



Conduct of the Persian Gulf Conflict

An Interim Report to Congress

*Pursuant to
Title V Persian Gulf Conflict Supplemental Authorization and
Personnel Benefits Act of 1991 (Public Law 102-25)*

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July 1991

QUESTION 5:***The use of special operations forces.***

In support of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, the US Special Operations Command (SOCOM) executed the largest deployment of Special Operations Forces (SOF) in history. SOF were among the first units to deploy to the Kuwait Theater of Operations (KTO). The lead elements of SOF arrived in Saudi Arabia on 12 August. SOF employed by the Commander-in-Chief, US Central Command (CINCCENT) included Army Special Forces and Army Special Operations Aviation aircraft; Navy SEALs (Sea, Air, and Land) and Special Boat Units; Air Force Special Operations aircraft and Special Operations Combat Control Teams; and Psychological Operations (PSYOP) and Civil Affairs units. SOF aircraft were employed to exploit their unique capabilities. A Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) was employed in operations to support preparation of the battlefield and confirmed its numerous capabilities.

SOF, including the JSOTF, were under the combatant command of CINCCENT and under the operational control (OPCON) of Special Operations Command Central Command (SOCCENT) except: Civil Affairs units which were under the OPCON of the Army component, Central Command (ARCENT); AC-130 Spectre gunships and EC-130 Volant Solo PSYOP aircraft which were under the OPCON of the Air Force component, Central Command (CENTAF); and those SEAL platoons and Special Boat Detachments normally assigned to the Sixth and Seventh Fleets which were under the OPCON of the Navy component, Central Command (NAVCENT). SOF conducted operations in support of several mission areas: Coalition Warfare Support; Kuwaiti Military Reconstruction; Combined Special Reconnaissance; Special Reconnaissance; Psychological Operations (PSYOP); Civil Affairs and Direct Action; Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR). Many of the missions performed during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm were identified in pre-war plans, others were not anticipated before the crisis.

Coalition Warfare Support

In August, CINCCENT recognized the need to assess the capabilities and limitations of the Coalition forces being committed to support Operation Desert Shield. It was also necessary to ensure that Coalition forces, using

different equipment and command and control procedures, were integrated at the operational and tactical level. The Coalition warfare support mission was given to SOF because of their unique capabilities—language and cultural orientation skills, wide range of tactical and technical expertise, and high levels of training. SOCCENT, in turn tasked US Army Special Forces, Navy SEALs, and Air Force Special Operations Combat Control Teams to perform a wide range of missions in support of Coalition forces. Coalition warfare support included individual, joint and combined training and operations, and liaison with Coalition forces.

SOF were attached to Coalition units during the war down to battalion level. Their presence proved to be a tremendous confidence builder for Coalition commanders. SOF assessed the levels of readiness of Coalition forces, provided necessary training and critical communication links, coordinated tactical operations, provided theater essential information necessary to ensure effective operational control of Coalition forces (“ground truth”), provided fire support coordination and other assistance. For example, a SEAL platoon and a battalion of the 5th Special Forces Group (SFG) trained the Royal Saudi Land Forces in close air support, naval gunfire support, and fire support coordination. Another SEAL platoon trained Royal Saudi Navy and Royal Saudi Marines in small unit tactics, diving operations, air operations, demolitions, weapons, mission planning, and high-speed boat operations. Execution of these and other activities ensured that Coalition forces were well-versed in the key skills necessary to operate in a lethal, high technology combat environment.

Despite these successes, overall SOF language skills and the number of language trained personnel available were not sufficient to meet the full range of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm requirements. Although language trained personnel, possessing requisite skill levels, were attached to Arab Coalition units, other language needs could not be filled because of deficiencies in total numbers of linguists and levels of proficiency. A continuing need is to identify SOF language requirements and to reconcile the competing training priorities between foreign language capability and other special operation mission requirements.

Combined Special Reconnaissance

SOF elements participated in Combined Special Reconnaissance missions with Coalition forces, primarily

during Operation Desert Shield. Some special command relationships were established. Some operations involved the establishment of early warning observation posts, using both mobile reconnaissance and fixed sites, to gather intelligence on front-line Iraqi units; to, on occasion, assist Saudi Arabian forces in the recapture of Saudi border posts; and, during Operation Desert Storm, to support their Coalition partners by directing close air support and artillery fires against Iraqi units and positions. These observation posts served as a trip wire to provide early warning of an Iraqi attack.

Special Reconnaissance

While combined special reconnaissance missions continued into Operation Desert Storm, US SOF were tasked to conduct additional unilateral Special Reconnaissance missions. Special Reconnaissance complements national and theater intelligence collection assets and systems by obtaining specific, well-defined, time-sensitive information of strategic or operational significance. While the integrated system of reconnaissance was being established during Operation Desert Shield, SOCOM (at the request of the US Central Command – CENTCOM) deployed the Special Operations Command Research Analysis and Threat Evaluation System (SOCRATES), an intelligence data handling system, to Southwest Asia. SOCRATES is a SOCOM-developed intelligence support system which improved CENTCOM's capability to perform complex intelligence handling and management tasks. Other Special Reconnaissance missions satisfied a wide range of requirements, from reconnaissance along the Kuwaiti coast to support of conventional tactical operations deep inside Kuwait.

During the period 23 August to 12 September, Navy SEALs and Navy Special Boat units conducted nightly patrols off Jubayl Harbor while the US Marine Corps maritime prepositioned force off-loaded. These operations were conducted to provide security for the initial entry of forces into the Kuwait Theater of Operations (KTO).

Beginning 5 January, Navy SEALs and Navy Special Boat Units conducted nightly coastal patrols in the Northern Arabian Gulf from Ras Al-Mishab north to Ras Al-Khafji on the Saudi coast. They collected intelligence regarding Iraqi small boat operations and established a US presence in northern coastal waters.

Commencing 16 January, Navy SEALs conducted Special Reconnaissance missions on Kuwaiti beaches. During these missions, Iraqi beach patrols passed as close as 50 yards. The SEALs were never discovered.

SOF also were tasked to perform unilateral Special Reconnaissance missions along the Saudi border. One SEAL platoon was directly involved in operations during the battle for Khafji. As Iraqi forces prepared to move south, the SEALs called in close air support. The unit remained in position on the border, providing real time intelligence regarding Iraqi troop and vehicular movement, until they were engaged by .50 caliber and mortar fire as the Iraqi Army advanced. These SEALs were the last US forces to leave that part of the Saudi border prior to the battle for Khafji.

During the same time period, Army Special Forces performed Special Reconnaissance missions in support of XVIII Airborne Corps and VII Corps. These operations required long range helicopter infiltrations and exfiltrations into central and west-central Iraq. Special Reconnaissance teams provided essential information to ground tactical commanders during their final preparations for combat. This information included certain ground trafficability analysis (for example, an analysis of soil conditions to determine whether heavy armored vehicles could pass) and other details which could not be acquired by other means. In central Iraq some teams were discovered and attacked, and had to be extracted early. Other teams continued to operate throughout Operation Desert Storm, or until linking up with advancing Coalition forces.

Psychological Operations (PSYOP)

As the initial combat forces were deploying to the KTO, PSYOP planners were assisting CENTCOM in the development of strategic and tactical PSYOP plans to support combat operations, if necessary. By the end of October, a combined cell for developing PSYOP products had been formed with representatives from the US, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Kingdom. Early on, intelligence had identified weaknesses in Iraqi troop morale. These weaknesses became the key focus of PSYOP efforts.

In November, broadcasting began into the KTO. By 12 January, all necessary PSYOP assets were in place to support tactical operations, and PSYOP products had been prepared to begin the PSYOP campaign. Examples

of PSYOP leaflet activity included a 12 January drop of 1,027,620 leaflets over southern Kuwait, and a 20 January drop near Baghdad of 265,000 leaflets. These and other leaflet drops put important information in the hands of many Iraqi soldiers.

The PSYOP effort was focused on breaking the Iraqi will to resist, and on increasing the fears of Iraqi soldiers, while pointing out that the Coalition was opposed not to the Iraqi people, but only to Iraq's national policy. In one especially effective method, air superiority permitted Coalition forces to drop leaflets on specific units announcing that they would be bombed, then to conduct such bombing, then to drop new leaflets reminding them that they could be bombed again at will. PSYOP products stated that Iraqi forces' only hope was to cease resistance and leave the battlefield. This amplified the psychological impact of the bombings and lent credibility to other messages. Leaflets dropped on Baghdad carried similar messages.

Broadcast efforts supplemented the leaflet campaign and enabled Coalition forces to reach Iraqi soldiers and civilians with more sophisticated messages. Air National Guard Special Operations EC-130 Volant Solo aircraft (specially configured with radio transmitters to support PSYOP), three ground stations, and a joint US/Saudi television station were employed.

During the combat phase, broadcast operations capitalized on previous leaflet delivery of "safe conduct passes" to Iraqi forces. At the front lines, PSYOP loud-speaker support of deception operations facilitated the "end run" by Coalition forces. Additionally, loud-speaker teams attached to maneuver units encouraged the surrender of Iraqi soldiers. In one case, an entire Iraqi battalion surrendered to a 1st Cavalry helicopter patrol when the attached PSYOP team broadcast that "death from above" was imminent.

Psychological operations played a key role in the destruction of enemy morale and contributed to the large-scale surrender and desertion of Iraqi soldiers. According to statements by an Iraqi division commander, PSYOP leaflets were a great threat to troop morale, second only to the Coalition bombing campaign. PSYOP radio broadcasts also had great impact on morale. These and other PSYOP gave Iraqi soldiers information which, in addition to undermining their morale, gave them detailed instructions on how to surrender, instilled confidence that they would be treated

humanely and fairly by Coalition forces, and provided advance warning of impending attacks, allowing them to save their lives. The reach of PSYOP was clearly evident from debriefings of enemy prisoners of war (EPWs). Discussions with Iraqi EPWs indicated that the PSYOP campaign was a factor in influencing a substantial portion of them to surrender.

Because of higher deployment priorities, PSYOP units were not deployed in strength to the Persian Gulf until November 1990. In addition, there were long delays in approval for parts of the initial PSYOP and deception plans; other parts were promptly disapproved. These delays were the products of a number of factors, including the inherent complexity of the issues, the multiplicity of US Government agencies involved in the process, very strict legal limitations on propaganda and deception activities, and the extreme sensitivity of a number of Coalition partners with whom coordination was essential. Further analysis is needed to identify ways to streamline the planning and approval process and to strengthen the orchestration of military PSYOP organizations and campaigns with the complimentary assets of US public diplomacy programs and the related information efforts of other participating nations. However, it is important to recognize that even the most streamlined process and most well prepared plans will have to conform to strict US legal requirements and take account of Coalition partners' sensitivities, which are more likely to apply much greater restrictions on such activities in peacetime than after war has broken out.

Civil Affairs

Civil Affairs units played an important role throughout Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. The Civil Affairs mission included providing emergency support to the civilian sector, assessing the availability of host nation support, and assisting in the control, care, and movement of dislocated civilians and EPWs.

In October, at the request of the State Department, Civil Affairs planners were directed to assist the Kuwaiti government in planning for and executing its reconstruction effort. Beginning in December, the Kuwait Civil Affairs Task Force was formed using personnel from the 352d Civil Affairs Command (United States Army Reserves). The task force performed an essential advisory and planning mission. It advised representatives of the Government of Kuwait in the development and implementation of an emergency recovery program

Interim Report

to be executed when Kuwait was liberated. The task force deployed to the KTO in January and continued to advise Kuwaiti officials at the ministerial level during their efforts to complete the planning and execution phases of their emergency recovery program.

Civil Affairs forces contributed to the success of the host nation support mission in the KTO by locating and facilitating procurement of supplies and services from US allies in the region. Initially the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion, and eventually the 304th Civil Affairs Group, worked in direct support of the ARCENT Support Command on host nation support matters throughout the theater. Their efforts helped sustain the buildup of forces in the KTO.

Civil Affairs forces also contributed in the management of dislocated civilians and EPWs. Civil Affairs forces were assigned to most combat maneuver units and assisted in the control, movement, and sustainment of civilians and EPWs in the rear areas. Civil Affairs forces provided humanitarian assistance support to dislocated civilians and the indigenous population and transitioned that assistance either back to the host nation or to international relief organizations. Their efforts helped minimize civilian and EPW interference with combat operations.

There were, however, problems in the Civil Affairs arena. Civil needs including refugees, humanitarian assistance, and the eventual restoration of Kuwait, were overshadowed initially by more immediate problems associated with potential combat operations and host nation support required to expedite and facilitate the buildup of Coalition forces throughout the Gulf. Civil Affairs tactical support considerations were accorded increasing priority as host nation support requirements were met. Deployment of Civil Affairs force structure, active or reserve, competed in the early stages of the operation with the deployment of combat capability. As an example, planning for the restoration of the Kuwaiti infrastructure upon the withdrawal or eviction of Iraqi occupation forces was delayed and compressed until early December. Initial planning was done in isolation from CINCCENT and his tactical plan. Furthermore, most of the Civil Affairs forces that ultimately provided combat service support to frontline units did not actually deploy until late January or early February, making it difficult to fully incorporate the Civil Affairs units into the plans of the supported units.

Direct Action

SOF also conducted Direct Action missions in support of Operation Desert Storm. In the conduct of Direct Action missions, units may employ raid, ambush, or other direct assault tactics; emplace munitions and other devices; conduct standoff attacks by fire from air, ground, or maritime platforms; and provide terminal guidance for precision-guided munitions.

On the evening of 16 January, SOF launched a Direct Action mission that assisted the opening of the air campaign. At 0238 hours local time, 22 minutes prior to commencement of Phase I of Operation Desert Storm (H-Hour), Air Force Special Operations MH-53 Pave Low helicopters crossed into Iraqi airspace leading a flight of Army AH-64 Apache attack helicopters. They destroyed key Iraqi radars creating a 10-kilometer wide air corridor subsequently used by some Coalition air forces to pass through enroute to key targets—primarily in western Iraq. Iraqi air defense forces fired two heat-seeking missiles at the joint attack team during their return flight, which were avoided through electronic countermeasures and evasive maneuvers.

As the air corridor-opening operation was being mounted, SOF emplaced radar beacons along the northern Saudi border. These beacons were used by Coalition pilots to confirm their position when entering and leaving Iraq and greatly aided in the command and control of Coalition aircraft.

Special Operations fixed-wing aircraft were also involved in Direct Action missions. The MC-130E Combat Talon, because of its ability to penetrate hostile airspace, was selected to support operations. These missions required the support of AWACS aircraft, electronic jamming aircraft, and air defense suppression and support aircraft.

Special Operations AC-130 Spectre gunships were involved in Direct Action missions in their armed reconnaissance and fire support roles. They operated in southern Iraq, northwest of Kuwait, and within Kuwait. They were particularly effective in attacking Iraqi ground forces in Kuwait and in suppressing the Iraqi incursion into Khafji. Unfortunately, at Khafji one Spectre was lost while supporting Marine ground forces. All 14 Air Force crew members were killed.

Navy SEALs also were instrumental in supporting CENTCOM's deception plan. On 24 February, the day the ground campaign of Operation Desert Storm began, SEALs swam ashore prior to the start of ground operations, detonated charges, and simultaneously attacked bunkers by calling in air strikes all along the beach.

SOCCENT, in cooperation with Coalition forces, was given the mission of coordinating, supporting, and controlling the simultaneous seizure and occupation, if required, of the US, British, and French Embassies in Kuwait City. This operation was executed on 28 February.

These successful efforts demonstrated some continuing need for specialized equipment to support Direct Action missions.

Combat Search And Rescue (CSAR)

In addition to the primary missions discussed above, SOF also conducted Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) missions. CINCCENT tasked the theater CSAR mission to SOCCENT primarily because SOF possessed the best capability in theater to conduct long range personnel recovery missions given the threat in the KTO. The SOCCENT commander was designated as commander of CSAR forces. SOCCENT designated Air Force Special Operations Command Central the single air manager for all aviation assets committed to the CSAR mission. These Army, Navy, and Air Force aircraft were responsible for providing 24-hour, on-call CSAR

CENTCOM's CSAR procedures required reasonable confirmation of a survivor's situation and location be established before a CSAR mission would be launched. Due to dense enemy concentrations on the battlefield, downed pilots were frequently captured immediately after parachuting to the ground. There were a total of 35 downed Coalition aircraft and 64 downed aircrew. Seven CSAR missions were launched, resulting in three saves.

The first save, 21 January, was a daring daylight recovery of a Navy F-14 pilot downed deep in Iraq. Quarterbacked by an AWACS, two A-10s and a Pave Low helicopter flew into the area of the survivor, over 160 miles inside Iraq. The A-10s destroyed an Iraqi radio-intercept truck and the Pave Low used the smoke

from the truck as a final reference point to find the pilot. After a successful pickup, the Pave Low returned to its base nearly eight hours after the F-14 was downed.

The second save, 23 January, involved the rescue of a US Air Force F-16 pilot who had ejected over the Northern Arabian gulf. Using a Navy SH-60 Seahawk, the CSAR mission took 35 minutes.

The third save, 17 February, was a nighttime save of an Air Force F-16 pilot downed 60 miles behind enemy lines. Army SOF responded with two MH-60 Blackhawk helicopters. Following the successful recovery, an Iraqi missile was fired at the trailing helicopter. The Blackhawk defeated the missile with evasive maneuvers. This rescue was flown using night vision goggles.

The use of SOF in a CSAR role saved lives. However, the use of SOF aviation assets in support of CSAR missions, combined with the demand placed on those assets by ongoing SOF missions, left little room to handle additional contingency missions.

Special Operations aircraft are built to provide many of the same capabilities of the non-SOF aircraft designed for CSAR activities. In addition, SOF aircraft have sophisticated radar evading, communications, and weapons system countermeasure capabilities that were deemed critical to the CSAR missions faced in Operation Desert Storm. As a result of their sophisticated capabilities, there was an unusual demand for SOF aircraft during Operation Desert Storm, in many cases for innovative missions outside the traditional special operations role. On several occasions, the CSAR requirement presented SOF planners with situations where the relatively scarce SOF aircraft were the preferred system for missions that had to occur simultaneously. As a result, in some instances, SOF planners had to make careful decisions about how to allocate SOF aircraft to the many competing demands for their services.

In planning for future CSAR activities, the Department expects to reexamine the capabilities of its CSAR aircraft to determine if it should provide them with the more sophisticated capabilities found useful in Operation Desert Storm. CSAR planning scenarios, doctrine, and tactics may also be examined.

General Observations On Mission Capabilities

In addition to the issues already noted, the war has revealed other issues, applicable to a number of SOF mission categories, that merit attention.

SOF capability did provide detailed real-time information from Iraqi-controlled areas and contributed significantly to the quality and quantity of intelligence supplied to Coalition forces. It allowed CINCCENT to extend his own surveillance beyond the ranges provided by organic capabilities of general purpose forces. However, SOF operational headquarters was pressed to handle the significant volume of high-priority communications which taxed its command and control capabilities. Due to distances involved and the complexity, sophistication and volume of communication required, Special Operations commands require greater communication capabilities.

SOF high frequency radios hampered dismounted operations and were easily detectable. Ongoing Joint Advanced Special Operations Radio Systems (JASORS) research and development may allow SOF

to resolve the requirement for a communications system that ensures a low probability of intercept and detection. Additionally, to exploit fully the sophisticated navigation advantages provided by the Global Positioning System (GPS), lightweight systems must be integrated with communications equipment to support search and rescue operations.

Conclusion

SOF played a valuable role in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. They proved that they could conduct a wide range of missions in a mid-intensity environment. However, use of Special Operations capabilities requires difficult tradeoffs between the potential political risk that often accompanies the conduct of special operations and the military advantage they can generate. Pre-hostility and cross-border operations can provide both tactical and operational level advantages to general purpose force commanders; however, inadvertent disclosure or compromise of these activities can signal strategic objectives, incurring both military and political repercussions.

EMERGING OBSERVATIONS

Some Accomplishments

- SOCOM executed the largest deployment of SOF in history.
- SOF units performed numerous missions well.
- SOF liaison with Coalition forces was important and effective.
- The numerous capabilities of the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) were verified.
- PSYOP contributed to the collapse of the Iraqi Army.
- Civil Affairs forces contributed significantly in the areas of civil administration, host nation support, and in the handling of displaced civilians and EPWs.

Some Shortcomings

- SOF aviation assets were pressed to support simultaneous mission requirements.
- Further analysis is needed to identify ways to streamline the PSYOP planning and approval process.

- Planning for the restoration of Kuwait was delayed and compressed until early December.
- Debriefings of aircrews indicated they were not comfortable with CSAR capabilities.
- Overall SOF language skills, and the number of language trained personnel available, were insufficient to meet the full range of requirements generated during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

Some Selected Issues

- Impact of Time Phased Force Deployment List (TPFDL) changes on SOF.
- Range capabilities of aircraft in support of SOF, especially in terms of exfiltration.
- Clarification of the responsibilities of the Service components to provide logistic sustainment support to service SOF elements and the theater SOC.
- Proper allocation of SOF to CSAR and other missions.
- Refinement of PSYOPS planning and implementation processes.