioned Officer and Initial Officer Entry education courses should be teaching the basic capabilities and missions of SOF forces with whom they will interact on the battlefield. The Marine Amphibious Warfare School and Army Captains Career Courses, particularly in the combat arms, need to reinforce

this instruction and further discuss how units at their level may be employed in an integrated role with SOF. This instruction could be as little as an hour, reinforced with incorporation of SOF assets in practical planning exercises. The same holds true for instruction of SOF at this level at the Special Forces Course, Navy SEAL Course and AFSOC training of Special Tactics Squadron personnel.

Command and Staff Colleges should place greater emphasis on the role of integrated SOF employment not only at the JTF level, but examine employment options at lower echelons as well.

Beyond instruction, practical training also must take place. Brigade Combat Training Program exercises in the Army can incorporate aspects of these scenarios. Potential exists for full practical implementation of SOF and conventional forces at the Joint Readiness Training Center and the Army's National Training Center (which is moving towards becoming the Joint National Training Center).

With this greater knowledge of SOF units and procedures, conventional units could send liaisons to SOF command elements, lessening the burden on overstretched SOF elements. This would benefit the conventional force providing headquarters by having access to information and resources that they normally would not. When the idea of conventional forces sending liaisons to special operations forward bases was raised recently at the JFK Special Warfare Center, despite operational security considerations, the idea received wide acceptance. A possible solution to provide consolidated training for conventional force personnel designated as potential SOF liaisons is to have a course at the Joint Special Operations University, or taught by mobile joint training teams.

Integration of SOF and conventional forces is happening on the battlefield now. Changes in education and training are needed to reinforce the successes and mitigate shortcomings. The changing nature of conflict, limited resources, broad operational scope, and increased operational tempo require all assets be employed to the greatest effect and as efficiently as possible. More effective integration of SOF and conventional forces is a step towards this end. **ND**

This article was adapted from Army Maj. William J. Carty's essay "An Unconventional Look at Training and Education to Improve Conventional and SOF Integration." Carty is a student at the Naval War College, College of Naval Command and Staff.

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