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# LESSON 7

## U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

### Introduction

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**Purpose** This lesson introduces you to the unique capabilities and the operational and strategic missions of special operations forces (SOF).

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**Why study U. S. Special Operations Command?** Recent history has caused the United States to maintain specialized forces capable of performing extremely difficult, complex, and politically sensitive missions on short notice, in peace and war, anywhere in the world.

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**Relationship to Other Instruction** This lesson provides a foundation for the incorporation of SOF in the joint OOTW environment. It also provides a basis for future OOTW study.

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**Study Time** This lesson, including the issues for considerations, will require about 3.5 hours of study time.

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## Educational Objectives

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**Roles and Missions of SOC** Explain the roles and missions of the U.S. Special Operations Command. [JPME Areas 1(c) and 1(d)]

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**Roles and Missions of a SOCC** Explain the roles and missions of a Special Operations Component Command within a unified Command or under a JTF. [JPME Area 1(b)]

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**Evaluate** Evaluate the distinct roles of SOF. [JPME Area 1(a)]

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**JPME Areas/ Objectives/Hours (accounting data)** 1/a/0.5  
1/b/0.5  
1/c/0.5  
1/d/0.5

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## Discussion

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### **Unique Capabilities**

Special operations forces (SOF) provide unique capabilities not found in other elements of the U.S. Armed Forces or those of other nations.

Some U.S. military units can conduct special operations, and other nations have special operations capabilities. But no other force in the world has the range of capabilities, including fully developed land, air, and maritime forces integrated as a joint service team but capable of operations as single service units. Although U.S. SOF borrowed heavily from foreign SOF, especially the British, these broad capabilities and their joint, integrated nature are peculiarly American.

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### **U.S. SOF Units**

As previously stated, special operations forces are specialized forces capable of performing extremely difficult, complex, and politically sensitive missions on short notice, in peace and war, anywhere in the world. In the U.S. Armed Forces, the term special operations forces includes the following units:

U.S. Army Special Forces (SF), the 75th Ranger Regiment, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), psychological operations (PSYOPS), and civil affairs (CA) units.

U.S. Navy Sea-Air-Land forces (SEALs), special boat units, and SEAL delivery units.

U.S. Air Force special operations squadrons (fixed and rotary wing), special tactics squadrons, and a foreign internal defense squadron.

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## Discussion, Continued

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### Overview of SOF Missions

WSOF provide the nation with rapidly deployable and flexible joint task forces.

WSOF can reinforce, augment, and complement conventional forces before, during, and after any conflict.

WSOF can also conduct stand-alone operations in situations where a small, discrete force provides the nation's leaders with options somewhere between diplomatic efforts and the use of high-profile conventional forces.

Insurgency, counterterrorism, counterdrug activities, surgical counterproliferation, and counterinsurgency may be best handled by such a force. The relatively small size and capability of highly trained, joint SOF teams to react rapidly provide the United States with options that limit the risk of escalation to larger conventional forces.

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## Discussion, Continued

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**Operational and Strategic Missions** In war, SOF conduct operational and strategic missions that directly or indirectly support the joint force commander's campaign plan. Fully integrated into the joint campaign plan, SOF help the joint force commander (JFC) seize the initiative, reduce risk, facilitate maneuver, and achieve decisive results by attacking operational and strategic targets.

SOF also carry out psychological operations to deceive and demoralize the enemy. As force multipliers, SOF work with indigenous forces to increase their contribution to the campaign plan and conduct coalition support to help integrate multinational forces into a cohesive combined task force.

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**Post-Conflict Operation Role** SOF also play a vital role in post-conflict operations. Many of the talents used in pre-conflict situations are applicable after fighting has ceased. SOF direct their efforts toward establishing (or reestablishing) the infrastructure required for a peaceful, prosperous society.

SOF training skills, coupled with civil affairs and psychological operations (PSYOPS) expertise, help speed the return to normal conditions, thereby allowing conventional forces to redeploy quickly.

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**SOF and the G-NA** Although the 1996 Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act made sweeping changes in the DoD, it did not address special operations deficiencies and concerns that the Department was not organized to meet the most likely future threats. Consequently, Senators William S. Cohen (R-Maine) and Sam Nunn (D-Georgia), supported by Representative Dan Daniels (D-Virginia) and others, sponsored an amendment to the Goldwater-Nichols Act which led to the creation of two new organizations.

wThe first was the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-intensity Conflict Activities of the Department of Defense.

wThe second was the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), which was charged to prepare SOF to carry out its assigned missions.

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## Discussion, Continued

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### Stand-up of USSOCOM

USSOCOM was formally established as a unified combatant command at McDill Air Force Base, Florida, on 16 April 1987, commanded by a four-star officer with the title of Commander-in Chief, U.S. Special Operations Command (USCINCSOC). All SOF of the Army, Navy, and Air Force based in the United States were eventually placed under USCINCSOC's combatant command.

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### Components

USSOCOM's four component commands are the

• Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) at Hurlburt Field, Florida

• Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM) at Coronado, California

• U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina

• Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) also at Fort Bragg

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## Discussion, Continued

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### **Legislated SOF Activities**

The legislation creating USSOCOM specified certain SOF activities and assigned command specific authorities and responsibilities. The responsibilities, similar to those assigned to the services, include the following:

wReadiness of assigned forces and monitoring the readiness of overseas SOF

wMonitoring the professional development of all SOF personnel

wDeveloping joint SOF tactics, techniques, and procedures

wConducting specialized courses of instruction

wTraining assigned forces

wExecuting its own program and budget (funding would come directly from Congress and not from the services)

wConducting research, development, and acquisition of special operations-peculiar items

The last two tasks give USSOCOM great flexibility in training, equipping, and employing its forces.

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## Required Reading

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***FM/FMFRP  
Readings***

USSOCOM Pub 1, *Special Operations in Peace and War*. Find this reading in the *FM/FMFRP Readings* (8800), pp. 279 to 362. This publication contains the fundamental principles that guide special operations forces (SOF). This publication can also serve as a framework for the proper employment of SOF to complement joint doctrine. The reading discusses the history, mission, and rules for successful employment of SOF.

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## For Further Study

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### **Supplemental Reading**

The reading listed is **not** required. It is provided as a recommended source of additional information about topics in this lesson that may interest you. It will increase your knowledge and augment your understanding of this lesson.

Joint Pub 3-07, *Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War*.

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## Issues For Consideration

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**Why was  
USSOCOM  
Created?**

Why was USSOCOM created, and what is its role in the organization for national security?

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**Differences of  
Operations**

What are the requirements that distinguish special operations from conventional military operations?

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**Importance of  
SOF**

Why are SOF important?