Creating Requirements:
The Military, Civilians, and Preferences About the Uses of Special Operations Forces

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I. Introduction

The literature on American civil-military relations is biased to assume preference divergence between civilians and the military. There is a general consensus that civilians and the military are different creatures, shaped by different cultures, saddled with different functions, and possessed of different interests. Samuel Huntington set this expectation in 1957 in his extended exploration of the clash between military conservatism and civilian liberalism. Both democracy and military policy, he claims, are at their best when the two camps leave each other to their own jurisdictions.[1] Barry Posen, some 23 years later, observed that, "interpreting the external environment is the specialty of civilians. Building and operating military forces is the task of [military] services."[2]

Even those who have sought to refine or replace Huntington's theory of civil-military relations have tended to assume civil-military preference divergence is either natural or at least frequent, and that in any case the times when the relationship matters most is when the actors' preferences diverge. This is, in part, due to the normative character of civil-military relations theory. "In a democracy, civilians have the right to be wrong," as Peter Feaver argues.[3] Michael Desch explains this measure of civil-military relations most starkly: "The best indicator of the state of civilian control is who prevails when civilian and military preferences diverge. If the military does, there is a problem."[4]

Nevertheless, some analysts have argued that this formulation—assuming one side or the other must win a zero-sum strategic interaction—does not reflect the frequency of civil-military collaboration during policymaking. Christopher Gibson and Don Snider argue that because military advice plays a key role in policy formulation, and because so-called "issue networks" comprised of civilian and military actors with overlapping responsibilities are the ones actually employing preferences, expecting civilian preferences not to be at least partially conditioned on military preferences is unrealistic, and not necessarily problematic.[5] What matters is the relative influence of civilian and military preferences in the fray.

[1] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State (*Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957).

[2] Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 53.

[3] Peter Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 65.

[4] Michael C. Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military: The Changing Security Environment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 4. Desch credits Kenneth W. Kemp and Charles Hudlin, "Civil Supremacy over the Military: Its Nature and Limits, *Armed Forces and Society* 19, no. 1 (1992) with sharing this definition.

[5] Christopher Gibson and Don M. Snider, "Civil-Military Relations and the Potential to Influence." *Armed Forces and Society* 25(2) (Winter, 1999). The "issue network" concept was introduced by Hugh Heclo and adopted by Gibson and Snider for CMR analysis. "Issue networks refer to individuals tied together by mutual policy interests…

I investigate Gibson and Snider's assertion that, in the U.S. context, civilians and the military collaborate during the policymaking process. More specifically, I extend their argument by exploring the extent to which military preferences, both in frequency and importance, influence civilian preference formation. If it is true that military preferences shape civilian preferences frequently, then civilian control over policy is at best diluted, and at worst supplanted. Moreover, if such military influence is happening in ways previously invisible to scholarship, then judgments about instances where civilian preferences "prevailed" may be overdetermined or even incorrect.

This study proceeds in both deductive and inductive ways. From the literatures on civil-military relations and organizational culture, I deduce explanations of why and how the military would be incentivized and enabled to influence civilian preference formation. I then turn to an empirical case both to test these theoretical expectations and inductively indicate a fuller theoretical picture of the interactions between military and civilian preferences. I analyze the evidence for its consistency or inconsistency with the propositions I deduced from the literature, including through a brief exercise in counterfactual thinking. I end with a conclusion suggesting a few areas where more theorizing is needed. My aim is to reveal the deeper structures of power that have gone unnoticed by other models of civil-military interaction to show whose preferences really dominate, under what conditions, and the implications for U.S. civil-military relations and civilian control of the military.

II. Theory and Methods: Deducing the Sources of Civilian Preference

Although civil-military relations theory tends to emphasize the differences between the two groups, it does not always expect civilian and the military preferences to be far apart. Many theorists, in fact, highlight occasions where a sub-set of military officers and civilian policymakers converge on a preference. For some, this is a function of civilians working to impose their preferences on a recalcitrant military. Feaver claims that civilians sometimes promote officers "who hold preferences more similar to those of civilian principals," and Posen argues that civilians seek out "military mavericks" to gain leverage over service doctrine.[6]

Others see broader patterns of fragmentation. Using a structural model to explain variation in civilian control, Desch argues that under conditions of low internal and external threat to the state, any conflict between civilians and the military "is likely to be one of coordination rather than insubordination, because not only will the military, the state, and society be divided from one another, but they will also be divided internally. This means that many conflicts will pit one civilian-military coalition against another."[7] Under conditions of strategic ambiguity, reasonable people may disagree with their own institutions about the purpose of various military capabilities and the use of force more generally. Like-minded people across government will then seek each other out. Using their issue network formulation, Gibson and Snider identify these civil-military coalitions as an important arbiter of preferences because they, "facilitate the necessary exchange and critique of ideas requisite to consensus decisions."[8] Together, their article and Desch's book represent a key debate among civil-military relations

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whose backgrounds, common values, orientations, and world views… facilitate the necessary exchange and critique of ideas requisite to consensus decisions."

[6] Feaver, 59; Posen, 142; 175.

[7] Desch, 16-17.

[8] Gibson and Snider, 196.

scholars as well as international relations theory more generally: the relative importance of structural and cultural-behavioral factors in competitions among preferences.

Typically, this debate revolves more precisely around explanations of choice (or policy or military doctrine) rather than preference. Choices are seen as outcomes, and outcomes are important things to explain and predict. But the civil-military relations literature itself identifies preference divergence and prevalence as a critical unit of analysis. It is therefore important to understand where these preferences come from—particularly if it is reasonable to suspect that civilians and the military share preferences to an extent that makes either civil-military relations or our understanding of it problematic.

What expectations do these two approaches—structural and cultural-behavioral—generate about the sources of preferences? Structuralists, generally coming from a rational-choice perspective, tend to view preferences as exogenously given by the environment or structure of a situation. Such preferences are fixed until the structure of the environment changes. In Desch's formulation, the "severity" of the threat posed by the structure of the international security environment makes preferences more or less fixed. In cases of "indeterminate structure", Desch allows that internal factors like organizational culture or, especially, military doctrine will play a larger role in civil-military preferences. Barry Posen, in his classic examination of the sources of European military doctrine, takes a similar approach and finds that while domestic determinants of doctrine were powerful during peacetime, international determinants overrode domestic organizational concerns in wartime.[9]

In contrast, others who study organizational culture and behavioral factors believe they play a key role in interpreting external pressures. Moreover, they claim that preferences are endogenous to the state and to organizations themselves—and as such, can vary or even be ambiguous to the actors holding them. An organization's culture relies on its values and general preferences to interpret material facts for actors, further shaping their preferences about specific events or pressures. Both Jeff Legro and Jack Snyder explore organizational culture's capacity to shape cognition, acting as a "heuristic for collective perception and calculation."[10] As Elizabeth Kier explains, "culture has an independent causal role in the formation of preferences."[11] Because states consist of multiple organizations with multiple cultures there are multiple preferences internal to them that must be selected among for a state to establish policy and take unified action.

There are two limitations to the organizational cultural approach, however. The first is that military and civilian organizations in government are not only different in function, but differential in their cohesion. Deborah Avant calls such cohesion "integrity," which is akin to professionalism: a set of standards and practices that distinguish members of the organization not only by membership and identity, but also by skills and knowledge.[12] Avant argues that the more integrity an organization has, the greater its ability to articulate preferences. This could suggest that professional military organizations have a clearer sense of their preferences than civilians do as a group—or at least that there may be greater variation among civilian groups in terms of

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[9] Posen, 1984.

[10] Jeff Legro, "Culture and Preferences in the International Cooperation Two-Step." The American Political Science Review, 90(1) (March, 1996): 121; Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

[11] Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 5.

[12] Deborah Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change: Lessons from Peripheral Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 12.

preference certainty. One logical inference of asymmetry in clarity of preferences is that the group with clearer preferences is able to prevail over the group with ambiguous preferences.

This leads to the second limitation of the organizational approach, which is that just because different organizational cultures generate different preferences, we still do not know how preferences interact in the process of policymaking. What is needed is an understanding of why one organization's preferences might overtake another's. For that, civil-military relations and IR scholars offer a variety of explanations. Jeff Legro proposes the concept of "organizational salience" in which one organization's views are valued over others as a result of its expertise; the complexity of the issue at hand; and the time available for action.[13] Legro's argument suggests that there are both incentives and mechanisms whereby actors can shape each other's preferences alongside cultural determinants. Christopher Gibson and Don Snider attempt to show such persuasion at work. Drawing on data from the U.S. between the 1960s and mid-1990s, they chart a relative increase in military competence over politics coupled with a relative decline of civilian expertise in military matters and experience in government generally. At the same time, they argue, years of working together has developed trust relationships between civilian and military groups. The combination of mutual trust and asymmetric expertise allows the military to make convincing arguments to civilian policymakers. Although their empirical data and models are limited to issue networks within the DoD, the logic of their findings could extend more broadly to any group of civilians who frequently encounter military institutional actors.

These models shed light on the substantive exchange between policy-motivated actors, but they also somewhat neglect the role that power plays in such exchanges. Risa Brooks explores how preference divergence and the balance of power between civilians and the military generate incentives for each group to influence decision processes and, therefore, outcomes. In particular, the more connected the military is to powerful groups in society that might affect politicians' political power, the more leverage the military has over civilian choice. "A leader who relies on military support faces significant pressure to defer to military leaders in disputes over substantive policies."[14] Brooks' argument, much like Legro's, does not posit that these same incentives might drive the military to try to influence civilians' preferences directly, but her logic opens avenues for the idea.

New institutionalists like Deborah Avant and Amy Zegart share this focus on the balance of internal power. Bridging the structural-cultural explanatory divide these scholars rely on rational choice and structures but also see organizations (institutions) as the major drivers of action. Focusing on civil-military relations, Avant and Zegart provide a series of insights that explain why these actors might want to or may just happen to influence not only each other's ultimate choices, but the preferences that inform those choices. In her exploration of the origins of national security institutions in the U.S, Amy Zegart observes that the "bureaucratic interconnectedness" of such institutions motivates actors to care about what others are doing and even seek to influence each other.[15] Zegart shares Legro's and Gibson and Snider's attention the role of information and expertise. But Zegart argues that these things are resources that give actors power, not just logic, and they win interagency political battles as well as arguments. In

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[13] Legro, 1996.

[14] Risa Brooks, *Shaping Strategy: The Civil-Military Politics of Strategic Assessment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 28.

[15] Amy Zegart, *Flawed by Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 38.

particular, she notes the paucity of outside interest groups on foreign policy issues as well as the tendency for classification to bar civilians from information. These informational factors suppress civilian expertise, deprive the Congress of independent sources of information on national security affairs, and relax political pressures on the president regarding national security policy. Zegart uses these facts to show how institutional design for national security is unrelated to function, and instead is related to internal political interests.

To Avant, political pressures are the key variable at work and in fact set up an alternative explanation for cases of civil-military preference convergence. It may not be that the military has succeeded in persuading civilians to share military preferences. It may be that the military has learned to anticipate what civilians want. Moreover, civilians may have shaped the military's preferences by shaping their institutions. Such "long-term patterns of civilian authority" can determine "an organization's automatic response to a new situation."[16] Yet these patterns of civilian authority will, in turn, be affected by the structure of civilian institutions of government. In particular, the U.S. model of divided government weakens civilian unity and clarity of preferences. To overcome such weakness, the best a government can do is tinker with its oversight mechanisms. But here, we revert to the problems civilians have in terms of expertise and information, as well as Avant's own concept of organizational integrity, which military institutions tend to possess in greater measure than civilians.

Structural incentives, cultural indoctrination, and the desire for power are thus the three major explanations for how preferences develop and interact. One array of explanations suggests that military organizations have incentives to persuade civilians to share their preferences, and some even suggest that coalitions of civilians and the military may come to share values and thereby preferences. Another school believes civilians may wax and wane in their interventions in military behavior, but they maintain their own unique preferences and are unaffected by military political power or argumentation (and the military may also continue to hold distinct preferences but follow civilian direction anyway). Still a third argument says that civilians shape military preferences long before decision points arise by shaping the institutions in which the military lives.

In a healthy democracy, only the first scenario is an obvious problem for civilian control of the military. But there are also problems with the other two. First, variation in civilian attention to military matters can and, given the array of issues facing policymakers, generally must be the mode of civilian oversight. However, lack of attention drives down expertise and experience, likely weakening the integrity of civilian preference and putting civilians at a disadvantage when they reengage in military matters once again. Moreover, in cases of national emergency, civilians might develop preferences rapidly and muster all their power to force military adjustments, but in more day-to-day scenarios, or conditions of slow change to the strategic landscape, civilian preference ambiguity could be a major liability. Second, although institutions will dictate general preferences for those actors inhabiting them as well as ways of interpreting the security environment, that is no guarantee of specific preferences, especially not if preferences are continually evolving based on more-recent pressures—including the military's own desire for power. It seems more likely that preference formation is dynamic and iterative rather than a one-shot game.

It is therefore important to test the record of civil-military preference formation for military influence. To do so, I draw a series of four assumptions and four testable propositions from the CMR, organizational culture, and new institutionalist literatures as follows:

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[16] Avant, 12-13.

Assumptions

1. Preferences are endogenous and variable, which means civilian and/or military preferences should change even when the external security environment has not changed. Because preferences are mutable, they can be altered after their formation by further social interactions.
2. Institutional unity around preferences affects the weight those preferences have in policymaking and when interacting with other preferences. The disparate organization of the civilians in the U.S. government and political system reduces civilian unity over preferences and positions military institutions and actors to shape civilian preferences.
3. If civilian and military actors share an organizational culture and/or values, they are more likely to share preferences. In forming coalitions (issue networks), civilians and military actors may come to share the values and preferences of the institution with the greatest unity of preference.
4. The more expertise and information the military has relative to civilians, the greater the likelihood that civilian preferences will rely on military preferences. Similarly, the greater the secrecy (classification) surrounding a military capability, the more dependent civilian preferences will be on military preferences.

Propositions

Existing Theoretical Proposition	Derived Proposition, *Test*
1. On average, civilian and military preferences are different and derived from different sources.	1. Civilians frequently base their preferences on military preferences. *Do civilians get their preferences from places other than the military?*
2. The external threat environment makes civilians work to impose their preferences on the military for reasons of national survival.	2. The external environment makes civilians defer to military preferences for the sake of expediency in pursuit of national survival. *Under conditions of external pressure, do civilians challenge military preferences?*
3. The internal political environment incentivizes civilians and the military to influence policy decision processes and outcomes.	3. The internal political environment incentivizes the military to influence civilian preferences. *Did military actors avoid or not have the opportunity to influence civilian preferences?*
4. Civilian preferences are often formed by mixed civil-military issue networks.	4. Civil-military coalitions are the main source of civil-military preference consensus. *In cases of civil-military consensus, were there sources of consensus other than coalition socialization/interaction?*

To test these propositions, I draw from a universe of cases regarding emerging military capabilities. I chose military capabilities for the same reason that Posen selects military doctrine: They are a major site of political-military strategic integration. What civilians and the military prefer capabilities should be "for" in a strategic sense is both important and provides scenarios of civil-military preference interaction. I focus on new, or emerging, capabilities because it provides a chance to see the early formation of preferences over a particular defense issue and because it also expands the empirical evidence beyond crisis moments and the actual use of force to more quotidian civil-military preference interactions. Moreover, debates over the purpose of military capabilities and the preferences that emerge from such debates likely inform the crisis events that much of the civil-military relations literatures uses to examine whether civilian or military preferences tend to prevail.

In this chapter, I provide a detailed case study of how military and civilian preferences for the strategic use of special operations forces (SOF) evolved and interacted from 1977 to 2010. This time frame spans the Cold War and the pre-and post-9/11 period of American history, and therefore allows me to examine the effects of variation in both the external and internal domestic environments. The sources I rely on are largely documentation in the form of primary government documents, news accounts, histories, and memoirs. I have also conducted a handful

of interviews with civilian government officials to validate and nuance the document-based findings.

III. Case Study: U.S. Special Operations Forces, 1977-2010

This case study of Special Operations Forces (SOF) capabilities from 1977 to 2010 shows that the military's preferences were a necessary condition for shaping civilian preferences at every point in the preference formation process. Military preferences were not the sole—or even always the dispositive—determinant of civilian preferences, however, as the external security environment and operational failures also played major roles in civilians' perceptions of SOF's utility. Yet even where other factors shaped civilian preferences about SOF, military actors frequently mediated the effects of those factors by interpreting the strategic meaning of important events for civilian policymakers. Civilians almost never developed preferences about SOF without military preferences conditioning them to an important extent.

There were two major, interrelated reasons for this outcome. First, on average civilians were inattentive to SOF. For much of the case, SOF and the kinds of missions they traditionally performed were minor considerations in the contexts of defense strategy and budgeting. Civilians, especially at the elite levels, simply did not develop much expertise on special operations. For a period of more than 20 years, SOF were the only institutional actors applying sustained attention to SOF capabilities, making strategic and organizational adjustments to SOF in light of the international environment and military operations. Second, civilian inattention gave the military autonomy over SOF capabilities development.[17] This meant that military institutions also had the time and space to define SOF's strategic purpose and to supply those answers to under-informed civilians when they were ready to form preferences. By the time civilians truly turned their collective gaze to SOF and its purpose after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, SOF institutional actors—in particular, the Joint Special Operations Command—had spent years shaping strategic assumptions and matching SOF's capabilities with those assumptions, and were ready to focus themselves on direct action and counterterrorism missions on terms they themselves had defined. And civilians agreed.

These two conditions meant that military institutional processes drove debate about SOF's purposes and provided most of the information available in the defense market of ideas. Much of the clash of preferences the civil-military relations literature often expects to see between the military and civilians in fact happened between military institutions, in this case between special operators and the conventional force. Civilians chose positions in the debate according to terms defined by military institutions. In a sense, the military conducted the debate over SOF's strategic purpose for civilians, leaving policymakers to adjudicate among military preferences rather than truly form their own.

This case study is presented in five parts. First, I define "SOF" and explore why they provide an excellent case of an emerging capability to examine the relationship between military and civilian preferences. Next, I outline the overall history of the case, the key institutional

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[17] In some cases, as Avant argues, civilian inactivity does not necessarily indicate that civilians do not have preferences about military policy but may instead be happy with what the military is doing. I am skeptical of this possibility in this case because SOF were, at this juncture, a vestige of both WWII and the Vietnam war rather than military organizations civilians had demonstrated proactive interest in preserving or reconstituting. Moreover, even if civilians had some kind of preference about SOF, their inattention suggests that preference was not strong or consolidated.

actors, and the congruence of military and civilian preferences for the use of SOF over time. Third, I dive deeper into the history, tracing the processes by which military and civilian preferences interact within three distinct and important case periods, bounded by key inflection points. Within the three periods I examine how the international security environment and operational experiences affected the bivariate relationship between those preferences. Fourth, I explore counterfactuals to test the strength of the association between military and civilian preferences. Finally, I re-examine the case as a whole and provide conclusions about the relationship and the mechanisms that generated the preferences for SOF obtained by the end of the case.

Definitions and Case Justification

What are SOF, and what makes them a relevant and useful case study to examine the relationship between military and civilian preferences?

"SOF" is a comprehensive reference to every military service's forces in both the active and reserve components that are organized, trained, and equipped to conduct or support special operations. Each service designates its own special operations capable units. SOF comprise the Army's Rangers, Special Forces, Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations, and the Special Operations Aviation Regiment (160th SOAR). In the Navy, the Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) units and Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewmen (SWCCs) are designated SOF. The Air Forces has special operations wings and groups, while the Marines have the Raiders, organized into three battalions. Special Mission Units organized under Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) have personnel from all four services.

SOF have always, in an idealized, doctrinal sense, offered a range of capabilities to strategic leaders. The common elements of SOF capabilities are: limited and precise use of lethal force in extremely hostile environments that pose a high risk of casualties; secrecy and deniability; and performing typically civilian institutional functions in dangerous conflict or post-conflict environments. These capabilities span what defense practitioners call the phases of conflict from peace to war to post-conflict reconstruction. Because of their broad applications, SOF's expertise sometimes approaches that of the conventional forces—to such an extent that defining SOF clearly in purely technical terms is difficult, and cultural and other contextual differences are often invoked to underscore the distinction. SOF are more independent, often termed as more flexible and risk-tolerant than the general purpose force (GPF), and therefore more useful in ambiguous or politically sensitive situations. SOF often do not perform tasks all that distinct from conventional forces' skills—or indeed, intelligence operatives'—but they perform them in distinct combinations and particular legal and political circumstances.

SOF's fundamentally ambiguous description means that their purpose has been subject to interpretation and debate over time as external events and internal politics (both partisan and bureaucratic) changed. As the historian Mark Moyar has observed, "Special operations lack a realm upon which they can lay indisputable claim. The roles and missions of special operations forces have changed frequently, based on the perceptions of political and military leaders of the tactical and strategic environments."[18]

This variation in roles over time makes the SOF case study particularly fertile for my research here, as do other factors. Although U.S. SOF were first established during World War Two and enjoyed a renaissance during the Vietnam War, by the mid-1970s their size and

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[18] Mark Moyar, *Oppose Any Foe: The Rise of America's Special Operations Forces* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), xvii.

relevance to national defense strategy were at bare minimums, making SOF a capability that could be reinvented by military institutions and a fresh consideration for many civilian defense practitioners, if not actually new. SOF involve all four military services, the Combatant Commands, and the Joint Staff and the time period I have chosen spans changes in the external security environment as well and the internal domestic political environment (including Democratic and Republican presidential administrations and control of Congress). Finally, there was measurable debate and changes in preferences as to SOF's purpose over time, supplying the variance in the variables I need to observe relationships. Of note, civilian and military preferences about the purpose of SOF are what are being examined, but I will also refer to SOF as a military institutional actor that itself has preferences about its purpose and is involved in the preference formation processes under study.

SOF 1977-2010: Key Events, Actors, Preferences

<u>Key Events</u>
This case study spans three strategically distinct decades: the end of the Cold War in the 1980s, the post-Cold War period of the 1990s, and the U.S. global counterterrorism campaign in the 2000s. It begins with SOF's organizational irrelevance and ends with its strategic predominance. SOF's missions over the entire period always included a mix of warfighting, direct action, counterinsurgency, psychological operations, and civil affairs. But its strategic emphasis changed from a kind of Swiss Army knife for discrete and non-kinetic tasks to direct action counterterrorism (and intelligence-gathering to support that primary mission).

The contrast between SOF's small force structure and low operational tempo in 1977 and their size and high operational tempo in 2010 is also stark. In terms of its organizational heft, SOF experienced steady growth throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and then a rapid expansion after September 11, 2001. In 1979, the Army, whose special operations force dwarfed those of the other services, had only 3,600 personnel "assigned to active duty Special Forces units."[19] By 1996, total numbers of Army SOF were "approximately 10,000."[20] By 2012, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command had 28,500 personnel.[21] In 1992, the USSOCOM posture statement for Congress claimed that 46,000 active and reserve personnel were special operators, and that some 2,000 of them were deployed to 20 countries on any given day. The statement requested approximately $3 billion for SOF in fiscal year 1993.[22] The number of forces then dipped at the end of the 1990s, but the deployment rates increased, and the budget level held. Then came 9/11. The Government Accountability Office found that in 2001, there were 42,800 "authorized military positions" for SOF with an annual budget of $3.1 billion and an average of 2,900 personnel deployed a week. By 2014, there were 62,800 authorized military positions (a 47% increase), a $9.8 billion budget (a 213% increase), and 7,200 personnel deployed per week (a 148% increase).[23] Given these personnel, deployment, and budgetary trend lines, it is clear

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[19] Susan Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding U.S. Special Operations* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997), 4.
[20] Colonel Rod Lenahan, *Crippled Eagle: A Historical Perspective of U.S. Special Operations, 1976-1996* (Charleston, SC: Narwhal Press, 1998), 217.
[21] U.S. Special Operations Command, "Factbook 2012."
[22] U.S. Special Operations Forces 1992 Posture Statement, 5. [Currently only on Google Books, Lenny Seigel]
[23] Government Accountability Office, *Special Operations Forces: Opportunities Exist to Improve Transparency of Funding and Assess Potential to Lessen Some Deployments* (Washington, DC: GPO, July 2015) Report 15-571, 14.

that over time the national command authority found SOF more and more useful in more and more places.

A series of events and operations marked SOF's path from irrelevance to significance. At the beginning of 1977, SOF were at an organizational and budgetary nadir. Each service SOF element struggled to justify its existence in its own parochial context.[24] The Marines had done away with their Raider SOF units. The Air Force special operators, organized around platforms that were being decommissioned or repurposed, were near extinction themselves. The Navy's Sea Air Land (SEAL) units survived by attaching themselves to conventional fleet operations and plans.

Then there was the Army. The Army had also shrunk its Special Forces as Vietnam wound down, but then in the mid-1970s resurrected the 1st and 2nd Ranger battalions to ensure capabilities for hostage rescue, raids, and the ability to secure American embassies.[25] Then, in 1977, the Army established Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta modeled off of the British Special Air Service.[26] After two years of training, Delta got their first real-world mission: an attempt to rescue the hostages in the U.S. embassy in Tehran, Iran.

On November 4, 1979, Iranian students overran the embassy and took most of the Americans—including the Marine security guards—hostage. Persistent diplomatic failures convinced the Carter administration to review options for a military operation to rescue the hostages. Operation Eagle Claw unfolded into a now-infamous disaster.[27] The operation involved Delta Force, Rangers, Air Force long-range transport and gunship aircraft, and Navy helicopters piloted by Marines because Naval aviators were not trained to fly long distances overland.[28] After two of the eight mission helicopters malfunctioned en-route to the first rally point inside Iran and then a third on the ground experienced more mechanical difficulties, the ground commander recommended—and the White House agreed—that the mission be called off. But during the attempt to withdraw the five helicopters and various personnel from the overcrowded airfield, one of the helicopter pilots became disoriented and crashed into one of the fuel-filled C-130 transport aircraft. The two exploded into fire, killing 8 personnel and severely burning others. The task force abandoned the remaining helicopters and evacuated from Iran.[29] The subsequent global news coverage was a major embarrassment for SOF, the Pentagon, and the Carter administration.

A review of the failures that led to the disaster eventually resulted in the creation of a new SOF organization gathering up units from the Army, Navy, and Air Force: The Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). Also partly in response to the disaster in Iran, in 1982 the Army once again expanded its SOF organizational capacity by standing up its own Special Operations Command.[30]

There are also narratives that the chaos was somewhat intentional, given that the services prioritized playing a role in the mission over the operational coherence of the force packages.

[24] Marquis, 1997.

[25] Moyar, 158.

[26] Charlie A. Beckwith and Donald Knox, *Delta Force* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1983); See also: Moyar, 159.

[27] For an excellent tactical breakdown of the plan and the numerous equipment failures that occurred during the mission's curtailed execution, see J. Paul de B. Taillon, *The Evolution of Special Forces in Counter-Terrorism: The British and American Experiences* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001).

[28] Moyar, 167 and Sean Naylor, *Relentless Strike: The Secret History of Joint Special Operations Command* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015), 4.

[29] Moyar, 167.

[30] U.S. Special Operations Command, *2007 Command History*, 5.

In the fall of 1983, these new SOF organizational units were tested in the invasion of Grenada. A coup on the tiny island nation had launched a Marxist regime, and the Reagan administration wanted it out. Operation Urgent Fury was a mix of conventional and special missions, conducted with poor intelligence, little reconnaissance, and poor joint communications. Despite JSOC's achievements in joint operations among SOF, the special operators were not integrated with the conventional force. JSOC was given the lead for the operation and then, toward the very end of planning, forced to cede it to the Marine Corps. Although JSOC's approach involved launching operations at night, the Marines were accustomed to daylight operations, and so shifted the start time to dawn.[31] Things deteriorated from there. Operation Urgent Fury was a mess of poorly coordinated conventional and special operations forces. 19 Americans died, 13 of them SOF. Losses of SOF operators were disproportionately large.[32]

Concurrent with the invasion of Grenada, spectacular incidents of terrorism and hostage-taking proliferated. The first such event was the April 1983 suicide bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, which killed 17 Americans, and 63 people in total. Some six months later, a more famous attack on the Marine barracks in Beirut killed 242 Marines and Naval personnel.[33] In June of 1985, Lebanese terrorists hijacked a Trans World Airlines plane. The crisis lasted 16 days, and although JSOC deployed a task force to a nearby staging area, decision-makers never authorized it to launch a rescue operation.[34] Four months later, terrorists from the Palestinian Liberation Organization hijacked a cruise ship, the Achille Lauro. Yet again, JSOC was deployed to a staging area to conduct a hostage rescue operation; yet again, the mission was never launched and the crisis came to an end without the use of military force.[35]

Meanwhile, Congress had begun working on what would eventually become the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Three years prior to the passage of that law the Senate Armed Services Committee launched a comprehensive study of DoD's organization. Members and staffers on the House side of the Hill also turned their attention to DoD reforms, including for SOF. DoD resisted calls for change but made some attempts to acknowledge Congressional frustrations that SOF were underfunded and poorly coordinated, most notably by establishing a Joint Special Operations Agency (JSOA) in 1984, housed within the Joint Staff—an organization stillborn by a lack of operational and budgetary authority.[36]

Although SOF reforms were not included in the final Goldwater-Nichols legislation, an amendment to the 1987 National Defense Authorization Act a year later established Special Operations Command (SOCOM), a new unified combatant command for SOF; a new Assistant Secretariat for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (ASD SO/LIC); and a separate budget program for SOF run by SOCOM called Major Force Program-11 (MFP-11). JSOC remained intact but was subordinate to SOCOM.

One of SOF's first opportunities to demonstrate whether the cumulative reforms of the 1980s would translate into operational performance was 1989's Operation Just Cause, the invasion of Panama. Although not without its own missteps, the operation was generally considered a success, and SOF were much better integrated with the conventional forces than

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[31] Naylor, 24.

[32] Marquis, 105.

[33] David C. Wills, *The First War on Terrorism: Counter-Terrorism Policy During the Reagan Administration* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 55, 62.

[34] Naylor, 31-33.

[35] Naylor, 37-38.

[36] SOCOM History 2007, 5.

had been the case in Grenada just six years prior.[37] Little more than a year later, however, SOF struggled to be included in the Gulf War. Only late in the planning stages were they assigned the "scud-hunting" task along with some reconnaissance missions.[38] Psychological Operations forces also conducted campaigns to "loosen the Iraqi resolve to fight."[39]

By this time, the Cold War had come to an end, and a range of regional and state-level political crises erupted around the world. One of the H. W. Bush administration's last major defense policy choices was to send a contingent of forces to support the United Nation's (UN) efforts in the collapsed state of Somalia. The Clinton administration inherited Operation Restore Hope, which, by the fall of 1993, had been largely successful at responding to the famine in Somalia. But after a Pakistani peacekeeping unit suffered 24 casualties at the hands of warlord Mohamad Farah Aideed's militants, Admiral Jonathan Howe—occupying a strange position as the UN Secretary General's representative but also the nominal head of the U.S. contingent—requested a Delta Force detachment in order to capture or kill him.[40] In October, Task Force Ranger, a mix of Delta and Rangers, launched the assault to capture Aideed. The operation ended in calamity as a Black Hawk helicopter was shot out of the sky, precipitating a two-day urban battle between U.S. forces and Somalis that left 18 Rangers and perhaps over 1,000 Somalis dead.[41] Internationally broadcast footage of the carnage included images of an American soldiers' body being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. Members of Congress called for investigations into the incident, and Secretary of Defense Les Aspin ultimately resigned due to the controversy.[42]

Almost simultaneously, the Clinton administration was also responding to an unfolding crisis on the island nation of Haiti. A military coup had overthrown the democratically-elected government, and Clinton was threatening invasion if the junta did not return power to the ousted leader. A plan involving heavy SOF contributions "similar to what SOF had done for the invasion of Panama in 1989" was set to launch in September of 1994 when the Haitian military relented.[43] The invasion was converted to a stabilization and peace enforcement mission, Operation Uphold Democracy, and SOF's contributions went from a planned assault force to civil affairs and psychological operations. SOF remained in Haiti until March of 1995.

The breakup of the former Yugoslavia also occasioned the use of SOF. The bulk of SOF missions involved combat search and rescue during NATO air operations, tactical air mobility, and PSYOPS and CA, both in Bosnia and later in Kosovo.[44] JSOC's most notable mission during the second term of the Clinton administration was a series of "snatch-and-grab" operations to apprehend suspected war criminals after the wars in the Balkan states.[45] Meanwhile, global terrorism reemerged as a feature of the international security environment thanks to a budding organization called al Qaeda. In 1993, a truck bomb in the World Trade

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[37] SOCOM History 2007, 44; Tom Clancy with Carl Steiner and Tony Koltz, *Shadow Warriors: Inside the Special Forces* (New York: Berkley Books, 2002), 391-393.

[38] Moyar, 187.

[39] Clancy, 425.

[40] Richard Sale, *Clinton's Secret Wars: The Evolution of a Commander in Chief* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009), 82.

[41] SOCOM History 2007, 56-59.

[42] David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001).

[43] SOCOM History 2007, 61.

[44] SOCOM History 2007, 64-69.

[45] Naylor, 2015.

Center in New York killed six people. In 1996, nineteen Americans died in a bombing at the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia. In 1998, simultaneous bombings at the American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania killed 213 people and injured more than 4,000.[46] Despite debating SOF-led counterterrorism operations against senior al Qaeda leaders, including Osama bin Laden himself, SOF were never deployed on such a mission, and instead the Clinton administration conducted air strikes on suspected al Qaeda locations in Sudan and Afghanistan.

SOF forces were thus still focused on apprehending war criminals in the Balkans when the attacks of 9/11 occurred. On September 11, 2001, 19 hijackers flew commercial airliners into both World Trade Center towers in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington, DC, and failed to hit a third target when the passengers on a fourth plane overtook the hijackers and crashed it into a field in Pennsylvania. Tracing the attack to al Qaeda, and knowing that Afghanistan harbored bin Laden, the Bush administration demanded that the ruling Taliban regime turn bin Laden over to the United States. The Taliban refused, and within a month, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan with a vanguard force of SOF (particularly JSOC elements) and CIA paramilitary forces operating alongside Afghan insurgents. Conventional forces followed to prevent the Taliban from recapturing the government and to provide security for the population and political processes. SOF remained in Afghanistan to hunt Bin Laden and other members of al Qaeda, and to conduct strikes against the Taliban.

Just 18 months after the Afghanistan invasion, under the pretext that Saddam Hussein had links to al Qaeda and was hiding weapons of mass destruction, the Bush administration invaded Iraq, with SOF heavily involved in the invasion and efforts to defeat the subsequent insurgency. SOF had long conducted small-unit deployments across the world to conduct everything from training to intelligence-gathering missions called "advanced force operations". Now, they focused these dispersed deployments on counterterrorism. In 2004, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld designated SOCOM as the lead DoD organization (or "global synchronizer") for the Global War on Terror.[47] SOF operations in Iraq also persisted for the entire duration of the U.S. involvement in the war—until the end of 2011.

Six months before the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, SOF's—and really, JSOC's—most spectacular publicly-acknowledged operation was the killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan. The operation featured many of the hallmarks of the post-9/11 SOF capability: It was an ultra-precise man-hunt, clandestine, diplomatically sensitive, and high risk in both political and operational terms. It also presented a glimpse at the dramatic transformation in civilians' views of SOF's purpose and role in national strategy since the late 1970s. SOF had gone from an after-thought to the premier strategic asset for the nation's number one national security priority: defeating terrorism.

Actors

The most prominent institutional actors over the case period were not "the military" and "civilians", but instead sub-organizations of those categories. On the military side, the two major players were the conventional forces—represented most frequently in the civil-military dynamic by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but also by the Service Chiefs—and the special operations community, its own locus of institutional sentiment moving over time between the

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[46] PBS Frontline, "Timeline: Al Qaeda's Global Context," October 3, 2002, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/timeline-al-qaedas-global-context/.
[47] Douglas C. Lovelace, ed. *Terrorism: Documents of International and Local Control*, Volume 86, 176; SOCOM 2009 Factbook, 6.

Army's Special Forces, JSOC, and SOCOM. At times, this community also included what other analysts would code as civilians: retired former special operators now in civilian positions. These civilians, largely in OSD but some also found on Capitol Hill, continued to share the institutional culture and interests of SOF. In general, institutional preferences were complicated by the tendency of individuals from one sub-group to share preferences with members of other sub-groups—for example, as will be demonstrated below, conventional Army leaders provided much of the early support for developing SOF CT capabilities. Such conditions also obtained when an individual spanned institutional sub-groups, such as being in the Army *as* a Special Forces officers. The important thing to attach to key actors is a core preference and to identify its source as a military institution or not.

On the civilian side, three distinct sub-groups stand out as salient actors. First are the civilians in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. This group comprises both political appointees and civil servants (although the former appear more prominently in the history presented below) who not only exercise an element of civilian control over the military, but also represent DoD in the interagency, on the Hill, and to the Public. Second are civilians in the White House, most importantly the President and his National Security Advisor and other staff at the National Security Council. Third are civilians in the Congress, both the members and their staff. As on the military side, sub-groups of civilians often collaborated with other sub-groups in addition to competing with them.

Preferences

At the beginning of the case study, there were two measurable preferences about what the country should do with SOF capabilities, and they were both held by military institutional actors. The absence of detectable civilian preferences suggests one of two possibilities: 1) Civilians had not formed a strong or consolidated preference, or 2) Civilian preferences were reflected in the status quo at the beginning of the case period. Regardless, attribution of a clear civilian preference is not possible with the evidence available.

The first preference was for SOF to support the conventional military in its efforts to counter the Soviet Union on the battlefield. This preference advocated integrating special operators into conventional operational plans. It necessarily excluded the ideas of SOF-led operations or modes of warfare that focused on non-state (or irregular state-sponsored) enemy combatants like counterinsurgency or counterterrorism.

The second preference was for SOF to emphasize missions that occurred outside the context of major war and against both non-state or irregular state-sponsored (including Soviet-sponsored) enemies. Operations against Islamist terrorist groups fell under this preference. The former preference emphasized SOF as an adjunct to the conventional services, whereas the latter saw SOF as an element of the military that should operate independently from the larger force outside the context of regular warfare. For brevity's sake, I will refer to the first preference as "conventional" use of SOF and the second as unconventional or irregular uses of SOF.

Conventional uses of SOF were, unsurprisingly, preferred by the conventional military. But in 1977 there were also elements of SOF that went along with this preference, most notably the Navy's Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) forces and the Air Force's special operators. The SEALs focused on providing reconnaissance support to amphibious operations and working themselves into the Navy's major operational plans.[48] The Marine Corps had eliminated its special operator

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[48] Marquis, 65.

designation, having done away with their Raider units after WWII.[49] Only the Army truly held a preference for non-conventional uses of SOF. As will be discussed in more detail below, the Army began to build units focused on counterterrorism in the mid- to late-1970s. The SEALs, however, also husbanded their counterterrorism capabilities in at least one of their teams. For the Army, interest in SOF CT capacity started at the top, with successive Chiefs of Staff, while the SEALs were circumspect about it as the Navy leadership focused elsewhere. Thus, the period began not so much with a split between civilians and the military on the purpose of SOF, but a split between elements of the military itself, including between parts of SOF.

Civilians in an institutional sense showed so little interest in SOF at the beginning of the case period that a reliable preference is nearly undetectable. Although President Carter did express interest in hostage rescue capabilities at one point, and his Secretary of Defense, Harold Brown, appeared supportive of some SOF institutional reform, the administration and the Congress showed little consistent interest in re-purposing or even revisiting SOF capabilities in the late 1970s.[50] Moreover, the Carter administration's defense policy focused on reducing tensions with the Soviets and the Chinese, developing sophisticated defense technologies, and limiting the use of military force—overarching preferences that may have precluded entertaining a capability for using discrete force in contexts outside major war.[51] Brown himself has written that his experience as Secretary of the Air Force toward the end of the Vietnam War led him to a skepticism of military engagements "beyond our vital security interests" that he brought into the position of Secretary of Defense in 1977.[52] In that, he sounds very much like his successor, Caspar Weinberger, whose well-known "doctrine" of a high threshold for use of military force was eventually adopted by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell and influences thinking among military officers and the permanent DoD bureaucracy to this day.[53] Brown's first annual report and budget submission to Congress also treated terrorism as a kind of peripheral concern, listed toward the end of a litany of threats that risked major war: "The incidence of terrorism, occasionally fostered by irresponsible foreign leaders, could also increase in number and intensity, and terrorists could become more heavily armed with more sophisticated weapons."[54] The connection between civilian leaders' overall thoughts about low-level warfare and SOF is an inference, however, and the paucity of civilian pronouncements about SOF at the beginning of the case period may reveal that civilians did not think of SOF as a strategic capability, nor as worthy of their time and attention as, for example, ballistic missiles or stealth technologies.

Although a strong civilian preference for the main uses of SOF was not evident in 1977, a preference had clearly emerged by 2010: Civilians saw SOF's main role as countering terrorism and conducting irregular warfare, primarily by eliminating so-called high value targets (HVTs) and training foreign counterterrorism forces. This preference featured many of the elements of the preference that the Army and Navy SOF first formed in the mid-1970s: It focused SOF on non-state (or irregular state-sponsored) enemy combatants; SOF was focused on both lethal and

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[49] Moyar, xvi; 56; 62.

[50] David C. Martin and John Walcott, *Best Laid Plans: The Inside Story of America's War Against Terrorism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 39; Richard Marcinko, *Rogue Warrior* (New York: Pocket Books, 1992), 236; Naylor, 5-7.

[51] Harold Brown with Joyce Winslow, *Star Spangled Security: Applying Lessons Learned Over Six Decades Safeguarding America* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2012).

[52] Brown and Winslow, 99.

[53] Jeffrey Record, "Back to the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine?" *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Fall 2007, 79-95.

[54] Department of Defense Annual Report, 1978, 13.

more civilian-oriented activities outside the bounds of major conventional war; and SOF had the leading role in the mission, often operating autonomously from the conventional force. Not only did civilians see SOF this way, but SOF shared this preference for its main purpose, expressing the primacy of counterterrorism missions in the official Special Operations Command (SOCOM) mission statements and focusing the full range of subordinate special operations elements on dealing with terrorists, from special mission (i.e. direct action) units to civil affairs and psychological operations teams.

SOF 1977-2010: Tracing Processes of Preference Formation and Change

Period I: SOF's Survival (1977-1987)

By 1977, most of the institutional military were aligned in the preference that SOF was a niche capability, useful for special missions in a major combat framework. Neither civilian opposition nor support to this formulation was evident. The Army, however, had a broader set of preferences for purpose of their own SOF, supplying them for major operational plans while also husbanding SOF elements for unconventional and irregular warfare and, notably, counterterrorism.

By 1987, the end of the period, an important fraction of civilians had shifted their expressed preference to align more closely with the Army's original position: SOF were still designed to support conventional operations, but many civilians now also recognized that SOF were the nation's specialists in the low-intensity conflict and crisis-related, direct action counterterrorism.[55]

The shift in civilian preferences was a result of persistent lobbying by the special operations constituency in and outside of government. In the Pentagon, on the Hill, and even in a presidential campaign, current and former SOF persuaded key civilian policymakers, politicians, and lawmakers that SOF were strategically important and institutionally neglected. Over the course of ten years, conceptions of SOF and its purposes born primarily in the Army Special Forces community spread into OSD and the Congress.

SOF leveraged a variety of conditions to make their case to civilians. External events and U.S. operational performance provided focal points to demonstrate lags in U.S. capabilities, while general ignorance of special operations ceded definitional space to uniformed experts. Civilians tended toward undefined preferences about SOF and their uses, making them open to the most persuasive argumentation and incentives. The result was that different military communities appealed to different civilians, with those in OSD aligning with the conventional force and those in Congress adopting SOF views.

Details

The 1977 civilian preference for SOF was weak. So weak, that it is difficult to detect it. SOF received very few mentions in official strategic and budgetary documents, public statements, and even memoirs covering the late 1970s. Secretary of Defense Harold Brown's first Annual Report to Congress, submitted in February of 1978, did not address or even use the

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[55] "Direct Action" is defined as "short-duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions conducted with specialized military capabilities to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover, or damage designated targets in hostile, denied, or diplomatically and/or political sensitive environments." Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-05: Special Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 16 July 2014).

words "special operations" or "special operations forces".[56] What preferences could be detected were derived from the majority preference among the military services and the Joint Staff. They were largely viewed as accessories to the warfighter. In the abstract, their services could be used when general purpose forces (GPF) could not, but such scenarios were underspecified. The Joint Chiefs of Staff's 1979 definition of special operations, for example, noted that "they may support conventional operations, or they may be prosecuted independently when the use of conventional forces is either inappropriate or infeasible."[57] In any case, SOF had no purpose absent a conventional warfighting context. At a 1983 conference on the future of special operations among defense practitioners and academics, Secretary of the Army John O. Marsh, Jr. (who became the acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict in 1987) argued that "a special operations capability is an essential adjunct to an effective conventional force structure."[58]

This view even extended to parts of the SOF community. One former SEAL explained the Navy's Sea Air Land (SEAL) teams' "job in life was to justify our existence" to the conventional fleet with support to anti-Soviet operations.[59] The Air Force, meanwhile, neglected its special operations aircraft nearly to the point of abandonment, focusing almost exclusively on conventional missions at any rate.[60]

The uniformed Army, however, saw more for SOF than conventional missions or vaguely-defined 'things the GPF couldn't do'. The Army believed SOF could also provide capabilities below the threshold of major war, not only in traditional training and advising to partner military forces, but also to counter state-based and non-state actor terrorism. This preference was organic to the Army itself and arose in at least three different places during the 1970s. In the early part of the decade, Chief of Staff General Creighton Abrams observed the rise in Islamist extremist attacks as a future defining security threat for the United States. He determined that the Army would therefore need a counterterrorism capability: hostage rescue, raids, and the ability to secure American embassies. To develop these capabilities, he resurrected the 1st and 2nd Ranger battalions, a separate entity from the Army's Special Forces.[61]

Meanwhile, General Edward Charles "Shy" Meyer, "had long believed that geopolitical pressures from the Muslim movements in the Middle East were a far more likely concern than events in Central Europe."[62] But he also knew the insight was not obvious to others. "It was necessary for us to try to create a requirement," Meyer told an interviewer in 1988. "It became clear that there was a void that needed to be filled on the low end of the spectrum of warfare."[63]

General William DePuy, the Commander of the Army's Training and Doctrine Command, shared this assessment as he reimagined the Army's purpose in the post-Vietnam era. DePuy and Meyer worked with Special Forces Colonel Charlie Beckwith to develop a counterterrorism-focused element, one with the additional goal of husbanding a near-monopoly on clandestine operations. Beckwith himself had been advocating for such a unit within the

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[56] Department of Defense Annual Report FY1978.
[57] Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Joint Publication 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States" (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 1979).
[58] Frank R. Barnett et al, eds, *Special Operations in U.S. Strategy*. (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1984), 18.
[59] Marquis, 66.
[60] Marquis, 76-77.
[61] Moyar, 158.
[62] Marquis, 62.
[63] Quoted in Marquis, 63.

Army since the 1960s—and even went so far as to mail a copy of his proposal to his senator, who placed phone calls to the Army to inquire about "the void" Beckwith had "pointed out in Special Forces".[64] It wasn't until 1975 that another Army officer, General Bob Kingston, asked Beckwith for a version of his earlier paper to shop around the Pentagon, in particular with General Meyer. By 1976, Beckwith was at a conference with General DuPuy discussing the merits of his proposal, and by 1977 DuPuy took it to Meyer.[65] As a result, the Army established Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta in November of 1977.[66]

SOF's purpose(s) were thus at an initial stage of evolution when the Iran hostage crisis unfolded in 1979. Anticipating a request from the White House for hostage rescue options, the Joint Staff directed Army Major General James Vaught and Beckwith to develop a plan. Vaught and Beckwith were then summoned to the Situation Room to brief the President and his national security team on the SOF community's proposal, which the President approved.[67]

Delta being one of the only places in the military that trained extensively for hostage rescue, they were an obvious choice for the mission. It was a case where the need for a capability was demanded by actual events, rather than proactive U.S. strategy. Under such conditions, as we shall see again, civilians reach for whatever available tool seems most relevant. This dynamic creates an incentive for military institutions to demonstrate relevance in future such contingencies, and thus to try to anticipate likely national security events and civilian demand signals.

After Operation Eagle Claw unraveled, the Joint Staff considered the meaning of the failure. The first and best-known review of the operation was the Special Operations Review Group Rescue Mission Report—better known as the Holloway Report after the Admiral who chaired it. Populated entirely by active duty and retired general and flag officers, the commissioners noted issues with command and control, equipment, and intelligence support.[68] The various service SOF personnel were too unfamiliar with each other and their assets to plan effectively or manage the aircraft malfunctions. The Holloway Report recommended a higher-level joint command element be formed to gather up the disparate SOF units—JSOC. JSOC's main purpose was "to plan and conduct military operations that would counter terrorist acts," and would gather the SOF of each service under a unified command.[69]

That JSOC was a response to the failures of Eagle Claw and that its primary mission was counterterrorism may seem incongruous to the modern reader. At that juncture however, terrorism was considered a tool state competitors used to menace American citizens abroad in order to coerce political concessions from the U.S. government. Other than explosions, for which the response was to punish state sponsors in a variety of ways, taking Americans hostage via proxies was a common terrorist tactic. The military's role in counterterrorism was narrowly focused on this type of immediate crisis-mitigation scenario.

As JSOC got organized, the Army continued to play a major role in counterterrorism. Not only was Delta Force assigned to JSOC, but the task force's first commander, Brigadier General

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[64] Beckwith and Knox, 44.

[65] Beckwith and Knox, 92-95. John Shalikashvili, President Clinton's future Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was also in attendance at the conference, the topic of which was the future of the light infantry.

[66] Moyar, 159.

[67] Moyar, 163-165.

[68] Special Operations Review Group, "Rescue Mission Report" (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1980) https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/i/iran-hostage-rescue-mission-report.html#recom

[69] Richard Marcinko, *Rogue Warrior* (New York: Pocket Books, 1992), 236.

Dick Scholtes, was an Army officer, and the command was headquartered at Fort Bragg, an Army installation. At the same time, General Meyer had become the Army Chief of Staff and was presiding over a major restructuring of Army SOF, modernizing it and orienting it toward the unconventional and irregular warfare. Writing in the *Army Green Book* in 1980, Meyer asserted "low-risk, high-leverage ventures, such as activities on the lower end of the spectrum, are the most likely military challenges to occur" and the Army therefore needed "forces equally comfortable with all the lesser shades of conflict."[70]

It was also at this point that the Navy's contribution to joint SOF missions began to expand, albeit idiosyncratically. The Navy as an institution did not take any particular initiative toward JSOC, but Lieutenant Commander [?] Richard Marcinko, working on the Navy staff at the Pentagon when JSOC was being designed, saw the opportunity to create a brand-new SEAL command "specifically trained to fight terrorists in a maritime environment."[71] Up to this point, the Navy had maintained counterterrorism training curriculum for a few platoons in each of its SEAL teams. In particular, Team Two, on the East Coast, trained with the counterterrorism forces of a variety of European allies, including Britain's renowned Special Boat Service.[72] In creating the Navy Special Warfare Development Group, or SEAL Team Six, Marcinko substantially increased the Navy's role in direct action SOF missions. And he was its first commanding officer.

Thus, by 1981, SOF was gathering momentum toward expanding their purpose. With JSOC and the Army's SOF restructuring, more of the conventional force saw SOF as a hostage rescue, security force assistance, counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism force along with its utility during major warfighting contingencies.

Ongoing support for these institutional changes, however, needed to rest on a broader foundation. To persuade others that such capabilities were necessary, Army leaders started talking more frequently about low intensity conflict (LIC). LIC comprised both state-based and non-state-actor competition and security threats, including many of Special Forces traditional proxy training missions along with the renewed counterterrorism capabilities in Delta Force. It was a way to specify when, exactly, and under what conditions, "the use of conventional forces is either inappropriate or infeasible." In 1985 the Army began examining the challenges of low-intensity conflict. The Low-Intensity Conflict Project, a civil-military group chaired by general and flag officers, released a two-volume report in August of 1986 that declared that the U.S. was fundamentally unprepared for irregular and unconventional forms of security competition. It also observed the focus on terrorism took away from efforts to develop counterinsurgency and stabilization capabilities. Critically, the project judged that preventive action was called for. About SOF, Volume I of the report stated: "Special operations forces must develop appropriate strategies and acquire resources to assist or intervene prior to or during the early stages of a conflict."[73]

Civilian leaders picked up on the marriage of SOF and LIC, even as they hung onto the earlier preference for SOF to support conventional war. Combining both the JCS' 1979 language and Meyer's arguments in the *Army Green Book*, the 1984 DoD Annual Report to Congress

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[70] Quoted in Clancy, 216.

[71] Marcinko, 238.

[72] Marcinko, 237-238.

[73] U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, "Joint Low-Intensity Conflict Project Final Report, Volume I: Analytical Review of Low-Intensity Conflict." (Fort Monroe, VA: United States Army, 1986), 8-5: http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a185971.pdf

stated that SOF's purpose was "to meet threats at the *lower end of the conflict spectrum—where the use of conventional forces may be premature, inappropriate, or politically infeasible*." [Emphasis added]

Within the military, however, arguing for the importance of LIC and capabilities to conduct it was an uphill battle. Despite the recognition that the tactical failures during Eagle Claw suggested some improvements to interoperability, the prevalent sentiment among the conventional force was schadenfreude. To them, Eagle Claw had demonstrated the unfavorable risk-reward ratio of special operations.[74] And although the Iran Hostage crisis raised the profile of terrorism generally, there was still no broad-based military nor civilian appetite for military solutions to what was seen as a criminal and political problem, or an aspect of state-based competition best met with conventional force.[75]

President Ronald Reagan thus inherited a Pentagon still divided, with a preponderance of opponents to any greater investment in irregular capabilities, but a growing cadre of proponents for the same along with a nascent concept marrying SOF and LIC. The fresh civilian leadership became the targets of such argumentation.

As had been generally true of civilian political leaders in the Carter administration, Reagan and his defense advisors betrayed few strong preferences about SOF or the types of missions they could fulfill. Although Reagan made two major national security speeches during the general campaign, the themes were broad: strength, weakness, peace, aggression. Within that broad rubric were windows of interest in the types of irregular conflict on which the bulk of the U.S. force did not focus. In a speech before the 1980 election, he outlined a nine-point plan to strengthen the U.S. and her allies abroad which included "a plan to assist African and Third World development" and "combatting international terrorism."[76] He presented terrorism as a state-centric phenomenon, singling out Soviet and Iranian sponsorship of terrorists, and highlighting the victimization of Israel at the hands of terrorist groups. Reagan's position on the ongoing Iran hostage crisis was that the U.S. should not negotiate with those sponsoring terrorism nor reward terrorism in any way.[77]

Overall, Reagan believed that compounding the appearance of weakness was actual military vulnerability: that the armed forces had been gutted by neglect. His nine-point plan included, "a determined effort to strengthen the quality of our armed services." While never taking direct responsibility for Reagan's campaign-era perspective on defense issues, Caspar Weinberger, Reagan's Secretary of Defense from 1981 to 1987, certainly shared his views. In his memoirs, Weinberger stated that he and Reagan had discussed perceptions of American weakness and the need for reinvestment in military strength, as well as his immediate efforts to provide "substantial increases" for conventional and nuclear forces.[78] Neither man left meaningful evidence, however, that they reflected substantially on either special operations or irregular warfare.

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[74] Moyar, 2017, 171.

[75] Richard H. Shultz, Jr., "Showstoppers: Nine Reasons Why We Never Sent Our Special Operations Forces after al Qaeda before 9/11". *The Weekly Standard*, January 26, 2004.

[76] Ronald W. Reagan, "A Strategy for Peace in the 80s." Televised Address. October 19, 1980. https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/10-19-80

[77] Jonathan Moore, ed., *The Campaign for President: 1980 in Retrospect* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1981), 34.

[78] Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York: Warner Books, 1990), 15; 57.

Yet SOF partisans were present in the Reagan campaign and early administration policy, and there is some evidence that their influence had a small impact on the administration. After the former Director of Central Intelligence George Bush signed on as Reagan's running mate, a collection of retired military officers and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officials joined the campaign, a development that turned out to be a backdoor for SOF advocates into the Reagan camp.[79] Among them was retired General Richard Stilwell. Stillwell had a background in the Army and with the CIA's covert operations.[80] He helped encourage Reagan to campaign on "revitalization" of SOF as part of the overall reinvestment in the military that Reagan had made a campaign plank.

Once the Reagan administration took office, Stillwell became the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy at the Pentagon, where he continued to press for an emphasis on SOF. Reagan and Weinbergers's first articulation of defense strategy and policy, the 1981 Defense Guidance (the full text of which has never been released), declared, "We must revitalize and enhance special operations forces to project United States power where the use of conventional forces would be premature, inappropriate, or infeasible."[81] According to Reagan's Secretary of the Army, Stillwell had personally seen to it that SOF revitalization was included in the document.[82] Thus, Reagan and Weinberger's first major expression of preference about SOF was one Stillwell, a retired Army Special Forces officer, persuaded them to adopt.

The strength of the preference was not robust, as would be demonstrated in the relative modesty of SOF's subsequent budget increases despite overall leaps in broader defense spending. Nor did it actually lay out a purpose for SOF beyond what the Joint Staff had already articulated—Meyers was still working to sell the relationship between SOF and LIC. One later observer noted that, "While special operations forces have clearly received increased priority during the Reagan Administration, with a budget increase from $441 million in 1981 to $1.6 billion in 1987, much of this increased spending has gone toward deep-penetration airlift, which has a primary focus of supporting SOF in a conventional war."[83] Nevertheless, the Defense Guidance was an important incremental step toward an important role for SOF in national strategy. For SOF to have a value unique enough to deserve strategic and budgetary emphasis was a new thing for OSD to claim, and a step toward civilians thinking more deeply about SOF as a capability in and of itself.

Nevertheless, the language in the guidance reflected not just SOF preferences but also the alternative preference held jointly by the military services and most civilian defense managers. His 1981 guidance document notwithstanding, Secretary Weinberger combined conservative views on the use of force generally (and for CT purposes specifically) with a pattern of deference to the military services and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, with whom he met almost every

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[79] Bill Peterson, "Coming in from the Cold, Going out to the Bush Campaign," *The Washington Post*, March 1, 1980, A2.

[80] Reflecting his importance during the campaign, Stillwell later became DUSD for Policy (today the PDUSDP position) at the Pentagon. "General Richard G. Stillwell Dies", *The Washington Post*, December 26, 1991. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1991/12/26/gen-richard-g-stilwell-dies/9187423d-d6d8-417f-aaa7-c6da20b8630e/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.8d570dfcef0d.

[81] Richard Halloran, "Military is Quietly Rebuilding its Special Operations Forces." *The New York Times*, July 19, 1982, A1.

[82] John O. Marsh in eds. Frank R. Barnett et al, *Special Operations in U.S. Strategy* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1984); Caryle Murphy and Charles R. Babcock, "Army's Covert Role Scrutinized," *The Washington Post*, Nov 29, 1985 pg. A1.

[83] Henry L.T. Koren, Jr. "Congress Wades into Special Operations." *Parameters*, December 1988.

day.[84] Weinberger wrote in 1985 that "the world consists of an endless succession of hot spots…
[But] the belief that the mere presence of U.S. troops… could be useful in some way is not
sufficient for our government to ask our troops to risk their lives."[85] Apparently, "when
Weinberger had to settle conflict between political appointees from the Office of the Secretary of
Defense and the JCS, the joint chiefs almost always won."[86] Weinberger himself explained, "my
purpose was to ensure *centralized* control of policy *formation direction*, but to move toward a
more *decentralized execution* of the policies. [Emphasis original]"[87] For the Secretary to be
skeptical of low thresholds for personnel deployment and simultaneously deferential to the
military chiefs was a double-whammy for the minority voices advocating SOF capabilities to
serve LIC mission needs. Despite the far more enthusiastic support for military responses to
terrorists and insurgents at the heads of other agencies,[88] Secretary Weinberger's implacable
stance made the Reagan SOF revitalization less revolutionary and more evolutionary. In fact, the
opposition between Weinberger and the Chiefs on one hand and SOF and its civilian allies on the
other was a pattern during this and the later periods of this case.

Where were those civilian allies for SOF? No one personified the SOF-oriented civilian
cadre quite so well as Noel Koch, the Reagan administration's Principal Deputy Assistant
Secretary of Defense (PDASD) for International Security Affairs (ISA) from 1981 to 1986. Koch
arrived in OSD having served as an enlisted soldier in Vietnam, but without any particular SOF-
related agenda. Yet his Military Assistant, Colonel George McGovern, did. McGovern was the
former commander of the Army's 5th Special Forces Group, and according to a historian who
interviewed Koch, "McGovern's mission became convincing Koch that rebuilding the nation's
special operations capability was a fight worth fighting."[89] McGovern joined forces with a
civilian in ISA, Lynn Rylander, and together they prevailed upon Koch to lead OSD's efforts at
SOF revitalization.

In histories and contemporary news pieces, Koch comes across as a zealous convert to
the SOF religion, and a clever bureaucratic tactician. Realizing his civilian status could put him
at a disadvantage when making arguments about needed military capabilities, especially against
conventional officers predisposed to be skeptical of SOF,[90] one of the first things he did was
assemble a "Special Operations Policy Advisory Group", or SOPAG, made up of retired general
and flag officers.[91] Indeed, "by early 1982 Koch was sponsoring the first briefings to Secretary
Weinberger and the Defense Resources Board on special operations."[92] He also ensured his
chain of command included as few people as possible, orchestrating one circumnavigation of the
bureaucracy after another. In addition to the SOPAG, Koch also established a Special Planning

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[84] Wills, 2003, 31.

[85] Caspar Weinberger, "U.S. Defense Strategy" in William G. Hyland, ed., *The Reagan Foreign Policy* (New York:
New American Library, 1987), 194.

[86] Wills, 31.

[87] Weinberger, 43.

[88] Wills, 32-40. See also then-Secretary of State George Shultz's "New Realities and New Ways of Thinking" article
in Hyland, 111. Shultz wrote about terrorism: "even as the world becomes more secure from the danger of major
war, paradoxically the democratic world now faces an increasing threat from this new form of warfare… much of it
supported or encouraged by a handful of ruthless governments."

[89] Marquis, 80.

[90] By my own standards, counting Koch as a civilian is fraught, since he was in SOF/intel during Vietnam. He was,
however, part of the civilian Presidential administration and occupying a civilian appointment in OSD, placing him
squarely in a civilian institution, something he acknowledged in creating the SOPAG.

[91] Marquis, 82.

[92] Marquis, 81.

Directorate that reported directly to the Under Secretary for Policy and the Deputy Secretary, allowing him to skip the coordination process among DoD organizations normally required before senior OSD civilian review policies for approval.[93] Such "short-circuits" of the Pentagon allowed Koch to do things like take a draft directive to the military services to expand their special operations forces and submit master plans for doing so straight to Deputy Secretary of Defense Thayer—who signed it.[94]

Koch's nearly lone guerilla bureaucratic warfare might have come to nothing, however, if it weren't for the invasion of Grenada in 1983. It was a moment of reckoning for SOF's strategic purpose. The invasion itself was entirely consistent with the view that SOF existed to complement conventional operations. Although the invasion succeeded in its operational objectives, and Secretary Weinberger later mounted a vigorous defense of the necessarily condensed planning process,[95] to special operators it was another study in how not to conduct an operation and to a wider audience became further evidence of the need for broad military organizational reforms.

Such a review was taking place on Capitol Hill. Although Eagle Claw had gotten many lawmaker's momentary attention, the needless casualties in Grenada prompted the Congress to take action on SOF reforms. But even though events provided civilian legislators the motivation for reform, it was active and retired members of the so-called "SOF Liberation Front" who shaped the legislative process and the legislation itself. In his own history of the passage of the Nunn-Cohen amendment, Jim Locher, the chief SASC staff architect of the law—and a later Assistant Secretary of Defense for SOLIC—stated plainly that "current and former special operators and their civilian supporters" were pivotal to negotiations on the Hill.[96] Representative Dan Daniel, Senator William Cohen, and Senator Sam Nunn were each approached by SOF advocates. Daniel was the chair of the readiness subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee. In his history of the legislation that eventually forced Special Operations Command on DoD, Colonel William Boykin wrote, "Senator Cohen was approached by a number of credible former special operations people with requests for his assistance in helping to rebuild SOF."[97] As for Congressman Daniel, he "knew little of special operations, but he was influenced by people who did."[98] The list of influencers included Brigadier General Richard Scholtes, who had been infuriated by his experience commanding SOF during Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada, and who had been advocating for a unified combatant command for SOF.[99]

Nunn and Cohen were members of the Senate Armed Services Committee and already at work on what would later become the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act. Although the thrust of that legislation was not oriented toward SOF issues for political reasons (Senators fretted that adding one more thing the DoD hated to the legislation would degrade the law's chances of faithful implementation), the Senate staff research underwriting the Act surfaced DoD's shortcomings in LIC—and also the "predominance of Service perspectives in DoD"

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[93] Linda Robinson, et al., *Improving the Understanding of Special Operations* (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 2018).

[94] Marquis, 85.

[95] Weinberger, 125.

[96] James R. Locher, III, "Congress to the Rescue: Statutory Creation of USSOCOM," *Air Commando Journal*, 1(3), Spring, 2012.

[97] William G. Boykin, "Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict Legislation: Why It Was Passed and Have the Voids Been Filled" Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1991.

[98] Boykin, 1991.

[99] Moyar, 180.

because of ineffective OSD organization and the Joint Staff's domination by the services.[100] Meanwhile, Cohen and Nunn conducted a series of hearings on gaps in SOF training, resourcing, equipping, and operational performance and became increasingly convinced that DoD's institutional resistance to special operations and special operators was too great for fundamental change to emerge internally.

Although much of the momentum toward legislation was built during the SASC process, a great deal of both the intellectual effort and the eventual compromise that led to the creation of SOCOM and SOLIC was generated by Congressman Daniel. Daniel helped get the House to form a Special Operations Panel to review implementation of the administration's SOF revitalization goals in 1984, submitted bills calling for SOF reform, and participated in the conference negotiations between HASC and SASC over SOF legislation.

The list of Daniel's influencers included LTG (ret) Samuel Wilson, a renowned SOF veteran. Wilson had served on the Holloway Board after Eagle Claw, was part of DoD's Special Operations Advisory Panel, had retired from the Army after running the Defense Intelligence Agency—and acted as an advisor to George H.W. Bush's 1980 presidential campaign.[101] He evaluated the Delta Force in 1979 and recommended a joint task force structure to provide command and control, a recommendation he apparently repeated during the Holloway review. Perhaps most importantly, he had given Congressman Daniel a battlefield tour in Vietnam and Daniel had respected Wilson ever since.[102] According to researchers at the RAND Corporation:

> Daniel asked Wilson to participate in the [SASC and HASC conference] negotiations, which was a critical decision: Wilson, having the trust and confidence of both sides, mediated the disagreements between both teams. He convinced HASC of the merits of a military-led command integrated into the National Command Authority's policymaking structure, and he negotiated with the SASC to include Daniel's provision to establish the creation of an SOF- specific major force program (MFP) budget line, now called MFP-11, by the Senate.[103]

Other key personnel included a member of the HASC staff and later Daniel's personal staff, Ted Lunger, who was also a former special operator in Vietnam and worked closely with Daniel and with Koch on the SOF advocacy project; and Ken Johnson, a former Special Forces officer who helped Locher write the defense reform report.[104] Efforts on the Hill were also spurred and then cheered on by Noel Koch and his allies in the SOF institutional community. Writing in the pages of Armed Forces International Journal, Cohen, Nunn, Daniel, Koch, and others, spent several months making the case for SOF.[105]

Many of the articles were part of an artificial debate written by Daniel's staffer Ted Lunger and OSD staffer Lynn Rylander.[106] The first article was signed by Rep. Daniel and argued for separating SOF from the services entirely and developing a "sixth service"

[100] United States Senate, Staff Report to the Committee on Armed Services. "Defense Organization: The Need for Change", October 16, 1985, Committee Print, 99-86, quote on page 4; Locher, 2012.

[101] Bill Peterson, "Coming in from the Cold, Going out to the Bush Campaign," *The Washington Post*, March 1, 1980, A2.

[102] Boykin, 1991.

[103] Robinson, 75.

[104] Robinson, 77; Boykin, 1991.

[105] Marquis, 116-127.

[106] Boykin, 1991.

(presumably counting the Marines and Coast Guard). Another article penned by a Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) in the Air Force (and former special forces group member) retread the argument that what SOF do isn't so different from other military missions to justify their separation.[107] Senator Cohen also authored an article calling for reform—significant for both the eventual legislation and because he was later to be Secretary of Defense for President Clinton.

Although civilians on the Hill were persuaded that the military was neglecting low intensity conflict and, as a direct result, SOF, civilians in the Reagan administration remained wedded to the idea that conventional forces could handle most security challenges and SOF reform and expansion was not only unnecessary but possibly dangerous. One chronicler of the process wrote, "Admiral Poindexter, then the National Security Advisor, wrote a number of members to 'express the President's concern' over the pending SOF legislation. He contended that the DOD proposal for a separate command was adequate, and he raised the constitutional issue."[108] Often, Reagan officials characterized efforts to reform SOF as working against the ideal of jointness. In 1986, when OSD and the Services were fighting against legislated change, ASD ISA Richard Armitage told a New York Times reporter that a new SOLIC/SOCOM-like structure would exacerbate "the subliminal wall between special operations forces and the rest of the military that we have been laboring over the last five years to dismantle."[109]

Eventually, Cohen and Nunn became convinced that institutional resistance to SOF was too great for the Pentagon to allow innovation internally. The alarming testimony of just-retired Brigadier General Scholtes, the most recent commander of JSOC and the man in charge of SOF during the Grenada operation, was apparently pivotal in this regard.[110] Not only that, but other uniformed SOF advocates had also testified before the SASC in support of mandated SOF reforms, including General Meyer and LTG Wilson.[111]

Scholtes' closed session testimony was perhaps all the more dramatic because it was preceded immediately by a disastrous hearing for the Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, Richard Armitage, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral William J. Crowe. Crowe and Armitage proceeded to demonstrate the overwhelming compatibility between OSD and the JS on the matter of SOF reform—and their incompatibility with Cohen, Nunn, and the SOF Liberation Front. First, Crowe repeated the DoD talking point on the uses of SOF: "They can support conventional operations in either limited or general hostilities or be employed independently when conventional force is either inappropriate or infeasible." He then went on to defend SOF remaining the responsibility of their respective military departments, but acknowledged that their resourcing, training, and interoperability with each other and the conventional force could be improved and asserted that DoD was making bureaucratic changes to ensure such resourcing, training, and interoperability. Armitage focused his remarks on the evolving understanding of low intensity conflict and the need for a national strategy to wage it. He argued that LIC was not "solely the province of Special Operations Forces."[112]

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[107] Marquis, 121-122.

[108] Koren, 1988.

[109] John H. Cushman, Jr. "Pentagon Plans Unit to Build Up Special Forces," *The New York Times*, July 19, 1986, A8.

[110] Marquis, 144; Robinson, 75.

[111] Robinson, 74.

[112] "To Combat Terrorism and other Forms of Unconventional Warfare," Hearing before the Subcommittee on Sea Power and Force Projection of the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, 99th Congress, Second Session, August 5, 1986.

Such comments were simply at odds with Congressional advocates for SOF, who by now saw a direct link between SOF and irregular, low-level warfare. Senator Cohen's opening statement had referred to the changing nature of warfare, guerilla insurgencies and terrorism. "I believe that if the United States is to be spared the bitter frustration we have experienced in earlier efforts to conduct counterinsurgency and counterterrorist operations, we must revamp the organization on which our special forces are built."[113] Prior to the Armitage-Crowe hearing, Senator Nunn had told a reporter, "In my view, the most likely use of force by the United States in the foreseeable future is by our special operations forces. The threat that we face from terrorism and from other forms of low-intensity conflict mean that we must be prepared to deter and respond if necessary with special operations forces."[114] In the same article, an unnamed general officer working in the Pentagon on SOF issues said, "special operations, regardless of what they seek to accomplish, will always be part of a larger effort which requires conventional forces and conventional support."[115] Meanwhile, Congressman Daniel remarked in an interview "the problem is, they're trying to conduct unconventional warfare with conventional plans and commanders."[116] Between the contentious hearing with Armitage and Crowe and Scholtes' and other military officers' testimony, Cohen and Nunn concluded that legislation was the only thing that would inspire the Pentagon to bolster SOF.

The result was the Nunn-Cohen Amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act of 1987. Although the law is usually discussed in the context of defense reorganization, the primary reason for and effect of SOF's institutional growth was to orient and prioritize SOF capabilities. Codified in Title 10 of the U.S. Code, the legislation stipulated the core missions— or purposes—for special operations forces: direct action, strategic reconnaissance, unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, civil affairs, military information support operations, counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance, theatre search and rescue, and other activities specified by the President or SecDef.[117] To ensure the Department of Defense would not neglect these missions, Nunn-Cohen created the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ASD) for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (SOLIC) and the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and mandated a special budgetary vehicle for SOF, Major Force Program-11 (MFP-11), to be developed and overseen by SOCOM in coordination with the ASD for SOLIC.

Taken together, the Nunn-Cohen reforms gave the SOF community more bureaucratic and budgetary power relative to the services and the operational force in the combatant commands by combining the functions of both into one military organization. The law did so without also establishing a civilian service secretariat. Instead, a civilian at the more junior assistant secretary level, in a totally separate organization, was expected to oversee development of special operations and policy for the threats that might prompt them. Implementation of the law and the working relationship between SOCOM and SOLIC would be critical to SOF's strategic purpose (and civilian oversight of that purpose) going forward.

The Pentagon's resistance to a more strategic role for SOF notwithstanding, the parallel tracks for terrorism policy and the purpose of SOF were also beginning to intersect, although just

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[113] Ibid

[114] Bernard E. Trainor, "Special Military Forces: Congress Sees Room for Improvement." *The New York Times*, September 6, 1986, A9.

[115] Ibid

[116] Bill Keller, "Conflict in Pentagon is Seen Hurting Elite Units' Buildup." *The New York Times*, January 6, 1986, A1.

[117] 10 USC 167, Unified Combatant Command for Special Operations Forces

barely. The spectacular terrorist attacks in Lebanon and on commercial air and sea travel began to demonstrate to U.S. policymakers, particularly Secretary of State George Shultz, that "terror was emerging as a new form of warfare for which the United States was poorly prepared", sentiments that echoed the conclusions Army leaders had made in the late 1970s prior to reviving the Rangers and establishing Delta Force.[118] Shultz gathered a group of senior officials to discuss terrorism on March 24, 1984, including Weinberger, the FBI Director, Koch, and officials from State and the CIA.[119]

The result was NSDD 138, "Combatting Terrorism", the administration's first major policy on the topic.[120] The document provides a kind of window into the state of the debate not only about the policy to "prevent, counter, and combat terrorism" itself, but the relevance of terrorism to the Cold War and the tension between conventional military tools and irregular warfare, including paramilitary, capabilities. State sponsors of terrorism were still the prevalent concern, and in its first paragraph, it noted "the possibility" that the Soviet Union was sponsoring some terrorist groups. In that vein, and yet also providing a counterterrorism purpose broader than the Cold War rivalry, the document stated that the U.S. should "ameliorate the subversive effect of terrorism on foreign democratic institutions and pro-Western governments" and consider "the practice of terrorism by any person or group in any cause a threat to our national security." To implement this policy, the document directed improved intelligence collection on terrorist groups; that the Secretary of Defense continue to improve military counterterrorism capabilities; and that the CIA establish "capabilities for pre-emptive neutralization of anti-American terrorist groups" along with a "clandestine service" to respond to terrorism abroad.

Despite the document being presidential-level guidance, subsequent events demonstrated an ongoing split between civilians on the matter of counterterrorism policy. Weinberger was unmoved, and Vice President Bush was similarly skeptical that the U.S. should conduct a CT campaign. The difficulty lay, in part, in the fact that civilians—and much of the conventional military—were still thinking of both proactive counterterrorism and retaliatory measures in conventional military terms. A debate over the appropriate response to yet another terrorist attack on a U.S. diplomatic post in Beirut surfaced arguments over targeting. The Pentagon dismissed a special operation as too risky, leading to an examination of airstrikes which were in turn ruled out as too damaging to civilians and U.S. diplomatic interests alike.[121] Bush, meanwhile, pushed back on a series of public speeches Shultz had been giving advocating for a more proactive military counterterrorism campaign. "We are not going to go out and bomb innocent civilians… I don't think we ever get to the point where you kill 100 innocent women and children just to kill one terrorist."[122]

Additional terrorism incidents in 1985 finally prompted the administration to convene a Vice Presidential-level task force chaired by the same retired Admiral James Holloway who led the review of Operation Eagle Claw resulted in National Security Decision Directive (NSDD 207), which directed that an interagency group craft a policy on the appropriate uses of force in

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[118] John Arquilla. *The Reagan Imprint: Ideas in American Foreign Policy from the Collapse of Communism to the War on Terror* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 179.

[119] Wills, 83.

[120] The White House, National Security Decision Directive 138: Combatting Terrorism. April 3, 1984. https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-138.pdf

[121] Wills, 85.

[122] Bernard Gwertzman, "Bush Challenges Shultz's Position on Terror Policy," *New York Times*, October 27, 1984, A1.

response to terrorism.[123] The Secretary of Defense, specifically, was directed to

> Review, in conjunction with the State Department and *NSC1* current criteria and procedures for deploying and employing U.S. military CT forces. Consideration should be given to political and legal questions involved and to forward deployment or prepositioning of CT elements in or near areas of most likely employment.[124]

The Vice President's Task Force on Combatting Terrorism issued its public report in February of 1986. The text made it clear that the administration thought about terrorism as individual incidents that required retaliation—and if possible anticipation and avoidance—and that the best way to eliminate adversaries' reliance on terrorism tactics was to for U.S. policy to render those tactics ineffective. This conceptual framing of terrorism made the military's role narrow. The report referred to military force as a precision instrument: "A successful deterrent strategy may require judicious employment of military force to resolve an incident."[125]

Without using the terms "special operations" or "conventional forces," the Task Force's report revealed the strategic tensions between SOF-style use of force and the larger footprints of conventional forces. Training, intelligence, and timeliness were highlighted as essential—attributes associated with JSOC's direct action capabilities. However, a "show of force" could have utility as well, typically a phrase that implies overt, large-footprint conventional operations.

> Use of our well-trained and capable military forces offers an excellent chance of success if a military option can be implemented. Such use also demonstrates U.S. resolve to support stated national policies. Military actions may serve to deter future terrorist acts and could also encourage other countries to take a harder line. Successful employment, however, depends on timely and refined intelligence and prompt positioning of forces. Counterterrorism missions are high-risk/high-gain operations which can have a severe negative impact on U.S. prestige if they fail.

> A U.S. military show of force may intimidate the terrorists and their sponsors. It would not immediately risk more U.S. lives or prestige and could be more effective if utilized in concert with diplomatic, political or economic sanctions. There are, however, some distinct disadvantages: a show of force could be considered gunboat diplomacy, which might be perceived as a challenge rather than a credible threat; it may require a sizable deployment of support activities; it may provide our enemies with a subject for anti-American propaganda campaigns worldwide; and most important, an active military response may prove necessary to resolve the situation if a show of force fails.

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[123] Wills, 135-136; The White House, NSDD 207: "The National Program for Combatting Terrorism", January 20, 1986. NSDD 207 listed State, Justice, and the FAA as lead agencies for CT depending on the location and type of crisis (int'l, nat'l, aviation). The use of force framework was to be developed by one of the interagency task forces and routed through SecState. However, NSDD 207 also lists military, paramilitary, and covert action tools as essential to CT. And it directs SecDef to "develop plans for integrating psychological operations more closely into the overall CT effort" and "review requirements and develop alternatives for more effective intelligence and operational support to CT forces/operations."

[124] NSDD 207.

[125] The Vice President of the United States, "Public Report of the Vice President's Task Force on Combatting Terrorism", February 1986. https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/138789NCJRS.pdf

By the end of the period, in fact, civilian leaders had settled on a shared approach to countering terrorism that used SOF for immediate crisis response and GPF for punishing and deterring governments from sponsoring terrorist groups. This was exemplified by the U.S. response to a Libyan-sponsored terrorist attack that killed two U.S. servicemembers in West Berlin in 1986. The administration retaliated with air strikes, and explained its response in the FY1988 DoD Annual Report to Congress (written in 1987):

> The Libyan action was not carried out by the kind of special operations forces that are involved in combatting specific terrorist acts while they are in progress and, in a sense, this is even a greater tribute to our conventional forces… The objective of the Libyan operation was both to strike at terrorist support bases, and to teach the state of Libya that providing terrorist groups with the support necessary to conduct their international campaign of aggression against the United States carries with it a terrible cost. Thus, our strategy for precluding and combatting terrorist acts involves a range of general purpose forces as well as special operations forces.[126]

SOF's self-generated orientation toward conducting direct actions against terrorists had made its way into civilian preferences. What SOF did not do yet was address terrorism comprehensively. It was still characterized as an 'in emergency, break glass' tool, rather than the element of the force that prevented, responded to, and punished terrorist violence.

The upshot of the 1977-1987 period was that civilian preferences about SOF came to reflect the uniformed Army's marriage of LIC and CT, but they were still anchored in the conventional military's preference to emphasize SOF as supplementing conventional warfighters. Still, SOF had achieved not just bureaucratic distinction from the services in the form of SOCOM but were moving into a strategic distinction as well. Fiscal Year 1986 Annual Report (submitted in 1985) was the first to have a separate section on SOF. By 1987, the Secretary of Defense was telling the Congress that SOF,

> …provide the United States a highly flexible, specialized capability to pursue national objectives during peace or war, either independently or in conjunction with conventional forces. In peacetime, SOF, in conjunction with other military forces and federal agencies, participate in security assistance, civic action, and humanitarian assistance operations. They also contribute to combatting terrorism.

> SOF can play a key role in crises through the use of forces, psychological operations, and the employment of civil affairs units. The importance of these capabilities was clearly demonstrated in 1983 in Grenada. SOF's unique skills as trainers, derived from cultural orientation and language training, also make them an essential element in counterinsurgency operations. If called upon, these same skills can be employed in support of guerrilla warfare.

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[126] FY1988 DoD Report to Congress, pg. 61

At higher levels of conflict, the SOF can delay, divert, and disrupt enemy operations, thereby gaining a critical edge for conventional defenses.[127]

That same year, the White House incorporated the idea of a balance between "specialized" and "general purpose forces" into the country's first-ever National Security Strategy Report (NSSR):

> The United States must have specialized forces-ranging from those required for nuclear deterrence to forces configured to deal with terrorism; and must also have general purpose forces capable of sustaining high intensity conflict, while maintaining an effective capability for lesser contingencies and special operations.[128]

How influential had military preferences been in shaping civilian preferences on SOF? In December of 1987, the Reagan administration submitted a statutory report to the Congress on the U.S. strategy for low-intensity conflict. Annex A addressed the role that DoD played in the strategy and highlighted the use of special operations forces. The discussion of SOF began with the Joint Chiefs of Staff definition of special operations. It goes on to list the critical tasks for LIC, all of which were SOF missions: FID, peacekeeping, combatting terrorism, and "peacetime contingency operations".[129] That the Joint Staff's language framed the ways SOF fit into low-intensity conflict and that SOF itself had informed the statutory missions of its own force suggested military preferences shaped civilian preferences a great deal.

Perversely, as LIC became a more meaningful U.S. military mission, more of the military wanted a piece of it. The Reagan administration reported to Congress in 1987 that SOF fulfilled LIC missions, but so did "combat maneuver forces."[130] SOF were still not specialists in any mission area in an exclusive sense as far as civilians were concerned. But they had maneuvered themselves into major strategic documents, adhering special operations to an emerging strategic concept. They had survived.

Period II: Market Share (1988-2000)

Thus, in 1988, civilians preferred SOF to fulfill a range of missions spanning the spectrum of conflict. They had essentially split the baby by agreeing with the conventional force's preference for SOF to be their "adjunct" while also increasing emphasis on SOF's capabilities in unconventional warfare and counterterrorism. This meant civilians were comfortable with SOF providing foreign internal defense (FID), civil affairs, and psychological operations exclusively, while counterterrorism and support to conventional operations were duties they shared with the general purpose forces, in part because SOF and the GPF had not

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[127] Department of Defense, Annual Report to Congress Fiscal Year 1988 (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1987), 293.

[128] U.S. National Security Council, "National Security Strategy Report" (Washington, DC: The White House, 1987), 19: http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/1987.pdf

[129] U.S. National Security Council, "Report to the Congress U.S. Capabilities to Engage in Low Intensity Conflict and Conduct Special Operations" (Washington, DC: The White House, 1987).

[130] Ibid

agreed on a division of labor in those two areas and civilians saw no immediate need to adjudicate one.

But unlike in the first period, there was no marked change in civilian preferences between the beginning and the end of period two. Despite the dramatic shifts in international and domestic politics, and a significant post-Cold War downsizing of the military, by 2000 civilian views of SOF's purposes were generally the same as they had been in 1988. As the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review stated, SOF, "provide a range of unique capabilities that have important applications across the full spectrum of conflict."[131] When it came to civilian preferences for their strategic purpose, SOF appeared to be holding their ground.

But this appearance of near-stasis belies the pronounced variance within the period in how civilians conceived of SOF and its purposes. In some sense, civilians—mostly those in the Clinton administration—went on a circular journey of discovery and arrived, by the year 2000, back at the same basic place they had been in 1987—and for the most part, remained until October of 1993. This variance followed the partisan identities of the three presidential administrations that spanned 1988 to 2000. 1988 marked the last year of the Republican Reagan administration, and civilian views of SOF had already been through seven years (plus the presidential campaign) of military influence. The H.W. Bush administration, also Republican, made no great adjustments in its overall views of SOF but did give SOF more strategic prominence and in 1991 articulated a detailed vision of SOF's relevance to "limited engagements in regional contingencies" while still referring to SOF as "crucial adjuncts to larger conventional actions."[132] Civilians in the H.W. Bush administration clearly had absorbed arguments that irregular and unconventional warfare would become more prevalent, making SOF broadly useful. "SOF have a role to play in each element of the [defense] strategy – particularly in forward presence and crisis response."[133]

The Democratic Clinton team came into office in 1993 with very little knowledge of special operations and few strong preferences about SOF. Moreover, the White House began by delegating management of defense policy to the Pentagon. At DoD itself, there were certainly civilians with sufficient expertise to weave SOF into the first articulation of defense strategy and resources, the Bottom-Up Review, but they essentially repeated the H.W. Bush administration's application of SOF across the spectrum of conflict, to include counterterrorism and countering weapons of mass destruction. The Black Hawk Down incident, however, soured many civilians to SOF direct action, even as stabilization operations in Haiti and later Bosnia sold them on civil affairs and psychological operations. Thus the Clinton civilian team spent several years emphasizing SOF's utility as the nation's post-intervention stabilization force. Yet by the end of the Clinton years, civilian preferences for SOF had rebounded somewhat to incorporate, again, direct action and counterterrorism, while the conventional forces as represented by the Chairman worked to persuade senior policymakers to veto SOF direct action missions. In sum, period two of this case study was another cycle where civilian preferences bounced between those supplied by military institutions.

What buffeted civilian preferences in this way? Certainly the changes in administration introduced variation in assumptions, ideas, and level of knowledge—as soon as one team's preferences stabilized, another team came in, sometimes with different starting points in their

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[131] Department of Defense, "1997 Quadrennial Defense Review"
[132] Department of Defense, Annual Report to Congress FY1992
[133] Department of Defense, Annual Report to Congress FY1993

expertise or preferences themselves. That each team eventually came to the same general preference is telling. How did this result obtain?

The conventional military continued to dominate civilians' preference formation, but the codification of SOF missions in Title 10 along with the existence of SOCOM and SOLIC and almost a decade of work among defense communities on the growing importance of low-intensity conflict meant that tolerance of SOF's strategic "market share" had gained widespread acceptance among defense practitioners, whether in uniforms or suits. However, as the Cold War ended and the framing threat from the now-defunct Soviet Union faded, ideas about what generated LIC and how the U.S. should handle it transformed. Insecurity around the world manifested as civil war and Western countries increasingly sought to defend principles and regulate international and sub-national politics in a variety of regions and nation-states rather than constrain the power of one major adversary. In the mid-1990s, stability operations—referring both to stabilizing individual states and whole regions—became the new LIC, and concerns about transnational terrorism faded into the greater clamor over genocides, coups, and humanitarian crises.[134] This made Special Forces A-teams, psychological operations and civil affairs especially relevant to U.S. foreign policy and the more kinetic, confrontational side of SOF (JSOC primarily) less salient.

SOF's purchase on strategic missions was thus shifting under their feet, and they would need to prove their ongoing relevance. Institutionally, SOF was of two minds. SOCOM was content with SOF's association with LIC and stability operations, mainly fighting to preserve prevalence in these areas in the minds of civilians. JSOC strained against the conventional military and civilians' shared risk aversion and distraction from the threat of terrorism. Thus, as in the 1980s, there was still a divide within the military about what SOF's purpose should be. Only now, a substantial portion of the SOF community and the conventional force were aligned, with the conventional forces having moved in the direction of acknowledging that SOF's domain was unconventional and irregular warfare. JSOC, as ever, thought direct action, especially where terrorist groups were concerned, should be a larger part of SOF's portfolio of activities—and therefore, what civilians preferred to do with their special operators.

SOF spent the years between 1987 and 2000 developing their market share, alternately convincing policymakers to use them and simply fulfilling the missions the defense community now agreed were theirs. JSOC struggled to keep itself relevant and employed, while SOCOM and the Services negotiated over the appropriate levels of investment in SOF capabilities.

Details

Preferences about SOF may have remained unchanged in the aggregate between 1987 and 2000, in part, because the SOF community spent at least part of that time consolidating its organizational gains. Implementation of the Nunn-Cohen legislation needed to be worked out between OSD, the Services, and SOCOM. Which forces belonged under SOCOM? Would SOCOM's new budget authority (the MFP-11) be run as a unique process or would it participate in the Program Objective Memoranda like other COCOMS? Would it have the same opportunity to provide the Congress with "unfunded requirements" lists as end-runs to DoD budgeting? What was the relationship between the Secretary, the Under Secretary for Policy, ASD/SOLIC, and

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[134] Another, clunkier term often used by military actors was "Operations Other Than War" or OOTW, a framing that dovetailed with another bit of military jargon, the "lesser-included case." Stability operations was a more widely adopted phrase and was more neutral as to the salience of such missions to national strategy.

SOCOM? It took until 1989 for most of these issues to be resolved.[135] This was in part because Army General James Lindsay was confirmed as CDR SOCOM in 1987 but Ambassador Charles Whitehouse wasn't confirmed ASD/SOLIC until 1988. The year gap in military and civilian leadership mattered, not only because it gave Lindsay a head start substantively and bureaucratically, but also because it meant Whitehouse was only in place for the last year of the waning Reagan administration, a span of time that was not long enough to introduce and implement many new ideas. During that year, Secretary of the Army John O. Marsh was given the acting Assistant Secretary for SOLIC job—unusually enough by the Congress, which was fed up with what it saw as the Reagan administration's foot-dragging over filling the roll.[136] Marsh has been credited with making arrangements for organizational matters like billets and budgeting, but also had, understandably, carryover notions of SOF from the Army. It was not, therefore, a period in which the civilians charged with SOF thought-leadership were likely to develop preferences independent from the SOF community. Meanwhile the wrangling over bureaucracy meant that much of the SOF community's energies at the higher levels were consumed by organizational turf battles rather than the substantive strategic purpose of the forces.

Just getting its own house in order actually meant that SOF lost some ground with respect to convincing the Services to continue their role in developing SOF. An article in the *New York Times* Sunday magazine described a force squandered, still repressed by conventional military leaders, hindered by intelligence-gathering turf wars with the CIA, and suffering even less mobility support from the Air Force than it had at its disposal in 1980. "Top brass view low-cost alternatives as a threat to big-ticket items, contending that massive firepower is the answer to unconventional warfare. 'The Air Force mistakenly thinks that if you want to improve the ability to fight terrorists, just buy more F-111's and bomb Libya again,' says [former Army Chief of Staff Edward C.] Meyer."[137]

Nevertheless, the mere existence of SOCOM changed the dynamics of influence between military and civilian preferences because it gave SOF much more bureaucratic power. William Cohen told the same *New York Times* reporter that the purpose of SOCOM was to "insure that counterterrorism and the special operations forces had an institutional voice in the Pentagon because it didn't have its own commercial lobby."[138] With its senior level leadership and new budgetary authority, SOCOM positioned the SOF community to be far more persuasive within DoD and gave it the independence to begin to define its roles and missions for itself—including through operational planning and doctrine. One of SOF's chief contemporary chroniclers, John Collins, wrote that by 1989, "CINCSOC [Commander SOCOM] and his staff could develop doctrine and tactics in the absence of sound policy guidance from the National Security Council and ASD SO/LIC".[139] SOF was now positioned to develop preferences for its own use under relaxed civilian (and other military) constraints.

Meanwhile, low-intensity conflict as a defense fashion hit its apogee in the late 1980s. Already in 1986, LIC and SOF were conjoined to the extent that Congress determined the ASD for Special Operations would also be the ASD for LIC. This did not mean that controversy over

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[135] Christopher Paul, Isaac R. Porche, and Eliot Axelband, *The Other Quiet Professionals: Lessons for Future Cyber Forces from the Evolution of Special Forces* (Washington, DC: RAND Corporation, 2014), 15-17.

[136] Marquis, 179

[137] Steven Emerson, "Stymied Warriors." *New York Times Magazine*, November 13, 1988, 68-112.

[138] Ibid

[139] John Collins, "Special Operations Forces: An Assessment" (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1994), 13.

the ideas underlying LIC had been resolved. Much of the LIC debate was about the threshold for using force, a tripwire whose location was unclear, or at least highly dependent on context[140]— hence the persistent appeal of the Weinberger doctrine, which seemed to offer straightforward answers to such knotty questions. But most civilians now accepted that LIC was a feature of the international security environments and that it presented a demand signal for a different type of force than what DoD was typically prepared to provide. SOF was the only element of the force that wanted such a mission, so it had the opportunity to shape itself for it.

At the beginning of the period, senior civilians used the term LIC frequently, and associated it with SOF often—if not by name, then at least by their primary mission set, as demonstrated by the marriage between SOF and LIC in the White House's report to Congress on LIC from 1987. The 1988 NSSR, for example, stated that "the most appropriate application of U.S. military power [in LIC contexts] is usually indirect through security assistance—training, advisory help, logistics support, and the supply of essential military equipment."[141] H.W. Bush's Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney noted in remarks before a Congressional committee, "to help deter low-intensity conflicts and promote stability in the Third World, we must have innovative strategies… Our approach for doing this is 'peacetime engagement'—a coordinated combination of political, economic, and military actions, aimed primarily at counteracting local violence and promoting nation-building."[142] In a separate appearance on the Hill, he warned of "low-intensity conflicts, including insurgencies, terrorism, and drug trafficking."[143]

The problem for SOF was now that it had helped to persuade civilian policymakers that LIC, terrorism included, was an object of real strategic importance, it seemed like more of the force than just SOF should be able operate in low-intensity environments. Civilians thus began to express a preference for more of the military to operate like SOF, if not entirely adopt its irregular warfare missions. Although SOF were still seen as uniquely capable in LIC contexts, light, agile, and speedy forces became desirable more generally. The 1990 National Security Strategy, President Bush's first, is especially revealing in this regard. It included a paragraph of discussion that again centered on SOF-like capabilities with speed, smallness, austerity, and sensitivity to political dynamics:

> …there are likely to be situations where American forces will have to succeed
> rapidly and with a minimum of casualties. Forces will have to accommodate to
> [sic] the austere environment, immature basing structure, and significant ranges
> often encountered in the Third World. The logistics "tail" of deployed forces will

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[140] See Admiral William J. Crowe, "Implications of Low-Intensity Conflict for U.S. Policy and Strategy," in Edwin G. Corr and Stephen Sloan, eds., *Low-Intensity Conflict: Old Threats in a New World* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992). Crowe of course was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who opposed the establishment of SOCOM. Amazingly, he goes on to advocate for LIC to be a SOF responsibility. Although, he thinks the entire force should develop LIC capabilities, and he also writes, "The worst mistake the services could commit, however, is to dedicate the Special Operations Forces solely to direct action missions and declare that the SOFs are the new LIC forces… Deep reconnaissance experience does not help a special forces adviser teach foreign soldiers how to defeat guerrillas. An increasing emphasis on direct action would also put too much emphasis on the military components of LIC, when in fact low-intensity wars involve fare more than simple military considerations." 297-298.

[141] National Security Strategy of the United States (Washington, DC: The White House, 1988), 35.

[142] Quoted in Sam C. Sarkesian, "Special Operations, Low Intensity Conflict (Unconventional Conflicts), and the Clinton Defense Strategy," in Stephen J. Cimbala, ed., *Clinton and Post-Cold War Defense* (Westport: Praeger, 1996), 104.

[143] Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, "Conflicting Trends and Long Term Defense Needs," statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, February 17, 1991.

also have to be kept to a minimum, as an overly large American presence could be self-defeating. These capabilities will sometimes be different from those of a force optimized for a conflict in Europe, and—as our understanding of the threat there evolves—we will make the necessary adjustments.[144]

Thus, although SOF were now clearly associated with LIC, civilian-penned strategic documents had begun to suggest that the rest of the force should also acquire the types of skills typically associated with special operators:

> American forces therefore must be capable of dealing effectively with the full range of threats, including insurgency and terrorism. Special Operations Forces have particular utility in this environment, but we will also pursue new and imaginative ways to apply flexible general purpose forces to these problems. We will improve the foreign language skills and cultural orientation of our armed forces and adjust our intelligence activities to better serve our needs. Units with unique capabilities in this environment will receive increased emphasis. Training and research and development will be better attuned to the needs of low-intensity conflict.[145]

SOF had to continue proving their unique contributions, not only to the strategic challenges of LIC, but also to broader national objectives. Writing in 1990, the Commander of SOCOM, General Carl Stiner, presented SOF's ongoing relevance to, indeed mastery of, LIC while also suggesting SOF were a kind of strategic anchor to hedge against future needs:

> The value of SOF goes well beyond its role in combat. The strategic capabilities of our nation's SOF across the operational continuum have been demonstrated daily during the past year. During Fiscal Year (FY) 1990 alone, the SOF of the US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), composed of special operations, psychological operations (PSYOP) and Civil Affairs (CA) forces from the Army, Navy and Air Force, deployed 485 training teams to 35 different countries around the world… Many of these deployments for training provided a significant and needed presence in areas where no permanent US military forces are stationed.[146]

Subsequent commanders of SOCOM made similar efforts to demonstrate the unique relevance of SOF. In 1996, toward the end of his tour as Commander, General Wayne Downing penned a chapter on "new national security challenges" in a book about contemporary warfare. In it, he highlighted global forces of social and political disintegration, including "Islamic fascism", and argued that the U.S. needed military forces who understood the local political implications of their actions. He also insisted that good intelligence in such contexts required "having human eyes and ears on target", a sly endorsement of SOF's role in intelligence-gathering.[147]

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[144] National Security Council, *National Security Strategy Report* (Washington, DC: The White House, 1990), 27: http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/1990.pdf

[145] Ibid, 28

[146] Carl W. Stiner, "The Strategic Employment of Special Operations Forces." *Military Review*, June 1991, 3.

[147] General Wayne A. Downing, "New National Security Challenges," in Max G. Manwaring and Wm. J. Olson, eds., *Managing Contemporary Conflict: Pillars of Success*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 92-99.

The conventional force was not enthusiastic about a shift toward LIC. This was especially true during the era when General Colin Powell occupied the positions of National Security Advisor (while on active duty) during the last two years of the Reagan administration and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during most of the H.W. Bush administration and the first nine months of the Clinton administration, until September of 1993. Powell was opposed to small scale uses of force under ambiguous circumstances—the hallmarks of both SOF and low-intensity conflict. He saw SOF as more of a force multiplier for large force packages rather than a set of detachments that could act independently where conventional forces could not. An acolyte of Caspar Weinberger and his doctrine, Powell argued even more strongly for clear exit strategies, public support, and sufficient forces to win overwhelmingly.[148] He was generally opposed to military interventions for vague humanitarian reasons or to simply halt a civil war.[149] In fact, he can be at least partly credited with reinvigorating the idea that SOF were adjuncts to the conventional force. As Chairman, Powell devised a four-part U.S. force structure he called the Base Force. SOF were used to reinforce forward-deployed forces in a crisis.[150] Powell's thinking was reflected in the 1991 NSS, which called for "a smaller and restructured force" with SOF a part of the "contingency forces".[151] Notably, and unlike the 1990 NSSR, the 1991 NSSR had no section on LIC.

Powell reflected the general feeling among the conventional forces that the reinvestment in SOF over the past decade was best used for warfighting. The December 1989 invasion of Panama (Operation Just Cause) was a case in point, celebrated universally as a vindication of the lessons learned since the Grenada debacle in 1983.[152] SOF's much-improved integration with the GPF and the operation's rapid success had something for everyone. Proponents of both GPF solutions to political challenges and SOF's utility during major operations could point to Just Cause.

Just Cause would prove almost immediately to be an anomaly as far as some conventional military leaders were concerned, and a proof of concept for both SOF and civilian leaders. In 1991 the major conventional campaign to push Iraq out of Kuwait provided that test. SOCOM and JSOC both wanted to be involved but were limited by the commanding general in charge of the war, Norman Schwarzkopf, who thought special operations were too difficult to control and might trigger premature escalation.[153] SOF lobbying went all the way to the Secretary of Defense. Eventually, Secretary Cheney had to order Powell to intervene with Schwarzkopf on SOCOM's behalf. Cheney later explained to an interviewer that his personal experience with SOF during Just Cause was dispositive: "Wayne Downing was the guy [Commander of JSOC], I'd dealt with him directly on a number of occasions. We'd done the planning for Panama, for example, and I'd watched him in operation there. I had a lot of confidence in him and I thought they [SOF] were appropriate for us to use."[154] As described

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[148] Halberstam, 2001.

[149] Jon Western, "Sources of Humanitarian Intervention: Beliefs, Information, and Advocacy in the U.S. Decisions on Somalia and Bosnia" (*International Security* 26(4), Spring 2002).

[150] John R. Galvin, "Conflict in the Post-Cold War Era" in Corr and Sloan, 66. Galvin was SACEUR and commanded Just Cause.

[151] National Security Council, *National Security Strategy Report* (Washington, DC: The White House, 1991), 31: http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/1991.pdf

[152] SOCOM History 2007; Clancy, 2002.

[153] Moyar, 187.

[154] Miller Center University of Virginia. Oral History Interview with Richard Cheney. March 16-17, 2000. https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/richard-b-cheney-oral-history-secretary-defense

above, SOF went on to perform numerous missions during Operation Desert Storm and subsequent missions supporting Iraqi Kurds.

These were major operations, however, and Powell's and the conventional force's suspicion of involving the military in LIC—regardless of whether such missions were undertaken by SOF or GPF—persisted, setting the stage for the events that would set JSOC back in its efforts to woo the Clinton administration into approving direct action missions.

The Clinton team was poised to assume the same preferences for SOF that had obtained over the preceding sixteen years of evolution in SOF's strategic purpose. The language in the administration's first major articulation of defense policy, the Bottom-Up Review, echoed the preceding Bush administration's own language on the uses of SOF. The 1993 document assigned a variety of missions to SOF, including involvement in phases 2-4 of conflict, a C-WMD role, interventions and PKOs, and plugging holes in conventional deterrence including mobility and presence operations. This was, in significant part, an artifact of civilian defense priorities—SOF being toward the bottom of the list rather than the top, and thus not a place for new thinking. Contemporary analysts claimed the BUR did little to re-examine LIC in light of the changes to the international environment, arguing it "appeared to be in large part a Department of Defense exercise to protect its budget and institutions rather than an effort to discard entrenched historical perspectives and take a broader view of international threats to U.S. security."[155]

Whether that characterization was fair or not, according to then-Deputy Secretary of Defense (later Secretary) William Perry, SOF and its missions were subsumed under the so-called lesser-included case category:

> We considered then, first of all, a major de-emphasis on nuclear forces, and second, that it provided the forces for the two major regional conflicts, and that the other things—the insurgency operations, the peacekeeping operations—were lesser included cases. That is, we dismissed them in a sense by saying, Yes, they may be important, but the forces we have should cover them. That was, I think you can appreciate, a bit of intellectual laziness. That is, it's not that simple, even as it wasn't that simple in the Cold War to talk about the lesser included cases. But that's the way we thought about it and treated it, not because we were fully satisfied with that answer, but because we had to get on to doing other things. We had to get that Bottom-Up Review done. That answered the mail. When people had questions about lesser included cases, that was the answer to the question."[156]

Cheney also said: "One of the real problems you have with any new Administration, even one as experienced as ours was—I mean, we weren't a bunch of amateurs, we'd been around there before—it's hard. You know, there is no training ground for senior civilian political leaders in an Administration." Also: "The general arrangement I had with General Powell was that in terms of giving directives—the operational use of the force, dealing with the CINC, for example—I would always go through him. Didn't have to, that was our option. Under Goldwater-Nichols I could go direct to the CINC if I wanted, but I would refrain from reaching around him to go to the CINC when I was passing something down. I wanted it all to go down through him. I wanted him to have some pretty tight control of that. [But] I did not want a single channel coming up. I wanted multiple sources of information coming up. I did not want him to be the screen for information coming to the Secretary from the military... I used my military assistants an awful lot as a source of information or to go pulse the system and generate stuff I needed."

[155] Ambassador Edwin G. Corr and Ambassador David C. Miller, "Organizing for Operations Other Than War in the Post-Cold War Era," in Manwaring and Olson, 1996, 155.

[156] Miller Center University of Virginia Presidential Oral Histories, Interview with William J. Perry, February 21, 2006. https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/william-perry-oral-history-deputy-secretary-

In 1994 the Clinton Administration's first NSSR, "A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement," reflected the BUR's various uses of SOF, including mixing them between unique and conventional operations. There were no references to SOF but to "specialized units":

> A number of other tasks remain that U.S. forces have typically carried out with both general purpose and specialized units. These missions include: counterterrorism and punitive attacks, noncombatant evacuation, counter-narcotics operations, nation assistance, and humanitarian and disaster relief operations.[157]

Thus, while the Clinton-era civilians' preference for the use of SOF were substantively similar to those of the H.W. Bush administration, the strength of that preference was weak. SOF were sprinkled into strategy as an after-thought.

Evidence of civilian preference weakness was available in the first year of the administration during the progression of the deployment to Somalia. Having withstood public pressure during the waning days of the H.W. Bush administration to get the military involved in either the deteriorating conditions in the former Yugoslavia or Somalia, General Powell had eventually supported a mission in Somalia because he thought it was less likely to mire the U.S. in a protracted deployment.[158] Clinton then inherited the deployment, which at the time was humanitarian in scope and in support of UN operations. SOF were involved mostly in transportation security, other force protection, and civil affairs.[159]

As Clinton's first year wore on, however, the dynamics on the ground between international forces and the Somalis shifted. Forces loyal to Mohamed Farah Aideed began attacking UN personnel, making UN and U.S. force protection a greater concern and drawing international personnel into the conflict. American officials on the ground increasingly requested permission to conduct offensive operations and the forces to conduct them. The Clinton White House, meanwhile, largely neglected the operational aspects of the situation in Somalia, focusing instead on processes at the UN in the hopes of negotiating some form of settlement.[160] There is little evidence that civilian managers at the White House understood the various options DoD had for engaging in Somalia, and Secretary Aspin was either unable or unwilling to draw their attention to it.[161] The Battle for Mogadishu therefore came as a shock to an inattentive White House, acting as an educational device about a number of foreign policy and defense issues to include special operations forces. Having not understood the operational risks being run on the

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defense He went on: "So there was a lot of thinking and a lot of talk and some writing in the Defense Department after the Bottom-Up Review about how you really should be thinking about these other cases and how they should influence the way you put your budget together. But that thinking is not articulated in the Bottom-Up Review. So in my judgment, I've always regarded it as an incomplete document."

[157] National Security Council, "A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement" (Washington, DC: The White House, 1994), The White House,. http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/1994.pdf

[158] Western, 1998

[159] SOCOM 2007 History, 55-56.

[160] Anonymous former senior OSD official, interview with the author December 5, 2018

[161] Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009)

ground or the political risk of military casualties outside major combat operations, the Clinton White House soured against direct action.[162]

At the same time, however, major stabilization operations were launching in Haiti. SF ODA teams fanned out across the rural areas, in many cases supplying basic services to the Haitian population.[163] James Dobbins, then the U.S. Special Envoy for Haiti, recalled that Special Forces "did a good job" establishing law and order "throughout the countryside."[164] Special Forces also performed well in Bosnia and Kosovo, conducting liaison missions with multinational forces and supplying intelligence on local conditions[165]—and, by helping stabilize post-conflict societies, proving that intervention was a workable method for conducting U.S. foreign policy. President Clinton's admiration for them even prompted a reference in his second Democratic presidential nomination acceptance speech in 1996: "The Special Forces are just what the name says; they are special forces. If I walk off this stage tonight and call them on the telephone and tell them to go halfway around the world and risk their lives for you and be there by tomorrow at noon, they will do it."[166]

The result was that SOCOM was extremely busy deploying SOF on the full range of their Title 10 missions—except for direct action and counterterrorism. Overall SOF deployments surged during the 1990s, and SOCOM's promotion of that fact makes it difficult to disentangle civilian demand from military persuasion.[167] But interviewees claimed that the different political experiences Clinton administration civilians had of Somalia and Haiti informed their beliefs.[168] JSOC and its direct action orientation took a back seat to civil affairs in civilians' preferences.

Meanwhile, intra-military dynamics continued to mold concepts of SOF's purpose in almost infinitely flexible ways. Operationally, conventional military leaders often continued to resist broad applications of special operators. In Bosnia in particular, conventional commanders limited Army Special Forces elements to a liaison function during the first year of operations.[169] However, Combatant Commanders (then called Commanders-in-Chief, or CINCS) generated a high demand for SOF in a variety of ways. One model was that out-of-the-way COCOMs used SOF-centric missions to gain policy relevance. For example, successive Commanders SOUTHCOM (including General Joulwan and General Charles Wilhelm) used counter-drug and FID missions. [170]

In 1997, the GAO conducted a report, the objective of which was "to determine whether SOF are being used in a manner that best supports national security objectives."[171] The report

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[162] Anonymous former senior OSD official, interview with the author December 5, 2018

[163] Philippe R. Girard, "Peacekeeping, Politics, and the 1994 U.S. Intervention in Haiti." *Journal of Conflict Studies* (Vol 24, No 1, 2004)

[164] "The World Was Tired of Haiti: The 1994 U.S. Intervention," Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, https://adst.org/2016/07/world-tired-haiti-1994-u-s-intervention/

[165] Armando J. Ramirez, "From Bosnia to Baghdad: The Evolution of U.S. Army Special Forces 1994-2004," U.S. Naval Post Graduate School, Master's Thesis, Monterey, CA: 2004.

[166] "Clinton's Speech Accepting the Democratic Nomination for President," *The New York Times*, August 30, 1996

[167] SOCOM's Official History notes that the "number of personnel deployed away from home station per week" doubled between 1993 and 1996 alone (25)

[168] Collins, Wechsler, Anonymous former senior OSD official.

[169] Ramirez, 23-25.

[170] Dana Priest, *The Mission: Waging War and Keeping Peace with America's Military* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003), 200-205.

[171] United States General Accounting Office. Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Military Readiness, Committee on National Security, House of Representatives, "Special Operations Forces: Opportunities to Preclude Overuse and Misuse" (Washington, DC: GAO, May 1997).

observed that SOF were being used at a rate that threatened readiness, in part because SOF were used for "missions that could be handled by conventional forces." They found that SOF were often "the force of choice" for regional CINCs in day-to-day operations.

> The CINCs use SOF as one of the elements available to them to support their regional strategies. Because of their extensive training, relative maturity, and in most cases language skills and cultural orientation, SOF are well-suited to perform a wide variety of missions, ranging from direct action, rapid response missions, to foreign internal defense missions that support the CINCs' peacetime strategies.[172]

The report also examined the degree to which SOF commanders and CINCs agreed about the purposes of SOF—and found a lot of variance, revealing that "the military" and even "SOF" did not have unified preferences about the use of SOF capabilities:

> According to responses to our questionnaire, CINCs and SOF unit leaders do not always agree on the priority of collateral missions that SOF personnel and units are routinely assigned. For example… in the Pacific Command, CINC officials ranked antiterrorism their number one priority for collateral activities, while Army and Navy unit officials consider it their number seven and four priority, respectively.[173]

In that event, much as during the Reagan years, terrorism and SOF's role in countering it became a growing part of civilians' agenda due to a number of spectacular attacks on American targets. In 1993, a truck bombing in one of the World Trade Center parking garage's hinted at the coming pattern of attacks. In 1996, an attack on Saudi Arabia's Khobar Towers drew yet more policymaker attention. Then in 1998, near-simultaneous bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania propelled high-level policy discussions at the White House.[174]

Civilian and military preferences about SOF's role in responding to the threat of terrorism during this period also reveal the extent to which civilian preferences came full circle. In the early part of the period, as a result of the march of terrorist attacks in the 1980s and multiple high-level strategic reviews, civilians in the H.W. Bush administration had accepted terrorism as a growing threat to U.S. interests. The DoD's FY1989 annual report to Congress, for example, argued,

> One type of low-intensity conflict—terrorism—has taken on a new character. What once was largely the activity of small, frustrated extremist groups within countries has become a virtual multinational enterprise, and state-sponsored terrorism has emerged as a new weapon in the arsenal of ambiguous aggression.[175]

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[172] Ibid

[173] Ibid

[174] Richard H. Shultz, Jr., "Showstoppers: Nine Reasons Why We Never Sent our Special Operations Forces After Al Qaeda Before 9/11." *The Weekly Standard*, January 26, 2004.

[175] Department of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress FY1989"

Nevertheless, the Clinton team backed off characterizations of terrorism as warfare. Again, the experience in Mogadishu suppressed proposals for direct action, in turn making the use of special operators for CT unappealing. In a study conducted shortly after 9/11, historian Richard Shultz noted that officials in the Clinton administration linked the catastrophe in Mogadishu to Desert One—the "last time the Democrats had held the White House." He noted that the Joint Staff was pleased the White House was so gun-shy about SOF after Somalia. He quotes a "Pentagon officer" explaining the Joint Staff "didn't want to put special ops troops on the ground. They hadn't wanted to go into Somalia to begin with. The Joint Staff was the biggest foot-dragger on all of this counterterrorism business." Shultz also chronicled the hesitancy of civilians in the White House and officers on the Joint Staff for DoD to focus on CT at all. Michael Sheehan, Clinton's Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the State Department, told Shultz that civilians and the Joint Staff alike minimized DoD's role in CT: "Terrorism was seen as a distraction that was the CIA's job, even though DOD personnel were being hit by terrorists. The Pentagon way to treat terrorism against Pentagon assets abroad was to cast it as a force protection issue."[176]

Nevertheless, as intelligence reports about al Qaeda flowed in, President Clinton himself increasingly asked about the use of SOF against transnational terrorist organizations, including al Qaeda.[177] A Counterterrorism and Security Group (CSG) was established at the NSC, and in a series of Presidential Decision Directives the administration pressed for more proactive counterterrorism measures.[178] Secretary Perry, meanwhile, had asked former SOCOM commander Wayne Downing to chair a commission study on terrorism in the wake of the Khobar Towers attack. Downing characterized the attacks on U.S. targets as part of a campaign of asymmetric warfare and urged DoD to prepare kinetic options to respond.[179]

Given how hard civilians were leaning into direct action against al Qaeda in formal policy statements, it is striking that the only military action taken against the group were air strikes in Sudan and Afghanistan.[180] Curiously, it was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Hugh Shelton who dissuaded the president from using SOF to conduct strikes against al Qaeda targets. That Shelton was also the former commander of SOCOM is perhaps a testament to Graham Allison's (unintentionally?) institutionalist adage: "Where you stand depends on where you sit." The services clearly still feared that any ground deployment—even those designed to be clandestine and exfiltrated immediately—risked greater military involvement in ambiguous environments. This is consistent with Will Wechsler's memory that the Pentagon in the 1990s continued to promote the Weinberger-Powell doctrine.[181] Shelton was reflecting their preferences—

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[176] Richard H. Shultz, Jr., "Showstoppers: Nine Reasons Why We Never Sent our Special Operations Forces After Al Qaeda Before 9/11." *The Weekly Standard*, January 26, 2004.

[177] Ibid

[178] "Presidential Decision Directive 39: U.S. Policy on Counterterrorism" (Washington, DC: The White House, 1995); "Presidential Decision Directive/NSC-62: Protection Against Unconventional Threats to the Homeland and Americans Overseas" (Washington, DC: The White House, 1998).

[179] Shultz, 2004.

[180] Raphael F. Perl, "Terrorism: U.S. Response to Bombings in Kenya and Tanzania: A New Policy Direction?" (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 1998).

[181] Interview with the author

and while it does not appear he changed the President's preference to take direct action with SOF, he did dissuade him from doing so.

Regardless, it was during this period of low demand for direct action when an important element of SOF's influence on national strategy itself began to develop. JSOC began to conduct "area familiarization" trips to countries where SOF deployments seemed likely. Also known as "advance force operations" or AFOs,[182] these missions would scout embassies and airports and other transportation hubs. They gathered massive quantities of data about innumerable places and potential targets, relying also on info from the NSA, CIA, and State Department. "One-third of the command's [JSOC's] 172 staffers work on intelligence analysis" the New York Times reported.[183]

These activities were echoed in strategic-level documents. NSDD 207's direction to the SecDef to consider prepositioning CT forces and the FY1988 Annual Report's discussion of LIC-type operations both provided hints of the opening SOF would later exploit, and had perhaps pried open themselves:

> Our specific role is to work with the other appropriate U.S. government agencies and host country organizations, as necessary, to integrate our effort into a comprehensive strategy to combat the insurgency when that is indicated, and, where possible, *identify at an early stage those conditions that foster insurgency.* [Emphasis added].[184]

This bias toward steady-state forward-stationing became a way of life for SOF over the course of the 1990s. Working with the regional combatant commands, SOF were the vanguard element to shape post-conflict, post-Cold War, and post-crisis U.S. relationships around the world. As Dana Priest explains in her book, *The Mission*,

> When the Soviet Union collapsed, small special forces teams quickly set up in Russia, Poland, and Hungary to develop new military relationships there. A dozen years later, members of an A-team trained to teach de-mining became the first American troops in nearly sixty years to resume military relations with the Vietnamese army. In Africa alone, the 3rd Special Forces Group has taught light-infantry and other military tactics to troops in [22 countries].[185]

SOCOM, with its institutional permanence and budgetary power, had become a repository of information and policy options. Already a popular force provider among policymakers and COCOMS alike, their high deployment tempo under "peacetime" conditions gave them global reach and insight that drove the perpetual motion of the SOF enterprise.

JSOC, still a secretive direct action-oriented organization with a far narrower and less-in-demand skill set, had to advertise their services to get work. They demonstrated their capabilities in impressive site visits and role-playing scenarios and "adopted" interested civilians, educating them about SOF—not unlike the way SOF advocates had sought out Noel Koch and members of Congress in the early 1980s. In interviews, numerous civilian officials reported their experiences

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[182] Naylor, xii; Moyar, 241.
[183] Emerson, 1988.
[184] DOD FY1988 Annual Report.
[185] Priest, 2003, 187.

on visits to Fort Bragg and the JSOC compound, witnessing high altitude jumps, marksmanship, and hostage raids designed to impress policymakers.[186]

The lobbying worked—to a point. Although publicly-available documents, including memoirs and reportage, state that JSOC was never sent to target terrorists during the Clinton administration, they did get a little exercise. As the wars in Bosnia and later Kosovo concluded, JSOC teams were deployed to use their unique man-hunting skill set to capture internationally wanted war criminals[187] and other counternarcotics-related man-hunting missions have been referred to in press accounts.[188]

On the eve of 2001, the Clinton admin released their last NSSR, which continued to list SOF among the range of military capabilities: "Our ability to respond to the full spectrum of threats requires that we have the best- trained, best-equipped, most effective armed forces in the world. Our strategy requires that we have highly capable ground, air, naval, special operations, and space forces…"[189] Rather than LIC, the strategy speaks of "smaller scale contingencies" which again mix conventional and unconventional missions:

> …military operations short of major theater warfare, including peacekeeping operations, enforcing embargoes and no-fly zones, evacuating U.S. citizens, reinforcing key allies, neutralizing NBC weapons facilities, supporting counterdrug operations, protecting freedom of navigation in international waters, providing disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, coping with mass migration, and engaging in information operations.[190]

By the end of the Clinton Administration the main focus of national security policy was on stabilizing countries and regions, not on countering terrorism. SOF were the managers of the lesser-included-case, while the GPF were in charge of the wars national security planners anticipated as likely and used to scale the entire force itself.[191] But civilians in the executive branch had rebounded from the post-Mogadishu rejection of SOF's direct action capabilities, even if the use of SOF's skills in capturing high value targets remained confined to non-counterterrorism contexts. SOF had achieved a lasting market share in terms of its size and mission scope, and that share had translated into a stable civilian preference to reach for SOF in a variety of situations.

Period III: Counterterrorism Monopoly (2001-2010)

In 2001, civilians in the George W. Bush administration came into office with an interest in blending SOF capabilities into the general purpose force. The military, they believed, should be small, agile, and lethal. This was a break from the outgoing Clinton administration although showed some continuity with the end of the H.W. Bush administration, when there was a push for the GPF to acquire LIC-associated skills dominated by SOF even as SOF's ability to support the conventional force in contingency operations persisted. The administration's 2001

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[186] Joseph Collins interview with the author September 12, 2018; Anonymous former senior OSD official.
[187] Naylor, 63-71.
[188] Priest, 214.
[189] National Security Council, "A National Security Strategy for a Global Age" (Washington, DC: The White House, 2000): http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/2001.pdf
[190] Ibid
[191] Anonymous former senior OSD official.

Quadrennial Defense Review, which was completed before the terrorist attacks of 9/11, articulated their preference for the use of SOF as an "immediately employable supplement to forward forces to achieve a deterrent effect in peacetime," and to supply "covert deep insertions over great distances." In other words, SOF complemented major operations—convention or otherwise.

By 2012, civilians preferred to use SOF as the lead in the nation's counter-terrorism campaign. This preference evolved during the Bush administration and held into the first term of Barack Obama's presidency. In its 2006 QDR, the W. Bush administration announced that the GPF would take on some of SOF's tasks to free them up for "long-duration, indirect, and clandestine operations." The 2006 QDR also associated "direct action" with SOF for the first time, specifying that such strikes were for the purposes of counterterrorism and against so-called High Value Targets (HVTs) or individuals with a strategic role in the terrorist threat to the United States. The 2010 QDR emphasized SOF's role in counterinsurgency, stability operations, and counterterrorism—although it included the GPF in such activities as well. Both the A-Team side of SOF and the direct action elements of the force were arrayed against terrorist targets in strategy and in practice, focusing SOCOM and JSOC on the same general purpose.

The obvious reason for the shift in civilian preferences were the terrorist attacks on 9/11. And indeed, they had the largest effect. But for SOF to become the lead element in the counterterrorism fight was not inevitable and was not even what the W. Bush administration initially preferred. Indeed, the administration's pre-9/11 preference as expressed in their first QDR lagged until well into 2002. It was SOF's—particularly JSOC's—volunteerism and the conventional force's hesitancy that persuaded civilian leaders to think of SOF as the counterterrorism force. This advocacy, especially by JSOC, built on years on groundwork laid by the SOF community in educating civilians about special operations and developing intelligence capacity and other direct action-enabling skills and knowledge. And once SOCOM and JSOC were assigned as leads in the War on Terror—and, moreover, began to show tactical and operational successes in Iraq—the bureaucratic, budgetary, and operational momentum carried into the Obama administration. A military preference to focus SOF on counterterrorism capabilities that was born in a small corner of the Army in 1977 and grew after the Desert One imbroglio had finally matured into SOF's monopoly over CT.

Details

President George W. Bush entered office with a vision for the U.S. armed forces that challenged both SOF and the GPF to be more like each other. His first Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated in his memoir, *Known and Unknown* that "the President had given [him] explicit guidance to make the Defense Department 'lethal, light and mobile.'"[192] In a campaign speech at the Citadel, candidate Bush had stated his belief that

> Our forces in the next century must be agile, lethal, readily deployable and require a minimum of logistical support. We must be able to project our power over long distances… Our heavy forces must be lighter. Our light forces must be more lethal. All must be easier to deploy. And these forces

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[192] Donald H. Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin Group, 2011), 294.

must be organized in smaller, more agile formations, rather than cumbersome divisions.[193]

Rumsfeld re-entered the building (it was his second tour as SecDef) with both Bush's marching order and his own notions that things like "space and high-tech intelligence were the centerpieces… for transforming the U.S. military."[194] The administration's first QDR, prepared prior to 9/11 and released just shortly after the attacks (and therefore considered immediately irrelevant), referred to SOF as an "immediately employable supplement to forward forces to achieve a deterrent effect in peacetime."[195]

Thus, while SOF were not irrelevant to the new civilian leadership's strategic vision, they were on the periphery. And the fact that Rumsfeld essentially wanted the entire force to be more SOF-like threatened SOF's uniqueness. It was even rumored that Rumsfeld was considering demoting the rank of the ASD for SOLIC to reflect his disinterest in both LIC and special operations.[196] Meanwhile, he rode roughshod over the Joint Staff and the services—conveying an initial unwillingness to bend to their preferences on much of anything.[197]

JSOC swung into gear. Sean Naylor chronicled how Rumsfeld "fell for" JSOC, in a series of engagements with its personnel that book-ended 9/11. Before the attacks, in March of 2001, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz took an "introductory briefing" on the command from its commander, Dell Dailey, and a few others. Scheduled to last under a half hour, it stretched into 120 enthusiastic minutes.[198] When the 9/11 attacks occurred, the effectiveness of JSOC's lobbying was evident in the Pentagon's initial memo to the President about the military response to the attacks. In that document, "Special Operations Forces" are cited as the key capability for achieving the "strategic theme" of "aiding local peoples to rid themselves of terrorists."[199] Then, in November of 2001, Rumsfeld visited the JSOC compound at Fort Bragg. Delta and SEAL Team 6 showed off their ambush, hostage rescue, and high altitude parachuting skills.[200]

But Naylor also reveals that JSOC's success meant that Rumsfeld emphasized direct action over—or even at the expense of—SOF's other capabilities. "Despite—of perhaps because of—his repeated exposure to briefings on the high-end counterterrorism that was JSOC's forte," Naylor writes, "Rumsfeld's understanding of special operations remained superficial and unbalanced. He did not recognize the value of unconventional warfare and foreign internal defense… To Rumsfeld, the value of special operations lay only in the spooky and lethal activities JSOC exemplified."[201]

Naylor partially substantiates this claim by citing Rumsfeld's memoir, in which Rumsfeld wrote, "Since 2001, I had made a priority of increasing the size, capabilities, equipment, and authorities of the special operations forces… We shifted some of the tasks that Special Forces

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[193] Rumsfeld, 294; quoted from George W. Bush, "A Period of Consequences," The Citadel, South Carolina. September 23, 1999.

[194] Priest, 27.

[195] Department of Defense, "2001 Quadrennial Defense Review"

[196] Collins, interview with the author

[197] Priest, 23-24.

[198] Naylor, 160.

[199] Donald Rumsfeld, "Memorandum for the President: Strategic Thoughts." Office of the Secretary of Defense: September 30, 2001. http://library.rumsfeld.com/doclib/sp/272/2001-09-30%20to%20President%20Bush%20re%20Strategic%20Thoughts.pdf

[200] Naylor, 161.

[201] Naylor, 162.

had historically been responsible for, such as training foreign militaries, to allow regular forces to do them as well. This freed up special operators for more upper-tier tasks—reconnaissance and direct-action missions."[202]

Naylor's own narrative suggests that Rumsfeld's love of JSOC was partly a meeting of the minds, and partly an abdication on the part of General Charles Holland, then-Commander of SOCOM. Rumsfeld originally approached Holland to lead the global war that he was envisioning, and Holland balked.[203] JSOC was only too happy to step into the void. Thus, SOF to Rumsfeld became everything JSOC did and nothing it didn't. Thomas Ricks, in his blistering account of the subsequent war in Iraq, quoted multiple mid-grade officers and enlisted SF soldiers complaining that SF were being mis-used in Iraq exactly along those Rumsfeldian lines. One such officer "criticized the emphasis on raids and other direct action missions, which he felt came at the expense of the training mission… 'We have become locked on kill or capture as a mission statement.'"[204] Given how FID-focused much of that first "Strategic Thoughts" memo to President Bush was, this is a remarkable case of how intra-military bureaucratic politics can affect the preferences of civilian leaders.

Rumsfeld wasn't the only civilian in the Pentagon to prefer a SOF-heavy approach to warfare more generally. Rumsfeld states that his deputy at DoD, Paul Wolfowitz, was the one who advocated the use of SOF in Afghanistan: "Wolfowitz also suggested that wherever we struck first, our special forces should be a part of the military strategy. He had been impressed by the use of special forces to locate and destroy Iraqi Scud missiles during the 1991 Gulf War."[205] As the Naylor book notes, Wolfowitz had also been in the JSOC briefing the previous March. Joe Collins, the DASD for Stability Operations from 2001 to 2003, recalled a 1991 trip that then-Undersecretary for Policy Wolfowitz took to JSOC. During the trip, which began with a jet flight from the DC area to Fort Bragg, JSOC personnel demonstrated their high-altitude parachuting capabilities by actually opening the back hatch of the aircraft and jumping out. The trip sounds remarkably similar to the demonstrations described by Sean Naylor that Rumsfeld himself witnessed some ten years later.[206] Rumsfeld also cites a memo that Wolfowitz wrote to him shortly after the 9/11 attacks: "We should consider using those [Special Forces] as a kind of armed liaison with anti-Al-Qaida [sic] or anti-Taliban elements in Afghanistan." Rumsfeld continues, "We believed our special operations forces could establish links with potential allies in Afghanistan, providing us with better intelligence and demonstrating that we were willing to help those who helped us."[207]

At least one other feature of SOF, aside from its efficiency, appealed to Rumsfeld, and that was its capacity for intelligence-gathering, a resource, as explored above, that SOCOM had been growing for over a decade. According to Douglas J. Feith, Rumsfeld's Under Secretary for Policy,

> When Rumsfeld complained about risk aversion, he was referring (among other things) to the lack of proposals to use ground forces. The intelligence needed to fight terrorists could not be obtained solely, or even mainly, by satellite. We needed

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[202] Rumsfeld, 2011, 654.
[203] Naylor, 158-159.
[204] Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), 368.
[205] Rumsfeld, 2011, 359.
[206] Joseph Collins, interview with the author, September 12, 2018.
[207] Rumsfeld, 2011, 360.

human intelligence…[VCJCS] Pace and I used the CAPCOM—the Campaign Planning Committee we cochaired—to connect with SOCOM officers on how to deploy Special Operations Forces, not just for "direct action" against known terrorist targets but also to obtain intelligence.[208]

The Bush administration would demonstrate their preference to use SOF as an intelligence and targeting device again in Iraq—remarkably, a preference that at least some conventional commanders had come to share. In his memoir, President Bush recalls that the Commanding General for the 2003 Iraq invasion, Tommy Franks, recommended "multiple, highly skilled Special Operations Forces identifying targets for precision-guided munitions [so that] we will need fewer conventional ground forces."[209]

Franks appears to have understood that Rumsfeld, under the direction of the president, wanted to see force used in rapid, light, precise packages. Although his initial preference was for the entire military to transform in that direction, Rumsfeld ended by relying on SOF to *be* the type of force he wanted to *do* the major military missions at the time. Rumsfeld's preference for SOF obtained because SOF offered to fulfill the Secretary's and the President's wishes.

So civilians' initial preferences, coupled with 9/11 and JSOC's lobbying produced a civilian preference to use SOF as the lead kinetic element in major operations and counterterrorism. Going into unusual detail for a civilian memoir, Rumsfeld laid out the reasoning behind his preference for relying so heavily on SOF for the invasion of Afghanistan:

> The Army's Special Forces, the Navy's SEALs, and the Air Force's combat controllers had not been previously entrusted with the lead in such a major mission. The few hundred men who were ready to risk their lives in the service of their country… were among the most highly trained, best equipped, and most experienced soldiers on the face of the earth. Some were fluent in the local languages and versed in the cultures they would be encountering. They had trained foreign militaries and understood how to get along with those who thought and fought differently. They were experts in the irregular guerrilla warfare that would be critical to success. They were trained in demolition, hand-to-hand combat, and mountain and desert warfare. American special operators would be the sharp tip of the spear in the first war of the twenty-first century.[210]

The waging of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq reinforced civilian preferences about how to use SOF, partly in path-dependent ways, and partly because SOF kinetic actions delivered the rare moments that felt like victory. In his memoir, President Bush refers to JSOC killing Abu Muqab al Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, as "a bright spot" during the otherwise dire news of 2006, "a dramatic sign of progress."[211] Robert Gates, Bush's second Secretary of Defense, also noted JSOC's "remarkably successful" operations that also "played a major role in the success of the surge in Iraq and the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan."[212]

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[208] Douglas J. Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 114.

[209] George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Random House, 2010), 233-234.

[210] Rumsfeld, 2011, 377-378.

[211] Bush, 2010, 365.

[212] Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Random House, 2014), 254.

As for the path-dependency, that obtained as a consequence of SOF defining the operational terms of the War on Terrorism and then driving activity across the foreign policy enterprise. They did so by framing the periodic policy debates about the best approaches in both wars: SOF-executed direct action counterterrorism missions were seen as a necessary complement to counterinsurgency, but it was also seen as a more viable *alternative* to counterinsurgency, especially in Afghanistan as the war dragged on late into the Obama administration.[213] In turn, SOF advocates framed debates by being present in every major decision and alternative-proposal node. During the Iraq war, SOF led the military colonization of the interagency, putting liaison officers in every intelligence element they could find and borrowing them from civilian agencies.[214] During the early years of the Iraq war, SOF's "outreach" was largely on the initiative of Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal, whose theory of "fighting a network with a network" operationalized SOF-led interagency coordination on the ground in both Iraq, when McChrystal was JSOC commander, and in Afghanistan, where McChrystal became Commander of the overall war effort.[215] Part of McChrystal's theory was that the U.S. needed to act faster than the enemy could process information and launch the next attack. This demanded not only exquisite intelligence but rapid communication between those gathering information and those leading missions. This meant JSOC's target for interagency cooptation was the intelligence community, the long-term SOF partner-and-rival.[216] It also meant that operations moved so swiftly that civilian leaders on the ground and back in Washington were in the position of consumer not only of intelligence but of the course of the war itself. One "senior civilian official" told Bob Woodward, "Every single night [in Afghanistan] they [JSOC] are banging on these guys with a pace and fury that is pretty impressive."[217]

Echoing the pattern of the first period in this study, the SOF community also counted on retired officers to persuade civilian institutions of their value. No figure better embodied SOF's institutional influence on civilian preference formation than Michael Vickers. The ASD for SOLIC from 2007 to 2011, spanning the Bush and Obama administration, Vickers had been a ten-year Special Forces officer turned CIA analyst. He fought in Grenada—although, as he transitioned into the Agency in 1983, it is unclear whether with SF or the CIA.[218] He was most known as the Agency's lead for the program that armed the mujahedeen in Afghanistan to fight the Soviet occupation.

Now, as ASD SOLIC, Vickers was a firm believer in SOF's potential to be the lead elements in the post-9/11 wars. Before being nominated by the W. Bush administration to fill the ASD for SOLIC role, he wrote a 2004 op-ed arguing that the U.S. force presence in Iraq should be smaller rather than larger, and should focus on training the Iraqis and supporting special operations.[219] As ASD SOLIC, he fought to expand the size of SOF dramatically,[220] and built "a

[213] Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 236.

[214] Christopher J. Lamb and Evan Munsing, *Secret Weapon: High-Value Target Teams as Organizational Innovation*. (Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University Press, 2011); Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 2013).

[215] Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin Group, 2013).

[216] Lamb and Munsing, 2011; Robinson, 103.

[217] Woodward, 316.

[218] Ann Scott Tyson, "Sorry Charlie. This is Michael Vickers's War." *The Washington Post*, December 28, 2007.

[219] Michael Vickers, "For Guidance on Iraq, Look to Afghanistan: Use Fewer U.S. Troops, Not More," USA Today, June 27, 2004.

[220] Thom Shanker, "A Secret Warrior Leaves the Pentagon as Quietly as He Entered," *The New York Times*, May 1, 2015.

global counterterrorist network" of over 40 countries with U.S. SOF training partner forces in SOF-like capabilities.[221] President Bush writes that during a 2006 Camp David retreat to consider outside opinions on the conduct of the war in Iraq, Mike Vickers recommended a larger role for SOF.[222] Sounding very much like a 1980s LIC enthusiast, he once told the Washington Post, "The war on terror is fundamentally an indirect war… It's a war of partners… but it also is a bit of the war in the shadows, either because of political sensitivity or the problem of finding terrorists."

Vickers' influence was evident in the 2006 QDR, a major reflection of the changes to civilian preferences about the role of SOF:

> The Department of Defense also is expanding Special Operations Forces and investing in advanced conventional capabilities to help win the long war against terrorist extremists and to help dissuade any hostile military competitor from challenging the United States, its allies, and partners.[223]

Moreover, SOF-related missions came to dominate the "war of partners" Vickers had outlined, a major element in Gates' 2008 National Defense Strategy:

> "The inability of many states to police themselves effectively or to work with their neighbors to ensure regional security represents a challenge to the international system. Armed sub-national groups, including but not limited to those inspired by violent extremism, threaten the stability and legitimacy of key states. If left unchecked, such instability can spread and threaten regions of interest to the United States, our allies, and friends. Insurgent groups and other non-state actors frequently exploit local geographical, political, or social conditions to establish safe havens from which they can operate with impunity. Ungoverned, under- governed, misgoverned, and contested areas offer fertile ground for such groups to exploit the gaps in governance capacity of local regimes to undermine local stability and regional security. Addressing this problem will require local partnerships and creative approaches to deny extremists the opportunity to gain footholds."[224]

In 2009, when the incoming Obama administration asked both Michael Vickers and Secretary of Defense Bob Gates to stay on at the Pentagon, the two men formed part of the path dependency in SOF's predominance over civilian preference formation for its own use. They were the continuity in civilian expertise on and management of SOF, not to mention the two ongoing wars in which SOF and JSOC in particular played a leading role.

Preferences among the Obama team at the White House, however, did not start—and did not all end—with SOF in the lead. Gates himself notes in his memoirs that he, Under Secretary of Defense Michèle Flournoy, and Vickers "often had to push back hard to keep the White

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[221] Tyson, "Sorry Charlie."

[222] Bush, 2010, 363-364.

[223] National Security Council, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2006): http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/2006.pdf.

[224] Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2008 National Defense Strategy (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2008), 2-3: https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2008NationalDefenseStrategy.pdf

House and State Department from getting too far into our military knickers" overall.[225] But pushback from the White House was more in the category of oversight, of restraining the scale of SOF activities rather than their scope or purpose.[226]

In fact, a significant faction within the White House not only embraced SOF's direct action CT focus, they championed it. During the course of debating the strategy in Afghanistan in 2010, Vice President Joe Biden and his national security team reportedly promoted an approach they dubbed "Counterterrorism Plus", whereby the U.S. dramatically reduced its footprint to mainly SOF elements that would conduct raids to maintain pressure on al Qaeda.[227] Although Obama ultimately rejected Biden's proposal for Afghanistan, SOF's identity as a counterterrorism force was clearly cemented in civilians' minds.

Viewing SOF as a potential main element in what candidate Obama had called "a war that we have to win,"[228] was a remarkable turnaround in civilian preferences for SOF overall. By the time the 2010 NSSR was released, the predominance of SOF missions was firmly established. Whereas in previous years, CT and stability operations were "lesser-included cases", now conventional military operations had become the secondary concern. "We will continue to rebalance our military capabilities to excel at counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, stability operations, and meeting increasingly sophisticated security threats, while ensuring our force is ready to address the full range of military operations."[229] The 2010 QDR also championed another SOF expansion and emphasized special operators' expertise in CT, counterinsurgency, and stability operations.

V. Findings and Analysis

In 1977, SOF had a problem: Survival. Their solution was more autonomy from their parent services, including budgetary autonomy. But to attract the support and approval of those with the power to give SOF such autonomy, they needed to answer wider problems, not just parochial ones. Countering terrorists and engaging in low-intensity conflict, both missions that the conventional force eschewed and which the external environment presented with increasing frequency, were the national problems that SOF's autonomy could solve. SOF thus argued that it alone possessed the expertise to conduct counterterrorism and irregular warfare, requiring its independence from the conventional force and dominance over these missions. Following the garbage can model of choice, SOF was a classic case of a solution in search of a problem,[230] and it long predated the attacks on 9/11, providing a ready frame for civilians' preference that SOF take over the War on Terrorism. Once it had done so and had provided civilian managers with a series of successes, SOF and counterterrorism had become synonymous.

How did this alignment obtain over time? Was it the case that civilians came to an independent conclusion about the strategic necessity of a counterterrorism capability, determined

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[225] Gates, 452.

[226] The target selection and approval process for CT strikes outside areas of major hostilities is an example of the administration's continued use of SOF as the main military element of the CT strategy with additional controls on target approval. See: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/fact-sheet-us-policy-standards-and-procedures-use-force-counterterrorism

[227] Woodward, 2010, 159-160.

[228] Mark Landler, "The Afghan War and the Evolution of Obama," *The New York Times*, January 1, 2017.

[229] National Security Council, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2010): http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/2010.pdf.

[230] Michael D. Cohen, James G. March, and Johan P. Olsen, "A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 17(1), (March, 1972).

that the capability should emphasize military direct action, and then chose SOF as the lead military element? Or did SOF partisans interpret the international security environment and the nature of terrorism for civilians and persuade them that SOF was a better and unique answer to counter terrorism as a threat as compared to other military alternatives? Put more simply, did civilians pull SOF into the CT mission after considering a range of other options, or did SOF push civilians to a preference they may not have held otherwise?

When it came to counterterrorism capabilities, civilians had at least two alternatives to SOF. One was the intelligence community, in particular the Central Intelligence Agency's paramilitary capabilities. The CIA obviously provided the ability to gather intelligence vital to hunting terrorists and offered the secrecy and some of the lethal precision that SOF could. The other alternative to SOF was the conventional military, particularly the Marine Corps. To the extent that terrorists were affiliated with or supported by states, or behaved like regular paramilitary forces, the conventional military offered deterrence power and offensive combat capabilities; to the extent that terrorists could be wiped off the map with airstrikes, that was another attractive strategic solution. Civilians entertained and experimented with both of these alternatives and even gave parts of the counterterrorism campaign to them. But in the end, SOF became preeminent. Why?

This case study demonstrated that SOF's advancement of three complementary preferences shaped and changed civilian preferences for SOF over time. First, a core constituency of SOF always wanted to emphasize the counterterrorism mission as SOF's key purpose. This constituency first appeared in the Army and shortly thereafter was housed in the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), the SOF institution created following the recommendation of the post-Iran hostage rescue disaster inquiry commission and comprising the Army and Navy's counterterrorism units among others. In the context of the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, SOF as a whole had a second, vital preference: institutional survival. Neglected by the military services to the point of near-dissolution, SOF determined that they needed autonomy from their military services. Yet mere autonomy for SOF's own sake was not reason enough to attract outside or even inside sponsorship. So SOF made the case for their survival, over and over, by pointing to the array of things they could do that no other part of the military could—by arguing that they were a solution to a variety of problems. Some of these problems civilians had perceived, but most of them they had not. During the 1980s, the most convenient hook for justifying the need for SOF's unique capabilities was the debate about the future prevalence of low-intensity conflict. This was SOF's third preference. Coupling the assertion of LIC's future relevance with the abundant evidence that the military services—and DoD writ large—neglected SOF allowed them also to protect their direct action and counterterrorism capabilities. While basic survival prompted SOF to attempt to anticipate civilian preferences along the lines that Deborah Avant suggests, the proactive persuasion of civilians that LIC would become a key feature of the near-term international environment was a case of military persuasion of civilians with ambiguous preferences. In such a case, because civilians did not have a consolidated preference about LIC, they were open to the institution that most wanted the gig.[231]

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[231] For example, the Marine Corps, with its expeditionary capabilities and experience deploying to "third world" contingencies was a plausible alternative to SOF. What is important in this case is that SOF put early emphasis on their LIC capabilities and the Marines increased their emphasis on it over time, perhaps losing out on being selected by civilians because they did not sell themselves soon or hard enough. See Wayne A. Clemmer, "Low-Intensity Conflicts and the United States Marine Corps." (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1991) for an initial

SOF leveraged new interest in LIC and the narrative of SOF neglect to persuade civilian stakeholders in the Pentagon to push for implementation of the SOF revitalization agenda and those on the Hill to legislate a permanent and powerful bureaucratic position for SOF within DoD. In the late 1980s, armed with resources and an irreducible seat at the strategic table, SOF institutionalized via SOCOM as a separate entity from the rest of the military, while JSOC honed its manhunting skills. The 1990s were spent overcoming the Clinton administration's Mogadishu-borne aversion to direct action, a new focus on Osama bin Laden's terrorist network, and chasing war criminals in the Balkans (which turned out to be pretty good training for chasing terrorists elsewhere). All this time JSOC was selling its thrilling skills to civilian defense leaders every chance it got, designing a kind of marketing strategy it could later use to win competitions for mission assignments.[232] When the terrorist attacks on 9/11 happened, civilians in DoD and the White House searched for tools that could satisfy their desire for a quick and lethal response to the Taliban and al Qaeda. Then, for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent fight against insurgent groups, civilian leaders again needed unconventional military capabilities. In both cases, JSOC stepped in, pulling the rest of the SOF enterprise with it and over time making SOF synonymous with direct action and counterterrorism. As JSOC's unofficial historian, the journalist Sean Naylor, put it, "As the twenty-first century stretched toward the middle of its second decade, JSOC had firmly established itself at the top of not only the U.S. military food chain, but also, arguably, the interagency hierarchy…"[233]

Notwithstanding this seemingly single-minded institutional vision, the civilian turn toward SOF-led counterterrorism did not follow a determined path, and the story does not surface a clear pattern of "the" military frequently prevailing over an abstract civilian whole. The SOF case demonstrates the degree to which preferences are developed, held, and championed at the sub-institutional level and often prevail over national policy when those sub-institutional actors form coalitions with counterparts in other institutions, overwhelming those with weaker or ambiguous preferences. The SOF Liberation Front, consisting of active duty and retired special operators and their civilian allies in OSD and on the Hill constituted an issue network along the lines that Gibson and Snider identified. To some degree it was also the reverse of Barry Posen's claim that civilians recruit "military mavericks" to help them impose civilian preferences on the military[234]—instead, special operators leveraged the power of civilian mavericks to advance their preferred uses of SOF with legislators and policymakers. They then faced-off against another civil-military coalition among the services, OSD, and the White House. The pattern repeated once SOCOM settled into LIC and stability operations and the rest of the national security bureaucracies adopted this preference, and JSOC began its own liberation movement.

This type of face-off between issue networks makes the categories of "military" and "civilian" less analytically useful at all levels of government. By the time an idea, which had become an alternative about the strategic purpose of SOF, reached the Secretary of Defense, the White House, or the Congress, preferences had already cross-pollinated among military and

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articulation and then Marine Commandant General Krulak's later argument about the "three block war." Charles A. Krulak, "The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War." (*Marines Magazine*, January 1999).

[232] This finding is consistent with some other empirical work in the field. Eitan Shamir and Eyal Ben-Ari, in a survey of special operations forces in democratic states, found that "internal military entrepreneurs…promote and market the unique advantages of [special operations] forces to key military and civilian decision-makers." Eitan Shamir and Eyal Ben-Ari, "The Rise of Special Operations Forces: Generalized Specialization, Boundary Spanning and Military Autonomy." (*The Journal of Strategic Studies,* 41(3), 2018, 335-371)

[233] Naylor, 427.

[234] Posen, 1984.

civilian institutional actors for years. At the interagency (White House-State Department-DoD) and inter-branch (Executive-Legislative) levels, there were rarely cases of civilians or military preferences prevailing over each other. Instead, an array of civil-military coalitions faced off based on the ways substantive policy positions reflected joint institutional interests. Even when a controversy featured the Department of Defense and the White House on opposite sides, neither side could truly be called "military" or even purely "civilian."

Thus, this case study challenges the notion that there is ever, at the levels of strategy and policy, a wholly civilian preference that can prevail over a wholly military preference. Instead, consistent with Gibson and Snider's argument, there are coalitions of individuals and organizations within DoD, across the interagency, and between the Executive branch and the Congress that promote coalitional shared preferences. One issue network's preferences prevail, not a majority opinion held by civilians or "the" military.

And yet there are still identifiable phases of military preferences shaping civilian preferences instead of civilians forming preferences based on factors independent of the military—or, for that matter, civilians persuading the military to adopt *their* preferences. Rather, the overall pattern is of the military establishing the link between SOF and both notional and real-world strategic challenges and events to persuade civilians of the CT-SOF link over time. This link played a role in creating JSOC, writing and passing the legislation that established SOCOM and SOLIC, and finally prevailed over George W. Bush and Obama administration civilian officials. It took civil-military coalitions to codify the preference into policy, but the preference originated with the military.

V. Testing the Findings: Counterfactuals

Did external pressures really affect how civilians formed—or adopted—preferences over the purpose of special operations forces? Did internal politics really matter? Or is it more likely that other factors explain the covariance in civilian and military preferences? We can test the effects of military preferences on civilian preferences by considering counterfactuals that remove or change these external and internal pressures.

First, suppose that there had been low external pressure. This would mean there was no Soviet threat and no Cold War, and no state-sponsored or non-state terrorism. Where would civilians derive their preferences in that case, and would they come from military actors? Two possibilities seem likely: First, as was the case prior to Operations Eagle Claw and Urgent Fury, civilian attention to special operations would have remained so minimal that they did not develop strong preferences. Second, they might have considered SOF at some point and concluded they weren't needed. In this case, intra-military controversy about SOF might have existed, but civilians would not have felt moved either to develop a preference or to defer to military debates about the wisdom of different preferences. Regardless, there is little evidence that civilians use moderate pressure like that of LIC to spend time considering alternative purposes for capabilities. Rather, crisis moments inspire civilian attention on an urgent basis. The urgency also demands quick choices, and therefore the tendency to rely on pre-developed preferences as a heuristic. Without external pressure that generates a need for immediate action, civilians can afford to have no or ambiguous preferences.

Now reinsert the external pressures of the Cold War and international terrorism, but suppose that neither SOF nor the GPF attempted to persuade civilian policymakers of their views or reached out to form coalitions with civilian officials. It is hard to imagine that civilians would

have developed SOCOM without the SOF Liberation Front's activism. There would have been no advocacy within OSD or on the Hill, nor would there have been sources of information and persuasion for lawmakers and staff. Without JSOC selling itself and its direct action capabilities, Rumsfeld might have continued to rely on—and attempt to reshape—the GPF for counterterrorism and interventions.

9/11 cast an especially long shadow. If the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon had not occurred, wouldn't JSOC's desire to conduct more direct action counterterrorism missions have remained a suppressed one, and the trends of the 1990s simply continued? Here the change in presidential administrations was also clearly salient. W. Bush's desire to make the GPF itself more like SOF would likely have continued as the dominant debate among military and civilian institutional actors. JSOC still would have conducted its charm offensive, possibly convincing Rumsfeld to maintain or even grow investments in SOF's direct action capabilities. The 2001 QDR's expressed preference that one of SOF's main purposes was to conduct "covert deep insertion over great distances" shows civilian appreciation for SOF's capacity for accepting risk and undertaking delicate operations. But then, again, this would seem to be a preference shaped by military actors.

Without the war in Iraq, McChrystal's JSOC has no opportunity to expand SOF's interagency influence and intelligence activities. Indeed, Iraq, with its high tempo of direct action counterterrorism missions that seemed for a time to deliver strategic success against the insurgency—suggesting a capacity for success against similar organizations throughout the world—may have been the most meaningful determinant of civilian preferences for the use of SOF.

The question is whether the things that civilians wanted SOF to do are things they want the military to do anyway. In other words, if SOF is merely bidding for a mission that civilians want the military to complete independent of any suggestion from the military itself, there is no real problem. The problem exists when, in the course of defining their own purpose or the purpose of a capability, a military community plants valuing the mission in civilians' minds, or forecloses options that civilians might have been interested in. If there were no 9/11, modern SOF would not be so direct action oriented today. But then, if there had been no JSOC, it is likely that modern counterterrorism would not have been as focused on direct action.

VI. Conclusion

Military organizations do not just want to prevail over civilian decision-makers; they want to *persuade* them. The military is incentivized to indoctrinate civilian allies so they can be relied upon over the long term to make choices consistent with military preferences. What better way to control policy than to shape civilians' preferences directly?

This substantive motivation swiftly encounters structural constraints. The path to persuasion is not free of obstacles, the first of which in the case of SOF was other parts of the military. Consistent with the theoretical expectations of organizational culture, military factions had divergent preferences over the strategic purposes of SOF. These factions recruited civilian allies, not only to persuade these civilians to rule in their favor, but also to help them survive and prevail in their intramural competitions. Civil-military coalitions thus formed as military actors coopted civilians into parochial disagreements within the military.

This co-optation process was different for different civilian allies. The SOF case shows how new military capabilities are first debated and tested at lower levels of DoD's bureaucracy

where civilians are acculturated to share military preferences for institutional reasons. The first layer of civil-military coalition building happens almost invisibly within DoD and privileges military preferences simply because DoD is a military institution, especially at the working level. As the debate over a capability gains salience, it makes its way up the chain of seniority in OSD, with civilians transmitting their preferences vertically to more-senior civilian policy makers and. When resistance is encountered, it spurs the coalition to seek new allies outside of DoD, across the interagency. Coalitions—or Heclo's issue networks, adapted by Gibson and Snider—may eventually span bureaucracies and even branches of the government, as was the case for the SOF Liberation Front. These coalitions are built around the preferences of military institutions but leverage the structural power of civilians. The coalition with the most powerful civilians wins. Thus, in shaping congressional perspectives on LIC and the utility of SOF for addressing it, the SOF issue network managed to inculcate powerful civilians with their preferences and see those preferences adopted as policy.

Ostensibly, that fact that civilian structural power is necessary for military preferences to take hold should demonstrate the dominance of civilians over policy choice. That civilians are both in the privileged position to make ultimate choices and therefore must be "won over" and that their power ultimately affects choice strongly suggests civilian control of the military is secure in the American system. In a formal sense, it is. But the deeper structure of choice at work reveals that the opposite is true: military preferences formed the core of all alternative preferences for the strategic uses of SOF.

The civil-military relations literature expects interservice competition to be a useful mode of civilian control because it keeps the military from a regime-menacing unity of purpose. What the literature does not anticipate is the degree to which interservice rivalries consume civilians in parochial military justifications of their preferences. When the preferences are over new military capabilities about which knowledge is limited, civilians are inherently at a disadvantage because they wind up in the position of ruling in favor of one military faction or the other, spending their time learning and adjudicating between military preferences in the interests of bureaucratic peacemaking rather than developing their own independent beliefs. Civilians become captured by military framing before they have a chance to develop their own.

Civilians were not passive receptors during this process, but they were affected by an array of conditions that made them open to military persuasion. One condition was the asymmetry of expertise. For SOF, novelty and secrecy both played roles in what civilians knew and when they learned it. The novelty meant that military actors, particularly special operators, had simply spent more time considering the strategic uses and limitations of SOF. They were therefore in a position to educate civilians about their expertise, and therefore to connect those capabilities to strategic goals *for* civilians. As SOF activities increased and drew closer to the center of national strategy, secrecy about them grew, hobbling civilian oversight and contributing to the informational asymmetries.

Another array of pressures on civilians is what Jack Snyder calls the "decisional stress" generated by complexity and troubling trade-offs. Over the course of the case study, civilian leaders juggled the operational and legal complexity of fighting terrorist groups as well as the tensions between costs (human, financial, legal) and benefits (politically important yet strategically ambiguous) inherent to doing so. According to Snyder, such stress motivates decision-makers to do two things: systematically ignore or distort inconvenient information and

adopt heuristics to simplify the process of evaluation and choice.[235] The military's tendency to present pre-packaged preferences and justifications for them offers relief from decisional stress and immediate heuristics. SOF seemed to minimize costs, allowing pursuit of the politically appealing but strategically uncertain benefit of countering terrorism.

Finally, the empirical evidence presented here suggests scholarship needs to adjust how it categorizes individual actors into "civilian" and "military" to develop deeper understandings of civilian preference formation. The role retired members of the military profession played in advocating for SOF preferences is striking over the three decades spanned by this case study. The tendency of retired servicemembers to take their institutional interests with them into civilian policy and legislative jobs was an important element of civil-military issue networks' strength. These former military personnel were able to leverage their expertise and credibility to persuade powerful civilians to join their issue network and adopt their preferences. They were technically civilians, but it is hard to argue that the preferences they advanced were civilian in origin.

Thus, civilian preferences regarding new capabilities depend on military preferences for both intentional and structural reasons. Although both the military and civilians want to influence each other's preferences, the military is in an inherently advantageous position to do so. And where it manages to indoctrinate civilians to share its preferences, the military's position of policy influence can be sustained over time.

What of the arguments that it is really the external environment that determines preferences? Despite Posen's assertion that external threats affect civilians and the military differently, the SOF case shows how military actors may interpret the international threat environment *for* civilians, especially in cases lacking immediate urgency from a civilian perspective. Military actors incorporated those interpretations into their justifications for (and against) special operations capabilities. In other words, most civilians viewed the threat environment through SOF's or the conventional military's lens. Military preferences mediated the international environment for key civilians. This was especially true during the debates about LIC in the 1980s and the emerging approaches to counterterrorism in the years after 9/11.

How important was structure? In SOF's case, it was not the Goldwater-Nichols Act that changed the military's role in civilian preference formation but the Nunn-Cohen Act. It did so by bureaucratically elevating SOF and its civilian allies inside DoD to higher levels of decision-making and a larger and more centralized budget share—what Gibson and Snider refer to as "changing the composition and character of the issue network." This helped shift SOF away from its reliance on pure persuasion and allowed it to use bargaining tools as well. Perversely, this may have actually contributed to the inertia of the 1990s, where neither military institutions nor civilians much changed their views of the strategic uses of SOF beyond the sobering Black Hawk Down incident. SOF was no longer at risk of institutional destruction, but their focus on bureaucratic tools and processes sapped the energy the issue network used toward persuasion in the late 1970s and first half of the 1980s.

What's wrong with the military persuading civilians of a substantive perspective? Peter Feaver tackled exactly this question in *Armed Servants*, claiming it isn't always a problem, but it can be, and surfaces different modes of persuasion that are problematic: "shaded or inflated" estimates designed to support military preferences; ongoing efforts to prevent the probable final

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[235] Snyder, 26-27. Snyder bases this argument primarily on Leon Festinger's 1957 book, *Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*.

presidential-level decision; and "bureaucratic foot-dragging."[236] Others allow that the process of military advice should not be problematized up front. Yet, as Feaver reveals, persuasion itself can contain an element of coercion. And even if it does not, persuasion that pervasively favors military preferences generates a situation where civilians are not controlling the military so much as approving of its activities. In this world, civilians may have a veto on military action but they exercise it much less often than they might if their values, knowledge, and perceptions were not so heavily influenced by military institutions.

This case of military institutional preferences' effects on civilian preferences also contradicts the general finding that a more unified military overall has more power to overcome civilian preferences. In this case, the divisions within the military helped motivate competitive persuasion of civilian allies. What mattered was the strength of the preference itself, not necessarily the general cohesion of the military or of civilians. SOF was desperate to survive, and under its own terms, despite intra-military opposition to their preferences. Later on, JSOC was determined to increase the rate of direct action and its role in implementing it, despite larger lethargy on the part of SOCOM. These disputes drove them to transfer their values, assumptions, and perceptions to powerful civilians in order to affect defense policy in their favor.

Fundamentally, what the SOF case shows is the conditions under which civilian preferences can be shaped by military preferences. Much of the civil-military relations literature focuses on situations where civilian and military preferences diverge. I have found situations where civilian preferences were suggestible, whether for reasons of information asymmetry, organizational culture, or political incentives, and military organizations were motivated to persuade civilians to adopt their preferences. It appears that under such conditions, civilian preferences have little opportunity to be independent from military preferences.

What is not clear from the above evidence is whether the military constrains civilian preferences to the point of supplanting most civilian judgment about the use of force. Also it spans several decades and at least three types of international security environment, this case focuses on the strategic roles of a single military capability rather than the use of force generally or even in specific circumstances. It may simply reveal the mechanisms by which civilian preferences *can* be conditioned on military preferences rather than a more systematic pattern. Nevertheless, that deductive logical consequences of existing theory are confirmed by empirical evidence across thirty years of defense policy in the U.S. is sufficient reason for further exploration.

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[236] Feaver, 138.