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COUNTERING UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE: SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES ROLE IN SUPPORT TO A NATIONAL STRATEGY

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COUNTERING UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE: SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

ROLE IN SUPPORT TO A NATIONAL STRATEGY

A Master Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of

American Military University

by

Dwayne Bierly

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Arts in National Security Studies

October 2016

American Public University

Charles Town, WV
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my loving wife and son. Thank you for your support throughout this academic journey. I truly appreciate everything you did to make this thesis a success.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Donna Kenley for her guidance and extreme patience during this thesis journey. Your sage advice was instrumental in completing my capstone thesis. Also, I would like to thank Howard Simkin, a true unconventional warfare expert, for your time and sound advice on unconventional warfare which improved the quality of this thesis. To my AMU classmates, thank you for the great insights and perspectives on national security challenges. Your feedback has enhanced my understanding and skills in the field of national security. Finally, I want to thank the men and women who defend this great nation. You sacrifice is greatly appreciated.

*De Oppresso Liber*
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

COUNTERING UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE: SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES
ROLE IN SUPPORT TO A NATIONAL STRATEGY

by

Dwayne Bierly

American Public University System, October, 2016

Charles Town, West Virginia

Dr. Donna Kenley, Thesis Professor

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 directed the Secretary of Defense to develop a DOD strategy to counter unconventional warfare threats posed by adversarial state and non-state actors. This thesis examined special operations forces capability to support a DOD counter unconventional warfare strategy. Research incorporated qualitative content analysis and case study approach exploring data on countering unconventional warfare. The U.S. Army War College Strategy Model end, ways, and means was used to examine U.S. special operations forces’ capability to support a DOD counter unconventional strategy and provided the framework to display data on Russia’s unconventional warfare activities in Ukraine. Research findings proved special operations forces activities have a primary and supporting role to a DOD counter unconventional warfare strategy and building partner capacity would be instrumental in countering adversarial state and non-state actors unconventional warfare campaigns.
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<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; SFC (A)(P)</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Special Forces Command (Airborne) (Provisional)</td>
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<td>75&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; RR</td>
<td>75&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Ranger Regiment</td>
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<td>160&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; SOAR</td>
<td>160&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Special Operations Aviation Regiment</td>
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<tr>
<td>A2/AD</td>
<td>anti-access/area denial</td>
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<td>AFSOC</td>
<td>Air Force Special Operations Command</td>
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<td>AQI</td>
<td>Al Qaeda in Iraq</td>
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<td>ARSOF</td>
<td>Army special operations forces</td>
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<td>BPC</td>
<td>building partner capacity</td>
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<td>BRCNA</td>
<td>Colombian National Police counter-drug</td>
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<td>CA</td>
<td>civil affairs</td>
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<td>CAO</td>
<td>civil affairs operations</td>
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<td>CCP</td>
<td>China Communist Party</td>
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<td>CMO</td>
<td>civil-military operations</td>
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<td>COIN</td>
<td>counterinsurgency</td>
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<td>CONUS</td>
<td>continental United States</td>
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<td>CP</td>
<td>counterproliferation</td>
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<td>CT</td>
<td>counterterrorism</td>
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<td>C-UW</td>
<td>counter unconventional warfare</td>
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<td>CWMD</td>
<td>counter weapons of mass destruction</td>
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<td>DA</td>
<td>direct action</td>
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<td>DOD/DoD</td>
<td>Department of Defense</td>
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<td>EEU</td>
<td>Eurasian Economic Union</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>FARC</td>
<td>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionares de Colombia</td>
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<td>FHA</td>
<td>foreign humanitarian assistance</td>
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<td>FID</td>
<td>foreign internal defense</td>
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<td>FSF</td>
<td>foreign security forces</td>
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<td>GCC</td>
<td>Geographical Combatant Command</td>
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<td>Russian Military Intelligence</td>
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<td>GWOT</td>
<td>Global War on Terrorism</td>
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<td>HN</td>
<td>host nation</td>
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<td>HRR</td>
<td>hostage rescue and recovery</td>
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<td>IDAD</td>
<td>internal defense and development</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDAD</td>
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<td>ISIL</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant</td>
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<td>IW</td>
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<td>JIIM</td>
<td>joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSOC</td>
<td>Joint Special Operations Command</td>
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<td>JSOTF-P</td>
<td>Joint Special Operations Task Force - Philippines</td>
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<tr>
<td>JOE</td>
<td>joint operating environment</td>
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<td>KSO</td>
<td>Russian Special Operations Command</td>
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<td>MARSOC</td>
<td>Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command</td>
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<td>MEDCAP</td>
<td>medical civil action program</td>
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<td>military information support operations</td>
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<td>multinational force</td>
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<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<td>NAVSPEWACOM</td>
<td>Naval Special Warfare Command</td>
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NGO  nongovernmental organization
NIC  National Intelligence Council
NMS  National Military Strategy
NSS  National Security Strategy
PSYOP  psychological operations
QDR  Quadrennial Defense Review
SEALS  United States Navy Sea, Air, and Land Teams
SF  special forces
SFA  security forces assistance
SOCAFRICA  Special Operations Command Africa
SOCCENT  Special Operations Command Central
SOCKOR  Special Operations Command Korea
SOCNORTH  Special Operations Command North
SOCPAC  Special Operations Command Pacific
SOCSOUTH  Special Operations Command South
SOF  special operations forces
SPETSNAZ  Russian special forces
SR  special reconnaissance
SW  special warfare
TSOC  Theater Special Operations Command
TTP  tactics, techniques, and procedures
USAJFKSWSC  United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School
USASOAC  United States Army Special Operations Aviation Command
USASOC  United States Army Special Operations Command
<table>
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<tr>
<td>USSOCOM</td>
<td>United States Special Operations Command</td>
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<tr>
<td>UW</td>
<td>unconventional warfare</td>
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<td>VEO</td>
<td>violent extremist organization</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Whenever possible ‘victory’ should be achieved through diplomatic coercion, thwarting the enemy’s plans and alliances, and frustrating his strategy.

—Sun Tzu, *Art of War*

Overview

Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and actions in eastern Ukraine have energized serious debate in the national security sector on how to identify adversarial unconventional warfare activities and how to counter those activities. Russia employed unconventional warfare (UW) tactics, techniques, and procedures to secure objectives in Ukraine. Secretary of State John Kerry testified before Congress illuminating Russian unconventional warfare activities in Ukraine. Secretary Kerry stated that “Russia’s clear and unmistakable involvement in destabilizing and engaging in separatist activities in the east of Ukraine” and “Russian special forces and agents have been the catalyst behind the chaos ...” (US Senate 2014). Likewise, Assistant Secretary Victoria Nuland echoed Secretary Kerry’s assertion on Russian support to the separatist adding that Russian agents are providing funding, weapons, and coordination on the ground in Ukraine (US Senate 2014). Russia’s UW activities in Ukraine have caused concern in other former Soviet Union satellites states—the Baltics, Moldova, and Poland—and raised the concern of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization members (Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2015, 5-6).

U.S. Congressional review of Russia’s actions in Crimea and Ukraine resulted in language inserted into the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 which directs the Department of Defense to develop a strategy for countering unconventional warfare. Section 1097, sub-section (a) states that, “The Secretary of Defense shall, in consultation with
the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the heads of other appropriate departments and agencies of the U.S. Government, develop a strategy for the Department of Defense to counter unconventional warfare threats posed by adversarial state and non-state actors” (National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016, 129-30). Congressional requirement for a countering unconventional warfare strategy is the genesis of the research question for this paper.

**Research Question and Hypothesis**

The thesis examines special operations forces’ (SOF) role to support a national strategy to counter adversarial UW campaigns and assess SOF and activities to support a whole-of-government approach to execute a national counter unconventional warfare strategy. Russia’s annexation of Crimea and destabilization actions in eastern Ukraine demonstrate the urgency for the United States to develop and implement a counter UW strategy to prevent coercion, disruption, or an attempt to overthrow allies’ or partners’ governments. In sum, the thesis answers the research question and either proves or disproves the hypothesis.

**Research Question:** What role does special operations forces play in a United States countering unconventional warfare strategy?

**Hypothesis:** Special operations forces’ core operations and activities contribute greatly to support an overall Department of Defense and whole-of-government countering unconventional warfare strategy to meet U.S. national security objectives.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research is to examine the contribution of SOF to a Department of Defense or National Security Strategy to counter state and non-state actor’s UW campaigns that seek to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow the governments of U.S. allies and partners. Russia’s actions in Ukraine and the Islamic State encompassing territory in Syria and Iraq have exposed a
gap in capabilities for the U.S. to counter state and non-state actor’s UW campaigns. The thesis focuses on the contribution of special operations forces to a countering UW strategy and addresses state and non-state actor’s UW as the basis for a counter UW strategy.

**Research Method and Variables**

Research examines SOF contributions to a national strategy to counter state and non-state actors UW campaigns. The U.S. Army War College Strategy Model—also known as the Art Lykke model — “strategy = ends + ways + means” (Yarger 2012, 48) is the theoretical framework constructed for data analysis. The ends are the objectives (securing US national security interests/objectives), the ways are strategic concepts/courses of action (SOF core operations and activities), and the means are resources (SOF). Finally, Lykke’s model is applied to analyze a state actor UW strategy.

Research uses the model as the theoretical framework to either prove or disprove the hypothesis: *Special operations forces core operations and activities contribute greatly to support an overall Department of Defense and whole-of-government countering unconventional warfare strategy to meet U.S. national security objectives*. The dependent variable (securing US national security interests/objectives) and multiple independent variables (direct action, special reconnaissance, countering weapons of mass destruction, counterterrorism, unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, security force assistance, hostage rescue and recovery, counterinsurgency, foreign humanitarian assistance, military information support operations, and civil affairs operations) guide the research effort.

A qualitative research design consisting of content analysis of historical documents and a case study of Russian unconventional warfare in Ukraine is used to answer the research question and to examine the relationship among variables. The data are collected from government,
military, academic, and civil sector data sources. The primary U.S. Government sources include Presidential statements, National Security Strategy, Department of State documents, reports, and testimonies before Congress, and Public Law. The U.S. military sources include the National Military Strategy, Quadrennial Defense Review, Joint Doctrine manuals and concepts, and Joint Operating Environment. The academic sources are university studies such as Johns Hopkins University study on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare. Civil sector sources include studies from Think Tanks such as the RAND Corporation special warfare topics, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments on Future Special Operations Forces, and books and journal articles on irregular warfare topics.

Triangulation of mixed method data collection from content analysis and case studies enhances the external validity of data used to provide findings or to answer the research question and to test the hypothesis (Special operations forces core operations and activities contribute greatly to support an overall Department of Defense and whole-of-government countering unconventional warfare strategy to meet U.S. national security objectives); the independent variables—direct action (DA), special reconnaissance (SR), countering weapons of mass destruction (CWMD), counterterrorism (CT), unconventional warfare (UW), foreign internal defense (FID), security force assistance (SFA), hostage rescue and recovery (HRR), counterinsurgency (COIN), foreign humanitarian assistance (FHA), military information support operations (MISO), and civil affairs operations (CAO); and relationship between the dependent variable—securing US national security interests/objectives. Research findings either prove or disprove the hypothesis. In addition, the explanatory approach describes the relationships between the independent and dependent variables.
Limitations

The limitations of this research are the use of secondary sources written by other people instead of personal interviews or surveys for research data. Every effort will be made to collect a broad sample of information to identify biases of the authors. Cross checking data will expose any bias by the authors.

Summary

This thesis narrows the scope of the research from a broad whole-of-government countering UW strategy to SOF contribution to a national strategy. Analysis of SOF operations and activities and assess a state actor to prove or disprove the hypothesis. Chapter 2 provides an initial literature review of the current and mid-term operating environment, a review of national strategies, countering UW, and the relevance of SOF in support of national strategies. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology consisting of content analysis and a case study for the thesis. Chapter 4 presents findings from the research and to either prove or disprove the hypothesis. Chapter 5 synopsizes the thesis, presents the conclusions and recommends further areas of research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origin—war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins, war by ambush instead of by combat; by infiltration, instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him. It is a form of warfare uniquely adapted to what has been strangely called "wars of liberation," to undermine the efforts of new and poor countries to maintain the freedom that they have finally achieved. It preys on economic unrest and ethnic conflicts. It requires in those situations where we must counter it, and these are the kinds of challenges that will be before us in the next decade if freedom is to be saved, a whole new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of force, and therefore a new and wholly different kind of military training.

—John F. Kennedy, Remarks at U.S. Military Academy 1962

For history teaches us that the nations that grow comfortable with the old ways and complacent in the face of new threats, those nations do not long endure. And in the 21st century, we do not have the luxury of deciding which challenges to prepare for and which to ignore. We must overcome the full spectrum of threats -- the conventional and the unconventional; the nation-state and the terrorist network; the spread of deadly technologies and the spread of hateful ideologies; 18th century-style piracy and 21st century cyber threats.

—Barak H. Obama, Remarks at U.S. Naval Academy 2009

Overview

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 directed the Department of Defense to develop and present a counter unconventional strategy. To meet this requirement, the literature reviewed in this chapter highlights the near- to long-term operating environment, current national strategies, counter unconventional theory, and the relevance of special operations forces capabilities to support a national counter unconventional strategy. The near- to long-term security environment is characterize as becoming more complex with rising regional powers and the increasing impact on the environment by non-state actors. Moreover, the security environment describes states employing more indirect approaches to achieve national security objectives while operating below the threshold of state-on-state conflict. The predicted
future security environment coupled with the historical fact that the majority of conflict is irregular in nature suggests states and non-state actors will continue using unconventional warfare activities to secure security objectives.

National strategies point out the threats from revisionist states and violent extremist organizations. The U.S. will strengthen allies’ and partners’ ability to counter internal threats and deter external state aggression. The approach is assuring partners and improving their internal security through engagement, training, and exercises. In addition, national security strategy execution will have to be prioritized in an era of fiscal austerity.

The U.S government does not have a comprehensive strategy to counter unconventional warfare executed by state and non-state actors. A counter unconventional warfare strategy counters state and non-state actors who sponsor unconventional warfare. Countering unconventional warfare will most likely be a protracted campaign that requires a whole-of-government approach to achieve desired effects. From the military perspective, a counter unconventional warfare strategy will likely employ irregular warfare operations and activities integrated with other departments and agencies strategies to obtain national security objectives.

Special operations forces have had successes and failures since the beginning of the Cold War. Since the 9/11 attacks in 2001, special operations forces have improved their capabilities to become a force of choice for counterterrorism, countering weapons of mass destruction, and unconventional warfare demonstrated in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other areas around the world. Special operations forces are uniquely manned, trained, and equipped to address future irregular and hybrid threats to national security interests. Special operations forces employed across the globe can identify problems early in their trajectory to develop understanding for better decision
making. In addition, special operations forces can train, advise, and assist partners to achieve mutual security objectives.

Finally, there are several key definitions defined in U.S. doctrine that shape understanding of the terminology utilized in this chapter—irregular warfare and unconventional warfare. Joint Publication 1 *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* emphasizes two forms of warfare—traditional and irregular. Traditional warfare is conflict between states and irregular warfare is “characterized as a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for the legitimacy and influence over the relative population(s)” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2013, I-6, I-7). Unconventional warfare is one of five irregular warfare operations and activities. Joint Publication 3-05 *Special Operations* defines unconventional warfare as “activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, GL-12).

**Operational Context**

The 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS) describes the near-term operating environment as “fluid” with historical transitions taking place. It depicts five strategic shifts from the previous 2010 strategy. First, “power among states is more dynamic” (US President 2015, 4). Increased economic completion and power will present challenges and opportunities for the future. The China rise, Russian aggression, and other inspiring regional powers will impact the balance of power relations moving forward (US President 2015, 4). Second, “power is shifting below and beyond the nation-state” (US President 2015, 4). Non-state actors are gaining greater access to technology which has both positive and negative effects. Citizens have higher expectations for their government to improve governance and economic opportunity as well as
being more transparent in the conduct of those affairs. If the government performs these functions poorly, it could spark violence and instability in a country which could lead to an insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow the government. Third, “increasing interdependence of the global economy and rapid pace of technological change are linking individuals, groups, and governments in unprecedented ways” (US President 2015, 4). This interconnectedness has both positive and negative effects. The positive effects can include better trade and economic activities, build stronger alliances, and enhance global communications (US President 2015, 4). Negative impacts to global connectedness may include threats from “climate change, malicious cyber activity, and pandemic diseases, and transnational terrorism and crime” (US President 2015, 4). Fourth, “a struggle for power is underway in among and within many states of the Middle East and North Africa” (US President 2015, 5). The NSS describes continued friction between governments and their population. This can be a challenge in areas where religious extremism has taken hold. The NSS points out the Iraq War and the 2011 Arab Spring as two prominent examples. Fifth, “the global energy market has changed dramatically” (US President 2015, 5). The United States has reduced its dependency on foreign oil and has become a major oil and gas producer. The energy market has seen some negative impacts as well. The Russian government uses its natural gas exports to intimidate its neighbors in eastern Europe to shape political outcomes (US President 2015, 5).

The Joint Operating Environment (JOE) 2035 describes a potential future operating environment for the Joint force to plan, develop concepts, and train and equip the force to win in the future environment. Joe 2035 points out two overarching challenges that the Joint force will face into the future—contested norms and persistent disorder. Contested norms is described as adversaries challenging the established “rules and agreements” of the international system (Joint
Chiefs of Staff 2016, ii). Persistent disorder is “adversaries exploiting the inability of societies to provide functioning, stable, and legitimate governance” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2016, ii).

Moreover, the JOE 2035 established three broad categories where contested norms and persistent disorder will develop in the future—World Order; Human Geography; and Science, Technology, and Engineering (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2016, 4). Under the World Order category, there is a subcategory powers pursuing regional primacy which describes two key points relative to countering state unconventional warfare. According to the JOE 2035, revisionist states will employ hybrid strategies through direct and indirect approaches to coerce populations to achieve national security interests (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2016, 6). In addition, the JOE 2035 predicts an “intensification of warfare by proxy” to reduce risk, conceal involvement, and limit cost (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2016, 6). Finally, adversarial non-state actors will leverage advanced technologies to advance their goals. These activities may include leveraging social media mechanisms, robotics, and autonomous systems to disrupt, degrade, or defeat security systems (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2016, 14). The JOE 2035 is focused on the Joint Force view of the future operating environment form the perspective of the military instrument of power. Therefore, the JOE 2035 will present the future operating environment through the military lens and it shapes the military’s future resource requirements in competition with other departments or agencies for finite national security resources.

Sebastian Gorka and David Kilcullen in “An Actor-centric Theory of War,” identify an on-going debate in the national security arena on how the U.S. should wage war in the 21st Century. They describe this debate in terms of preparing the future force for conventional state-on-state conflict versus preparing the force for irregular warfare. Gorka and Kilcullen provide a historical analysis of conflict over the past 200 years. The authors claim over that period of time
state-on-state conflict was 20 percent while 80 percent of conflict was irregular in nature (Gorka and Kilcullen 2011, 15). Additionally, the authors declare that both sides of the argument are not totally correct and the U.S. must have a better understanding of the actors operating in the environment. A better understanding of who the actors are and how they want to fight us will improve the U.S. approach to future conflict.

Max Boot’s book *Invisible Armies* supports Gorka’s and Kilcullen’s assertion that the history of conflict has been more irregular than state versus state. Boot’s “The Invisible Armies Database” assesses insurgencies going back to 1775. In 2013, Boot reports there were 381 resolved insurgencies and 61 ongoing insurgencies around the world (2013, 569-590). In addition, Boot claims the average insurgency last about seven years and in many cases the insurgency was only successful with external support (2013, 570-590).

**U.S. National Security and Military Strategies**

The NSS describes national security challenges and provides strategic guidance to address those challenges. The 2015 NSS asserts the U.S. will continue to face challenges to our national security from state and non-state actors. United States forces will “defend the homeland, conduct global counterterrorism operations, assure allies, and deter aggression through forward presence and engagement” (US President 2015, 8). Moreover, the NSS establishes a national security priority of combating violent extremist organizations such as al-Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The U.S. is “pursuing a more sustainable approach that prioritizes targeted counterterrorism operations, collective action with responsible partners, and increased efforts to prevent the growth of violent extremism and radicalization that drives increased threats” (US President 2015, 9). Another key component of the NSS is building partner capacity to prevent conflict. To deter inter-state aggression against allies and partners,
the U.S. will invest “in their capabilities to withstand coercion, imposing costs on those who threaten neighbors or violate fundamental international norms …” (US President 2015, 10). Furthermore, the U.S. will “help our allies and partners resist Russian coercion over the long term” (US President 2015, 25).

The 2015 National Military Strategy (NMS) describes the U.S. military’s strategic aims to implement the NSS guidance. The NMS “addresses the need to counter revisionist states that are challenging international norms as well as violent extremist organizations (VEOs) that are undermining transregional security. We are working with allies and partners to deter, deny, and – when necessary – defeat potential state adversaries” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 1). The NMS identified Russian military activities are “undermining regional security directly and through proxy forces” and Iran is a “state-sponsor of terrorism that has undermined stability in many nations” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 2). Moreover, the third national military objective is strengthening allies and partners around the globe. To do this, the NMS emphasizes “maintain a global stabilizing presence, and conduct training, exercises, security cooperation activities, and military-to-military engagement … enhancing our collective ability to deter aggression and defeat extremists” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 9).

The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) builds upon the Defense Strategic Guidance and the strategy depicts three pillars: protect the homeland, build security globally, and project power and win decisively (Department of Defense 2014, v). The QDR points out the challenging fiscal environment and the impacts of the Budget Control Act of 2011 on readiness and the ability to modernize the force (Department of Defense 2014, 27). Equally important is the QDR’s assessment to rebalance the Joint Force after a decade plus of continued conflict—balance capabilities across the range of military operations. In addition, the QDR asserts special
operations forces (SOF) will play a “central” role in counterterrorism efforts around the world (Department of Defense 2014, 37). The QDR suggests SOF’s end strength will increase and the Department will seek resources to maintain persistent and distributed operations to defeat designated terrorist organizations, counter weapons of mass destruction, build partner capacity, and conduct direct action missions (Department of Defense 2014, 37). Although the QDR acknowledges SOF’s important role in counterterrorism and countering weapons of mass destruction operations, the document does not account for SOF’s significant contributions across the range of military operations.

**Countering Unconventional Warfare**

In his presentation at the United States Special Operations Command, David Maxwell described Countering-Unconventional Warfare (C-UW) consist of “operations and activities conducted by the U.S. Government and supported by SOF against an adversarial state or non-state sponsor of unconventional warfare in order to decrease the sponsor’s capacity to employ unconventional warfare … may comprehensively employ political, economic, military, and psychological pressure in order to affect both an adversarial sponsor’s will and capabilities” (2014). Moreover, C-UW efforts are most likely going to be “protracted and psychological-centric in nature” (Maxwell, 2014). Maxwell suggests Irregular Warfare (IW) operations and activities—foreign internal defense, counterinsurgency, unconventional warfare, counterterrorism, and stability operations—can be utilized as lines of effort in a C-UW strategy (2014). According to Maxwell, a C-UW strategy should expose and attack threat UW strategy; counter-organize based on adversary’s UW organization structures; conduct remote area operations; employ law enforcement and intelligence in sanctuary countries; and execute political warfare strategies (2014).
The United States Army Special Operations Command’s (USASOC) White Paper Counter-Unconventional Warfare builds upon Maxwell’s C-UW strategy. The paper’s central idea states that, “C-UW must be strategic in conception and scope … encompass the whole-of-government while employing the full range of synchronized IW functions in order to defeat an adversary’s unconventional warfare activities” and “persistently integrate joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) partner efforts” (USASOC 2014, 6). In addition, the paper expands the components of a C-UW strategy to include: develop hybrid structures with regional and global focus to plan and execute IW and C-UW operations; expand partner relationships; improve SOF operational art and campaign planning; operationalize the CONUS base to leverage expertise from other government agencies, civil sector, and academia; strengthen alliances and coalition partners to defeat UW activities abroad; and leverage authorities established in U.S. Code (USASOC 2014, 9-19).

Robert Newson declared in “Counter-Unconventional Warfare Is the Way of the Future. How Can We Get There?” that the United States does not have “a credible strategic-level ability to interdict and roll back external sponsorships of insurgent and separatist movements,” therefore, a C-UW strategy is required to counter adversary’s hybrid warfare (Newson 2014). Newson points out two state actors conducting UW—Russia’s action in Ukraine and Iran’s support to Hezbollah—and the United States needs to build capacity for C-UW efforts (2014). According to Newson, special operations forces have a primary role in C-UW because of their small footprint scalable force packages, low signature capabilities, and expertise in UW (2014).

The United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) White Paper Countering Adversary Unconventional Warfare through All Aspect Cyber Preeminence points out state and non-state actors will utilize the cyber domain to enable UW operations (2016). The cyber
domain could be used to: “recruit, train and mobilize local partners and surrogates; communicate with their own UW forces in a target country; carry out offensive attacks on target regimes’ intuitions and critical infrastructure; and conduct a broad spectrum influence campaign among multiple regional and global audiences” (USSOCOM 2016, 2-3). As part of a C-UW strategy, the cyber domain provides access to global audiences that could be mobilized to propagate messages for specific effects, counter messaging, and can be used to disrupt adversary’s information and communications networks (USSOCOM 2016, 3).

**Relevance of Special Operations in U.S. Strategy**

Matthew Johnson in “The Growing Relevance of Special Operations Forces in U.S. Strategy” described the challenges SOF faced since its inception to gain acceptance as a viable military force. During the Cold War, President Eisenhower saw the utility of a force to operate in the “grey area between peace and war” and he employed SOF and covert action as a counter to Soviet Union sponsored proxy wars (Johnson 2006, 276). Johnson points out that SOF had successes and failures during the Vietnam War. U.S. Amy Special Forces training tribesman in the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups program was successful in defending their areas and removing Viet Cong from the area (Johnson 2006, 277-78). On the other hand, the Studies and Observations Group “black” operations in Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam lacked the “political and military support and did not have a significant strategic impact” (Johnson 2006, 278). SOF’s stock began to rise in the 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union creating the potential for weapons of mass destruction to get into the hands of terrorist or criminal organizations—creating the counterproliferation mission (Johnson 2006, 284). In addition, Islamic terrorism was on the rise and the SOF focus became counterterrorism operations.
Finally, the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. placed SOF in the spotlight and they were at the tip of the spear for the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). In Afghanistan, SOF and Central Intelligence Agency paramilitary forces organized, advised and assisted Northern Alliance forces to overthrow the Taliban regime in forty-nine days (Johnson 2006, 286). Equally important was SOF’s actions in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. SOF entered Iraq ahead of the conventional campaign to conduct reconnaissance, report current intelligence, and linked-up with Kurdish forces in the north to establish a northern front to hold Iraqi Army Divisions from reinforcing Baghdad (Johnson 2006, 286-87). According to Johnson, SOF are now the force of choice to confront emerging unconventional and asymmetric threats in the current operating environment (2006, 273).

In a RAND research project Special Warfare: The Missing Middle in U.S. Coercive Options, Dan Madden et al. (2014), conducted research on special warfare to determine the advantages and risks; identify how special warfare campaigns can be used for strategic ends; and assessed how special warfare capabilities can be developed and institutionalized. The authors of the study identify four special warfare advantages:

- special warfare can improve U.S. contextual understanding of potential partners and the situation on the ground; special warfare’s small-footprint approach allows the United States to pursue cost-effective, cost-imposing strategies; given a decision to intervene, policymakers could use special warfare to avoid making commitments beyond U.S. interests; and special warfare’s small-footprint approach can be more fiscally and politically sustainable than alternatives when underlying sources of conflict cannot be resolved in the short term (Madden et al. 2014, 2-3).

In addition, the authors recommend that “the U.S. national security community needs to begin thinking seriously about special warfare capabilities, authorities, and options in strategic and operational planning” (Madden et al. 2014, 4). The study only examined special warfare which only encompasses several SOF operations and activities. Special warfare is an U.S. Army
Special Operations umbrella term consisting of irregular warfare operations and activities unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, and counterinsurgency.

Jim Thomas and Chris Dougherty in their report Beyond the Ramparts: The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces assessed “how SOF can advance U.S. national security interests and expand the nation’s option set for dealing with security challenges over the next several decades” (2013, 1). The authors point out several long-term security challenges that SOF will have a central role in executing: defeating violent extremist organizations; countering weapons of mass destruction; disrupting or defeating anti-access and area-denial systems; executing influence campaigns; and waging proxy wars (Thomas and Dougherty 2013, xi). Equally important will be SOF’s role in preventing conflict and building partner capacity to achieve mutual security objectives (Thomas and Dougherty 2013, 2). According to Thomas and Dougherty, SOF’s advanced skill sets, scalable small-footprint options, language and cultural training, global network, and the capability to operate in politically sensitive and denied areas makes SOF a viable force to address future security challenges (2013, 2-3). The authors compiled a comprehensive report evaluating SOF from 2001 to the date of this publication. The authors assessed the future operating environment and laid out how SOF will contribute to combatting those challenges. In addition, the authors presented sold recommendations for SOF to build capacity and capabilities for the future.

Summary

The literature reviewed depicts several key observations that will further shape the development of this thesis. First, the initial assessment of the operational environment depicts a future with more competition between states and non-state actors for control over relative populations. State and non-state actors will use indirect approaches to achieve national
objectives pushing the limits, but keeping the activities below the point of triggering major state-on-state conflict between the major power states. The historical review of conflict over the past 200 years suggests that the majority of conflict has been irregular in nature. The overview of the future operating environment and the historical data suggests conflict in the future will remain mostly irregular warfare. Therefore, states and non-state actors will continue employing unconventional warfare.

Second, the literature identified a gap at the strategic-level to counter state and non-state actors UW campaigns. Several author’s advocated for a national counter unconventional warfare strategy that integrates joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) partner efforts to counter state and non-state actor’s hybrid and UW campaigns which attempt to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow allies and partner governments.

Third, authors emphasized special operations forces have increased their role in national security approaches and they would have a significant role in executing a counter unconventional warfare strategy to achieve U.S. national objectives.

The literature reviewed does not adequately prove or disprove special operations forces core operations and activities contribute greatly to support an overall Department of Defense and whole-of-government countering unconventional warfare strategy to meet U.S. national security objectives. This author will further examine SOF’s role in a counter unconventional warfare strategy, attempt to point out a state actors UW activities in order to develop a counter strategy, access SOF core operations and activities feasibility to support a counter unconventional warfare strategy. This data will assist with directing additional research and develop Chapter 3 which will discuss the methodology used to test the hypothesis.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Overview

The research methodology is grounded in the basic principles of developing a strategy to counter state and non-state actor’s aggression against the U.S. and its allies or partners. An assessment of the current and future operating environment is essential to developing a strategy to counter state and non-state actor’s aggression. This understanding of the environment identifies threats to U.S. national security interests, identifies potential threats to allies and partners in which the U.S. provides security guarantees to respond to aggression such as the countries under the NATO Alliance. This understanding of the environment assists with designing a strategy which identifies the ends, ways and, means to counter state and non-state aggression. The U.S. Army War College’s strategy development model ends, ways, and means will be utilized to present the data collected on U.S. unconventional warfare theory as well as a case study on Russian unconventional warfare activities in Ukraine.

Data collection was from multiple sources including U.S national security and military strategies; Department of State; academic institutions; private research organizations; and international military journals and assessments. These sources illuminated the international security environment; threats to U.S., its allies and partners interest; a strategic gap in countering unconventional warfare; and the relevance of SOF in the future operating environment. This chapter discusses the methodology used, research framework, data collection methods and a summary of the analysis methods that were used.
Methodology

Qualitative research methods were used to collect and review relevant data related to U.S. unconventional warfare theory and countering adversarial state and non-state actor’s unconventional warfare approaches. Key sources to support research for this thesis includes U.S. National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy; U.S. Joint and Service component doctrine; Department of Defense, Department of State, Intelligence Community, and Congressional documents and reports related to national and international security; research reports form academia and private sector research organizations; books on strategy and warfare; peer reviewed papers and journals; and North Atlantic Treaty Organization member states security reports. The sources identified are important to identify U.S. national security interests, threats to those interests, and national objectives to counter those threats; understanding the current and future operating environment; examine adversarial unconventional warfare tactics, techniques, and procedures; and the importance of developing a strategy to counter adversarial state and non-state actor’s unconventional warfare activities.

Research Framework

This thesis examines SOF’s contribution to a national strategy to counter state and non-state actors UW campaigns. Lawrence Freedman (2013) identified that there is not an “agreed-upon definition of a strategy” but a common thread is balancing between ends, ways, and means; “identifying objectives; and about the resources and methods available for meeting such objectives” (Lawrence 2013, xi). Therefore, this thesis used the U.S. Army War College Strategy Model—also known as the Art Lykke model (Figure 3.1)—strategy = ends + ways + means (Yarger 2012, 48).
The model will be used to frame data collection and display the results of the analyzed data in terms of the ends are the objectives (securing US national security interests/objectives), the ways are strategic concepts/courses of action (SOF core operations and activities), and the means are resources (SOF). In addition, the model will be used to analyze a state actor UW strategy. The model provides a framework to answer the research question, prove or disprove the hypothesis and test the variables toward the hypothesis:

**Research Question:** What role does special operations forces play in a United States countering unconventional warfare strategy?

**Hypothesis:** Special operations forces’ core operations and activities contribute greatly to support an overall Department of Defense and whole-of-government countering unconventional warfare strategy to meet U.S. national security objectives.

**Dependent Variable:** Securing US national security interests/objectives.

**Independent Variables:** Direct action, special reconnaissance, countering weapons of mass destruction, counterterrorism, unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, security force assistance, hostage rescue and recovery, counterinsurgency, foreign humanitarian assistance, military information support operations, and civil affairs operations.

**Data Collection Methods**

The research methodology for this thesis will be a qualitative research approach utilizing content analysis and a case study. The content data analysis will focus on data related to
unconventional warfare operations and activities, national security interests, threats and national security objectives. Content analysis encompassed documents and reports from U. S. government Departments and Agencies related to nation and international security; U.S. Joint and Service doctrine on special operations; international organizations; academic and private sector research organizations, books on strategy and irregular warfare; and websites related to national security issues. The collection of this data helped to examine U.S. strategy and policy to counter threats to national security interests, develop an understanding of U.S. and adversarial unconventional warfare capabilities, and determine the validity of special operations forces as a key component to a national counter unconventional warfare strategy.

The case study for this thesis is Russian UW activities in Ukraine. The U.S. Army War College Strategy Model—strategy = ends + ways + means—will be used to direct research and to organize the data collection. The data collected for this case study will draw conclusion to how Russia conducts UW and assist with developing a countering unconventional warfare strategy.

Summary

The research indicated the future operating environment will continue to be mostly irregular warfare in nature thus indicating a continued use of unconventional warfare by state and non-state actors to gain a position of advantage. The research data suggests there is a strategic capability gap to counter adversarial unconventional warfare; therefore, requiring the development of national strategy to counter state and non-state actor’s unconventional warfare activities who threaten U.S. and allies’ national security objectives. In addition, the data indicates that SOF are a key component to a national counter unconventional warfare strategy.
Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research, analysis of the data, answers the research question, and lays out the evidence to prove the hypothesis.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Our traditional approach is either we’re at peace or at conflict. And I think that’s insufficient to deal with the actors that actually seek to advance their interests while avoiding our strengths.

—General Joseph F. Dunford Jr., Remarks at the Center for Strategic and International Studies 2016

Overview

Chapter 4 presents thesis research findings which filled a strategic gap to counter adversarial unconventional warfare activities. The research data and the U.S. Army War College Strategy Model—Art Lykke model—outlined in Chapter 3 were used to answer the research question: What role does special operations forces play in a United States countering unconventional warfare strategy? The research proved the hypothesis (Special operations forces’ core operations and activities contribute greatly to support an overall Department of Defense and whole-of-government countering unconventional warfare strategy to meet U.S. national security objectives). This Chapter approaches unconventional warfare from a U.S. prospective; describes the operational context; posits the ends, ways, and means for SOF to support a C-UW strategy; and analyzes Russian unconventional warfare activities in Ukraine; and a summary of the chapter.

What is Unconventional Warfare?

A basic understanding of unconventional warfare is necessary to design a strategy to counter adversarial use of unconventional warfare operations and activities. This section provides that understanding from the U.S. perspective. Such an understanding provides the conceptual start point to develop insights into adversarial state and non-state actor’s unconventional warfare activities.
U.S. Joint Doctrine describes two forms of warfare—traditional and irregular. Joint Publication 1 *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* describes traditional warfare as conflict between “nation-states or coalitions and alliances of nation-states” and focuses on the destruction of enemy armed forces and capacity to fight a war or to seize territory (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2013, I-5). In contrast, irregular war is defined as “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s)” and focuses on population as the key to success (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2013, I-6). The U.S. wages irregular warfare (IW) from the nation-state perspective with a whole-of-government approach and with the military instrument of power setting the conditions to achieve victory (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2013, I-6). From the opposite perspective, weaker adversaries employ IW to achieve their objectives though a protracted weakening the will of the opposing force and of winning over the relevant population. Adversaries employing IW may combine activities such as terrorism, insurgency, criminal activity, distribute propaganda, as well as other approaches to advance their cause (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2013, I-6).

Unconventional warfare is one of five operations and activities executed under the umbrella of IW. The *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* lists the five IW operations and activities as: counterterrorism, unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, counterinsurgency, and stability operations (2010, 7). Joint Publication 3-05 *Special Operations* defines unconventional warfare as “activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, GL-12). Further examination of the definitions of coerce, disrupt and overthrow will add additional clarity to the U.S. perspective on UW operations and activities. Within the
context of UW, coerce or disrupt operation or activity has limited objectives. It seeks to change
the behavior of a hostile government or occupying power, but does not seek regime change. In
contrast, an overthrow campaign is designed to replace the hostile government by employing
coercive and disruptive approaches as well as violence to achieve the end state. In addition, an
occupying power can be a nation-state that has occupied territory in another country or an
element occupying territory within a state(s) and performing state-like functions. Examples
include the Islamic State occupying territory in Iraq and Syria or the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The underground, auxiliary, and guerilla force are elements of a resistance movement or
an insurgency. There are doctrinal definitions for these elements; however, there are some key
points that enable the understanding of these elements. The underground is a clandestine cellular
structured organization that operates in areas under control of local security forces—such as
urban areas. Underground members gather information and intelligence to support resistance
operations such as subversion, sabotage, operate propaganda networks, procure or fabricate
government documents, and they may form the nucleus of a shadow government in the case of
an overthrow campaign. The auxiliary supports the underground and guerrilla force. Auxiliaries
can procure and distribute logistics; provide transportation; information, security and early
warning; recruit for the movement; and operate safe sites.

Finally, the guerrilla is the military element of the resistance movement or insurgency.
The guerilla force is organized along the lines of a military force who conduct military or
paramilitary operations against the security forces of the hostile government or occupying power.
In the early stages of the resistance, the guerrillas are usually smaller groups who use hit and run
tactics against a superior force. As the guerrilla force grows and has success, they can evolve
from squad size elements to brigade formations to conduct direct offensive attacks on security
forces. After victory, they can form the nucleus of the new or newly liberated state’s security forces.

Unconventional warfare can support major combat operations or can be the main effort in response to adversarial action. UW can be used to initiate action where large scale military operations are not practical because of sensitive political considerations. An example of UW operations supporting major combat operations is Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in 2003, where special operations forces linked up with the Kurdish Peshmerga in northern Iraq and preventing 13 Iraq divisions from reinforcing Bagdad as the main coalition attack came from the south (Robinson 2004, 340; U.S. Army Special Operations Command 2011). The early phase of Operation ENDURING FREDOM Afghanistan in 2001 is another example of UW operations conducted by Special Forces “horse soldiers” as the main effort to overthrow the Taliban regime. The next section will describe the operating environment for the early 21st Century security environment.

**Operational Context in the Early 21st Century Security Environment**

Many national security experts describe the future operational environment as more complex with rising regional powers challenging international norms, increasing transregional threats from violent extremists and criminal organizations, and the diffusion of technology empowering sub-state actors to influence local, regional and global outcomes. Henry Kissinger’s (2015) statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee claims security threats have expanded and become more fluid. According to Kissinger, “The United States has not faced a more diverse and complex array of crises since the end of the Second World War” (US Senate 2015, 1). Director of National Intelligence James Clapper described the future security
environment as “unpredictable instability” establishing a “new normal” moving forward into the future (US Senate 2016, 1).

Likewise, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter believes there are complex challenges in every region of the world. Carter claims the current security environment is “the age of everything, as threats become more transnational, more transregional, and cannot be addressed in isolation” (2015). All three national security experts agree that the future operational environment will be complex with many challenges from all corners of the world.

Many national security analysts agree on several broad trends in the operational environment. The trends are a diffusion of power in the world among states and from states down to groups and individuals; diffusion of advanced technologies which empower state and non-states actors to exert influence at local, state, regional and global levels; demographic shifts in the population; and natural resources pressures.

The National Intelligence Council’s *Global Trends 2030* projects potential trends that shape the future operating environment. It provides potential world scenarios based on those projections. The National Intelligence Council (NIC) points out four megatrends—individual empowerment, diffusion of power, demographic patterns, and food, water, energy nexus (Table 4.1) (2012, ii).
Table 4.1. Global Trends 2030 Megatrends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Empowerment</td>
<td>Individual empowerment will accelerate owing to poverty reduction, growth of the global middle class, greater educational attainment, widespread use of new communications and manufacturing technologies, and health-care advances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffusion of Power</td>
<td>There will not be any hegemonic power. Power will shift to networks and coalitions in a multipolar world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Patterns</td>
<td>The demographic arc of instability will narrow. Economic growth might decline in “aging” countries. Sixty percent of the world’s population will live in urbanized areas; migration will increase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food, Water, Energy Nexus</td>
<td>Demand for these resources will grow substantially owing to an increase in the global population. Tackling problems pertaining to one commodity will be linked to supply and demand for the others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data from National Intelligence Council 2012, ii.

Megatrends of individual empowerment and diffusion of power have great significance to states and non-state actors conducting unconventional warfare activities. The NIC points out both positive and negative impacts of individual empowerment. Individuals and groups will have greater access to advanced technologies—communications, drones, cyber, and bio weaponry—which in turn will allow them to inflict violence on a scale previously reserved to state actors. (National Intelligence Council 2012, iii). The trend toward diffusion of power can produce negative effects as well.

The rise of regional powers will increase competition among states, thereby inducing a state to form either protective or predatory alliances to influence other states, regions, or the world (National Intelligence Council 2012, iii). This increased competition between states may increase their use of unconventional warfare activities as a low-risk, low cost means to shape outcomes in their favor.

Nation states employ unconventional warfare to achieve national security objectives. The NSS and NMS identified rising powers, revisionist states, and violent extremist organizations as threats to U.S. national security interests. The NMS points out four nation states that “pose
serious security concerns” to the U.S. and international community—Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea. These actors all attempt to destabilize rivals, fragment opposing alliances, and assert political dominance.

Russia is capable of posing an existential threat to the United States and its NATO alliance countries. The NMS claims Russian military action is “undermining regional security” through overt and low visible means as well as employing proxy forces to achieve security objectives (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 2). Over the past decade, Russia has shown aggression towards the Caucasus, Ukraine, and the Baltics. In early 2014, Russia has employed special operations forces, intelligence agents, and political provocateurs in eastern and southern Ukraine to achieve political objectives (US Senate 2014).

Russia leveraged diasporas in Ukraine to disrupt civil order provoking excessive response from the government. Moreover, Victoria Nuland’s testimony before Congress points out that Russian agents were supporting separatist movements in Ukraine by providing funding, weapons, and coordination on the ground (US Senate 2014). Clearly, Russia employed unconventional warfare activities supported by conventional forces to achieve their objectives in Ukraine. Further analysis of Russian unconventional warfare will follow later in this chapter.

China is a rising power in the Pacific with expanding economic and military power which it uses to influence the region. The DoD 2011 Annual Report to Congress on Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China illuminated evolving Chinese military doctrine. The 2011 report claimed that the CCP Central Committee approved a “three warfares” concept to advance China as a global power and these tools will set conditions prior to and during hostilities (Department of Defense 2011, 26). The “three warfares” are listed below:

**Psychological Warfare** seeks to undermine an enemy’s ability to conduct combat operations through operations aimed at deterring, shocking, and demoralizing enemy military personnel and supporting civilian populations.
Media Warfare is aimed at influencing domestic and international public opinion to build support for China’s military actions and dissuade an adversary from pursuing actions contrary to China’s interests.

Legal Warfare uses international and domestic law to claim the legal high ground or assert Chinese interests. It can be employed to hamstring an adversary’s operational freedom and shape the operational space. Legal warfare is also intended to build international support and manage possible political repercussions of China’s military actions. China has attempted to employ legal warfare in the maritime domain and in international airspace in pursuit of a security buffer zone (Department of Defense 2011, 26).

China is using all three elements of the “three warfares” concept today in territorial disputes. In the Pacific region, China has aggressively claimed the majority of the South China Sea as its national waters in a manner inconsistent with international law (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 2). According to Dereck Watkins (2015), China has built up the Mischief and Subi reefs into islands which have ports, military facilities and airfields in an illegal attempt to extend their sovereignty. China’s actions in the South China Sea will continue to be contentious because Vietnam, The Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei all lay claims to portions of the Spratly Islands. In addition, China’s island building extends their operational reach and could threaten free flow of commerce through the South China Sea. Unconventional warfare against their regional competitors can be a next step in China’s “three warfares” approach to achieve national security objectives.

Iran is a regional power presenting strategic challenges to the U.S. in the Middle East and beyond. The Iran nuclear deal is supposed to extend Iran’s capability to produce enough material for one nuclear bomb from 2-3 months out to one year (White House 2016). Despite signing the nuclear deal, Iran continues to defy United Nations Security Council resolutions by pursuing “missile delivery technologies” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 2). In addition, Iran is developing anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) capabilities to control the Strait of Hormuz (Department of Defense 2014, 1). A DoD 2014 Annual Report on the Military Power of Iran
claims that Iran is fielding A2/AD systems to include: “advanced naval mines, small but capable submarines, coastal defense cruise missile batteries, attack craft, and anti-ship ballistic missiles” (2014, 1-2). Iran’s A2/AD capabilities could disrupt maritime traffic traversing through the Strait of Hormuz.

Equally important to U.S. interests is Iran’s support to terrorist organizations. Iran is a designated state-sponsor of terrorism whose proxies are having negative impacts in the Middle East (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 2). Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Qods force is the primary organization that conducts covert action to support Iranian foreign policy (Department of Defense 2014, 1). Qods Force conducts covert operations in both Iraq and Syria. Iran also employs Lebanese Hezbollah as a proxy in Syria to reinforce the Assad regime against a Sunni insurgency (Department of Defense 2014, 1). Iran’s support to Hamas and Hezbollah employs unconventional warfare activities. Those are the same activities to train, equip, fund, advise and assist a resistance movement or insurgency. Understanding Iran’s UW tactics, techniques and procedures can inform development of a counter strategy.

North Korea is a regional threat that threatens it neighbors South Korea and Japan with both nuclear and conventional capabilities. Over the past decade, North Korea has significantly increased its nuclear and missile capabilities. On September 9, 2016, North Korea tested a second nuclear device this year preceded by an “unprecedented campaign of ballistic missile launches” (Obama 2016).

Both the nuclear test and ballistic missile firing are immediate threats to U.S. Allies South Korea and Japan. More ominously, the NMS assesses that North Korea will have the capability to threaten the U.S. homeland in time (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 2). In addition to nuclear saber rattling, North Korea has conducted cyber-attacks against the U.S. homeland. One
North Korean cyber-attack caused “major damage to a U.S. corporation” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 2). Finally, North Korean military doctrine envisions the use of unconventional warfare activities to support security objectives. Their most likely target would be South Korea in the form of establishing intelligence networks, sabotage, subversion, and organization of resistance movement. The goal is re-unification of the two Koreas under communist rule.

Violent extremist organizations also pose a threat to the U.S. and its Allies. The NSS and NMS identified al Qaida and their affiliates and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) as the primary terrorist threats to the U.S. homeland and allies. These terrorist organizations have global networks but are especially located in the Middle East and Northern Africa (Joint Chief of Staff 2015, 3).

ISIL emerged from the remnants of Al Qaeda in Iraq which seeks to overthrow apostate governments to create a Muslim Caliphate. ISIL controls areas in Syria and Iraq and survives by extorting local populations, collecting taxes, receiving external donations, and selling oil on the black market. The Islamic State has a sophisticated social media capability used to recruit foreign fighters, radicalize supporters to execute terror attacks in the western world, and employ propaganda to bolster its influence.

Despite recent setbacks to ISIL—loss of territory and surgical strikes removing leaders—they were able to commit high profile acts of terror in Bagdad, Paris, Brussels, Istanbul, Ankara, San Bernardino, and Orlando. ISIL will continue to be a significant threat as long as it has a safe haven from which to operate. Like an insurgency, ISIL employs principles of unconventional warfare to overthrow established governments which they view as illegitimate. Paradoxically, ISIL could be considered an occupying power since it performs state-like functions in Iraqi and Syrian territory it controls.
This section has provided an overview of the early 21st Century operational environment. It has highlighted the complexity of the security environment and pointed out the four-major perceived state and non-state actor threats to national security outlined in the NSS and NMS. Data available strongly suggests that the state and non-states actors named above are currently conducting various UW activities to obtain national security objectives. Therefore, it is important to understand how state and non-state actors execute UW so the U.S. can implement an effective counter strategy. The next section explores the U.S. ends, ways, and means to counter adversarial unconventional warfare from a SOF perspective.

**U.S. Strategy and Ends, Ways, and Means from a SOF Perspective**

U.S. strategy is developed by identifying national interests, threats to those interests, and objectives; by formulating policies and supporting strategies that draw from capabilities across the instruments of national power—diplomatic, information, military, economic, financial, intelligence, and law enforcement—to achieve objectives; and by assigning resources to implement the strategy.

U.S. government agencies, departments, and bureaus then develop supporting concepts to accomplish objectives. Their approaches should minimize risks by balancing ends, ways, and means. Equally important is identifying and exploiting opportunities to pursue national security objectives.

The NSS defines national security interests and provides a general direction to the national security enterprise to address them. The 2015 NSS identified four enduring national security interests:

1) The security of the United States, its citizens, and U.S. allies and partners;
2) A strong, innovative, and growing U.S. economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity;
3) Respect for universal values at home and around the world; and
4) A rules-based international order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges. (US President 2015, 2)

To implement the NSS, the U.S. will “lead with strength” by having a strong economy, unrivaled military might, and maintain rule of law and universal rights; “lead by example” by upholding our values at home in order to promote those values abroad, safeguard civil rights, and abide by international norms and standard; “lead with capable partners” by leveraging collective action to address global challenges and expand our cooperation with partners and international institutions; “lead with all the instruments of U.S. power” by employing diplomacy and development backed by a strong military; and “lead with a long-term perspective” to influence trajectories, seize opportunities, and manage risks (US President 2015, 3-4).

Next, the NSS outlines eight strategic national security objectives—ends. The objectives are: strengthen our national defense; reinforce homeland security; combat the persistent threat of terrorism; build capacity to prevent conflict; prevent the spread and use of weapons of mass destruction; confront climate change; assure access to shared spaces—cyber, space, air, and oceans; and increase global health security. The NSS objectives are broad and they provide strategic ends for all U.S. government departments, agencies, and bureaus enabling these institutions to develop their own organizations objectives based on capabilities and capacities to accomplish the strategic objectives.

To address all of these at a national level is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, they do establish an overall framework in which to examine SOF’s contributions to a national C-UW strategy. This is proper, as SOF is a key component of the solution for the military instrument of power. Therefore, the next section will present the national military objectives.
The NMS nests within the NSS. The NMS provides direction for the U.S. military to accomplish national security objectives through a set of national military objectives. To do so, the U.S. military examined U.S. enduring national interests, deriving national security interests to guide military leader’s decision making. The national security interests from the 2015 NMS are:

1) The survival of the Nation;
2) The prevention of catastrophic attack against U.S. territory;
3) The global security system;
4) The security, confidence, and reliability of our allies;
5) The protection of American citizens abroad; and
6) The preservation and extension of universal values. (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 5)

To protect the national security interests, the NMS posits three National Military Objectives: “to deter, deny, and defeat state adversaries; to disrupt, degrade, and defeat VEOs; and to strengthen our global network of allies and partners” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 6). The U.S. military will use “globally integrated operations” to pursue the nation military objectives (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 6).

Objective 1 Deter, Deny, and Defeat State Adversaries. The U.S. military deters state adversaries by “maintaining a credible nuclear capability …; conducting forward engagement and operations; and maintaining Active, National Guard; and Reserve forces” ready to deploy to accomplish their missions (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 7). In addition, the U.S. military will forward deploy forces, employ rotational forces, and deploy global response forces to “demonstrate capability and the will to act (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 7).

If deterrence fails, the U.S. military will project power to deny the adversary from accomplishing their objective(s) and will defeat actors who threaten the U.S. homeland or its allies (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 7). SOF have an important role in fulfilling objective one. SOF has forward deployed units of action in various locations around the world—to include
Germany, Japan, and South Korea—to build trust, capacity, and interoperability with the host nation security forces. These forward deployed SOF extend operational reach and reduce reaction time to respond to an incident in theater. As required, SOF can employ scalable rotational forces for long-term contingency operations. Moreover, SOF has global response forces on alert to deploy anywhere in the world with purpose built forces ranging from small teams to regimental size.

Objective 2 Disrupt, Degrade, and Defeat VEOs. U.S. military forces partner with U.S. government agencies and international partners to disrupt VEOs “planning and operations, degrade support structures, remove leadership, interdict finances, impede the flow of foreign fighters, counter malign influences, liberate captured territory, and ultimately defeat them” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 8). To accomplish these tasks, U.S. military forces require viable partner forces to execute a counter-VEO campaign. The U.S. military can contribute scalable force packages, technical assistance and train and equip programs to enable partners to defend their homeland (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 8). Moreover, the ultimate defeat of VEOs requires security and economic assistance to enable local governments to address the root causes of the conflict (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 8).

SOF have unique capabilities to address military VEO objectives. SOF can conduct unilateral strike operations to kill or capture terrorist leaders or partner with security forces or indigenous elements to disrupt or defeat VEOs. One example of a unilateral surgical strike is the raid on the Usama bin Laden compound. SOF infiltrated by helicopter to bin Laden’s compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan where he was killed during the assault.

In contrast, SOF can train, advise and assist partner forces to defeat VEOs. In Afghanistan 2001, SOF and interagency team partnered with Northern Alliance forces and
supported by airpower conducted UW to overthrow the Taliban regime in a matter of weeks. The successful UW mission was carried out by approximately 350 SOF, 110 interagency operators and an indigenous force of roughly 15,000 (Votel et al. 2016, 101).

Likewise, SOF can train, advise, and assist host nation security forces to counter VEOs. In Iraq, Afghanistan, and other locations, SOF has developed, trained, advised and assisted host nation special operations forces to conduct counterterrorism (CT) operations. These programs were successful in building capable host nation CT forces.

Finally, SOF has assigned Psychological Warfare and Civil Affairs personnel that contribute greatly to defeating VEOs. Military Information Support Operations (MISO) can employ their technical capabilities to counter VEO propaganda, delegitimize the VEO ideology, influence target audience behavior, and build legitimacy of the government. Civil-Military Operations (CMO) can assist local governments to identify root causes of conflict, improve governance, and respond to humanitarian crisis.

Objective 3 Strengthen Our Global Network of Allies and Partners. U.S. military force will expand its network of allies and partners to protect the homeland and to promote shared interest. U.S military forces will “preserve our alliances, expand partnerships, maintain a global stabilizing presence, and conduct training, exercises, security cooperation activities, and military-to-military engagements” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 9). These activities improve allies’ and partner’s capabilities and capacity to deter threats and defeat adversaries by collective action (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 9).

The NMS reinforces the pivot to the Pacific theater by placing more capabilities in theater, strengthening allies, and deepening relations in the area to maintain peace and build capabilities. Likewise, the U.S. military will continue to show their commitment to NATO allies
by building NATO capabilities and interoperability with U.S. forces by conducting combined activities and exercises (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 9). Also, U.S. military forces will demonstrate our commitment to allies and partners to foster their defenses and countering transregional extremism in the Middle East and Africa as well as supporting interagency “stability and counter transnational criminal organizations” in Latin America and Caribbean (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 9).

SOF has a major role in expanding the global network of allies and partners across the globe. General Joseph L. Votel, former Commander United States Special Operations Command, statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee provides a snapshot in time for SOF’s contribution to military objective 3. General Votel reports on March 26, 2015:

Our SOF are deployed to more than 80 countries worldwide, filling GCC requirements and supporting 10 named operations. … nearly 3,500 personnel we have stationed forward … over 7,000 service members deployed in support of a variety of GCC requirements on any given day … From working with indigenous forces and local governments to improve local security, to high-risk counterterrorism operations … (Votel 2015, 4).

General Votel’s statement shows the breadth and depth of deployed SOF to accomplish military objectives. SOF maintain persistent presence in assigned GCC theaters through continuous engagement, training exercises with partner forces, military exchange programs, and security cooperation activities.

By building allies and partners capabilities and capacity, SOF can enable their ability to counter an adversarial UW campaign. Such a C-UW strategy may encompass elements of all three national military objectives. However, Objective 3 to strengthen our global network of allies and partners is central to a C-UW strategy. The next section examines how SOF operations and activities—ways—contribute to a C-UW Strategy and assesses those activities as either a main or supporting effort.
**SOF Contribution to a Counter-Unconventional Warfare Strategy - Ways**

SOF support GCCs and Joint force commanders by deploying specially trained, manned and equipped forces capable of executing lethal and nonlethal special operations globally in politically sensitive, hostile, or denied environments. SOF can infiltrate the operational area by air, land, or sea methods. SOF can execute unilateral operations or work with and through indigenous forces or host nation security forces.

Special operations are normally joint and interagency focused to accomplish the mission. Special operations can deter, disrupt, or defeat designated targets or adversaries. SOF operations and activities provide main and supporting lines of operation/effort for a C-UW strategy. SOF operations and activities are codified in public law and military doctrine.

Figure 4.1 illustrates special operations and activities compared across U.S. Code Title 10 Section 167, DoD Directive 5100.01 *Functions of DoD and Its Major Components*, Joint Publication 3-05 *Special Operations*, and United States Special Operations Command Publication 1 *Doctrine for Special Operations*. For the purpose of this thesis, the Joint Publication 3-05 *Special Operations* list of SOF operations and activities will be used to guide the analysis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>United States Code</th>
<th>DoD Directive 5100.01</th>
<th>JP 3-05</th>
<th>USSOCOM Publication 1 Doctrine for Special Operations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title 10 Section 167 (j)</td>
<td>Functions of DoD and Its Major Components</td>
<td>Special Operations</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Direct Action</td>
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<td>• Strategic Reconnaissance</td>
<td>• Special Reconnaissance</td>
<td>• Special Reconnaissance</td>
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<td>• Unconventional Warfare</td>
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<td>• Counterterrorism</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Humanitarian Assistance</td>
<td>• Counterproliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction</td>
<td>• Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction</td>
<td>• Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Theater Search and Rescue</td>
<td>• Security Force Assistance</td>
<td>• Security Force Assistance</td>
<td>• Security Force Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Such other activities as may be specified by the President or Secretary of Defense</td>
<td>• Counterinsurgency</td>
<td>• Counterinsurgency</td>
<td>• Counterinsurgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Information Operations</td>
<td>• Information Operations</td>
<td>• Hostage Rescue and Recovery</td>
<td>• Stability Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Activities specified by the President or Secretary of Defense</td>
<td>• Foreign Humanitarian Assistance</td>
<td>• Foreign Humanitarian Assistance</td>
<td>• Support to Major Operations and Campaigns</td>
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Figure 4.1 Special Operations Core Operations and Activities.

The twelve special operations core operations and activities can be executed as a single line of operation or line of effort but in many cases, multiple operations and activities can be executed throughout a campaign. The relationship of special operations and irregular warfare provides one example of multiple operations or activities that can be use in a campaign. Joint
Publication 3-05 *Special Operations* (2014) portrays the five irregular warfare operations and activities and who those missions support (Figure 4.2). Foreign internal defense (FID), counterinsurgency (COIN), counterterrorism (CT) and stability operations (SO) support a host nation to counter a resistance movement, insurgency or terrorists.

Iraq and Afghanistan provide two examples where multiple special operations activities overlapped to achieve campaign objectives. Both operations had elements of FID training and equipping special operations forces, conducting COIN, SO, and CT to kill or capture terrorists in the area of operations. In contrast, UW supports a resistance movement or insurgency against a hostile state or occupying power.

In Operation ENDURING FREEDOM Afghanistan 2001, UW was executed to overthrow the Taliban followed by a transition to a combination of FID, COIN, SO and CT operations. The next section will provide the definition and description of the special operations
core activities; provide examples for selected activities; and assess how each activity can support a C-UW strategy.

All SOF operations and activities have either a main or supporting effort to a C-UW strategy. Figure 4.3 depicts which special operations activities are a main or supporting effort.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Special Operations / Activities</th>
<th>C-UW Effort</th>
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<td>Main</td>
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<td>Direct Action</td>
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<td>Special Reconnaissance</td>
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<td>Unconventional Warfare</td>
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<td>Foreign Internal Defense</td>
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<td>Civil Affairs Operations</td>
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<td>Military Information Support Operations</td>
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<td>Counterterrorism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Counter Weapons of Mass Destruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Security Force Assistance</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Counterinsurgency</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hostage Rescue and Recovery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign Humanitarian Assistance</td>
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</table>

Figure 4.3 Special Operations Activities in Support of a C-UW Strategy.

The key observation from Figure 4.3 is that the main C-UW efforts are related to building partner security forces capability and capacity. This is important because building partner capability and capacity is critical to countering adversarial UW activities. Next, there is an analysis of each SOF special operations activity.

Direct Action. Joint Publication 3-05 Special Operations defines direct action (DA) as “short-duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or diplomatically sensitive environments and which employ specialized military capabilities to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover, or damage designated targets” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, GL-7). DA differs from conventional forces offensive operations. DA missions have a higher risk level requiring more discriminate fires and precision on the target.
DA can be realized through raids, ambushes, or direct assaults onto an objective where the DA forces withdraw from the target area as soon as possible.

In addition, DA can involve “standoff attacks by fire from air, ground, or maritime platform; provision of terminal guidance for precision-guided munitions; independent sabotage; and special anti-ship operations or maritime interception operations” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-5). Also, DA supports personal recovery to secure isolated personnel. The Son Tay raid execute on November 21, 1970 to recovery American prisoners of war for North Vietnam is an example of DA supporting personnel recovery. The raid was assessed as successful despite the fact the American prisoners of war were moved before the assault force arrived. A direct result of the raid was an improvement in the treatment of U.S. POWs.

Finally, DA is a supporting activity in a C-UW strategy. DA missions can target key leaders of a resistance movement or insurgency or they may target the sponsoring nation’s in-country advisors or in the homeland when authorized. In addition, DA can recover U.S isolated personnel or other personnel designated by the President or Secretary of Defense from adversary held territory.

**Special Reconnaissance.** Joint Publication 3-05 *Special Operations* defines special reconnaissance (SR) as “reconnaissance and surveillance actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or diplomatically and/or politically sensitive environments to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance, employing military capabilities not normally found in conventional forces” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, GL-12).

SR entails reconnaissance and surveillance activities to gather information on a target or area. SR is normally executed in a clandestine and covert manner that may include “meteorological, hydrographic, or geographic” assessments of a designated area; chemical,
biological, or nuclear hazards assessments in a denied area; target acquisition; and post-strike assessments (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-6). Moreover, SR could use “unmanned aircraft (UA) with imagery, SIGINT [signals intelligence], and other intelligence collection capability” to support operations (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-6).

One example of a strategic SR mission was during Operation DESERT STORM. Saddam Hussein deployed mobile missile launchers in western Iraq and launched SCUD missiles into Israel. President George H.W. Bush was concerned that Israel would conduct counter air attacks in Iraq and it would dissolve the Arab coalition. SOF teams deployed to western Iraq to find the mobile missile launchers. The mission execution on the ground was between 7-10 days and teams would hide during the day and search for launchers at night (Rosenau 2001, 35-37). If targets were identified, SOF teams called in airstrikes to neutralize the targets.

Finally, SR is a supporting activity in a C-UW strategy. SOF can conduct SR unilaterally against a sponsor nation to gather intelligence, confirm or deny information on the ground, enable targeting of adversary installations, equipment or personnel. Also, SOF can conduct SR to support a partner nation in areas where the government is not in control.

**Unconventional Warfare.** Joint Publication 3-05 *Special Operations* defines UW as “activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, GL-12). UW is a strategic option to effect change in a government or occupying power. UW objectives may include: “supporting the insurgency/resistance movement so it can influence, coerce, disrupt, or foster a change in the governing authority” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-9).
UW operations are sensitive in nature and may be executive in a covert, clandestine, or low visibility manner. These campaigns are usually long-term operations and require a whole-of-government effort to achieve national objectives. UW can support major combat operations or it can be a small-scale contingency operation as an effort to support a resistance movement or insurgency.

World War Two provides an example of UW in support of a major military campaign. Jedburgh teams infiltrated deep behind enemy lines prior to Operation OVERLORD. Jedburgh teams linked up with the French resistance to organize the resistance, gather intelligence, and conduct sabotage missions to disrupt enemy forces in the rear area (Smith 2005, 159-160). The Jedburgh teams had great success and General Dwight D. Eisenhower recognized Special Forces contribution to the France campaign stating, “In no previous war, and in no other theater during this war, have resistance forces been so closely harnessed to the main military effort” (Eisenhower 1945).

Likewise, UW has had success in limited theater contingency operations as the main effort to achieve national security objectives. The U.S. supported the Mujahedeen to remove Russian forces for Afghanistan and supported the Nicaraguan Contras against the Sandinista government. The U.S. UW operation enabled the Contras to effect change in the government by coercing the Sandinistas to hold a national election. Finally, UW is a main effort in a C-UW strategy. UW is an option to counter a state or occupying power conducting UW activities.

Foreign Internal Defense. Joint Publication 3-22 Foreign Internal Defense defines FID as “participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to its security” (Joint Chiefs of
Staff 2010, GL-7). U.S. FID activities support a Host Nation’s (HN) internal defense and development (IDAD) program to protect the country from subversion and threats to its internal security. FID operations are tailored to the needs of the HN and can involve all instruments of national power to address the causes of instability.

FID can focus on counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, counter drug, or stability operations. It can be executed with SOF in an indirect or direct support approach including combat operations in country upon approval (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-10). Because of cultural and language capabilities, SOF has a primary role in conducting FID around the world. SOF train, advise, and assist HN security forces and can accompany forces into combat if approved by the U.S. and HN governments.

SOF has had success executing FID operations. One long-term example is SOF’s support to Colombia. USSOF trained, advised and assisted Colombian police and military forces to counter the powerful Cali and Medellin cartels and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionares de Colombia (FARC) insurgency (Petit 2013, 123). Under Plan Columbia 1991-2001, USSOF focused training on the “Colombian National Police counter-drug, Brigade Contra el Narcotrafica (BRCNA) and the Colombian Army Tactical Retraining Center” (Pettit 2013, 128).

In 2002, USSOF engagement transitioned toward the military and began training, advising and assisting the newly establish Colombian Army Special Operations Command (Petit 2013, 129). In 2003, USSOF engagement with Colombian SOF units accelerated after three U.S. civilian contractors plane crash and they were captured by the FARC. USSOF and other government agencies supported Columbia SOF to find and recover the hostages.

The continued U.S. support led to a successful hostage rescue on July 2, 2008 executed by Colombian SOF (Petit 2013, 135). The successful hostage rescue is a tribute to the persistent
engagement by USSOF with their counterparts. In addition, the long-term FID mission enabled the Columbian security forces to have success against the FARC leading to a cease-fire agreement this year.

Finally, FID is a main effort in a C-UW strategy. SOF are the optimal force to execute FID in allied or partner nations to counter a resistance movement or insurgency. SOF are manned trained and equipped to conduct unconventional warfare. SOF understands the tactics, techniques, and procedures to conduct a UW campaign. SOF possess unique cultural and linguistic expertise to work with host nation forces or against an adversary. Therefore, SOF are the military force of choice to train, advise and assist a partner nation on how to counter unconventional warfare.

Civil Affairs Operations. Joint Publication 3-57 Civil-Military Operations defines Civil Affairs operations (CAO) as “actions planned, executed, and assessed by civil affairs forces that enhance awareness of and manage the interaction with the civil component of the operational environment; identify and mitigate underlying causes of instability within civil society; or involve the application of functional specialty skills normally the responsibility of civil government” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2013, GL-6). CAO is executed across the range of military operations in permissive, uncertain and hostile environments. CAO build, maintain, and influence relationships between the military and civil authorities (Department of the Army 2012, 2-7).

Civil Affairs teams conduct civil reconnaissance to identify critical civil vulnerabilities, engage the populace to reduce friction during the conduct of military operations, and coordinates with other U.S. government agencies, non-government organizations, and multinational partners to achieve civil-military objectives (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-17). CA can employ functional
specialist to advise commanders or civilian counterparts on the functions of government—rule of law, economic stability, public health and welfare, infrastructure, public education and information (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2013, I-16).

Civil Affairs teams deploy around the world in support of named operations and theater engagement campaigns. Civil Affairs teams can build relationships between the military and the population. One example is the deployment of Civil Affairs teams to Africa on a mission to improve the lives of the local population. Civil Affairs teams executed numerous projects to improve local civil conditions. These activities included clean water projects; medical civil action programs (MEDCAPS) providing dental exams, teeth extractions, and cleanings; eye exams and providing eye glasses; HIV screening; and distributing medications (Portillo 2015).

In another example, Civil Affairs teams executed military-to-military training in Cameroon to guide their Civil Affairs officers through the process of identifying risk and presenting courses of action to mitigate effects on the population during military operations, and planning to provide basic essential services to the population (Portillo 2015). Finally, CAO is a supporting effort to a C-UW strategy. The primary focus of CAO will be in the host country to identify root causes of instability; assess HN civil infrastructure and make recommendations to improve governance; train, advise, and assist government or military personnel execution of civil-military activities; and build legitimacy of the government and military to counter a resistance movement or insurgency.

**Military Information Support Operations.** Joint Publication 1-02 *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* defines Military Information Support Operations (MISO) as “planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior
of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to the originator’s objectives” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2016, 152). MISO is executed across the range of military operations to achieve physiological effects on foreign target audiences. MISO support joint forces commanders, interagency, and multinational partners with analysis of the psychological and media environment, design themes and messages to influence key leaders and groups, counters adversarial information, conducts military deception, and train and advise HN forces to build their influence capability and capacity (Department of the Army 2012, 2-7).

Iraq provides an example of MISO having positive effects on the battle. Psychological messages and actions were successful against Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) leader Musab Zarqawi. The Joint Psychological Operations Task Force targeted Zarqawi with editorials and cartoons placed in local and regional media platforms to change the populations view of AQI (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-15). The targeted psychological acts put AQI on the defensive to defend their killing of Muslims forcing AQI to “publish a ‘manifesto’ stating that they did not kill Muslims” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-15). The psychological pressure on Zarqawi and AQI enable the population to turn against AQI leading up to an airstrike that killed Zarqawi (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-15).

MISO is another main effort in a C-UW Strategy. Resistance and insurgents use propaganda to influence internal and external audiences. MISO can counter the adversary narrative by employing counter messaging to delegitimize the resistance movement or insurgency and bolster the HN government and security forces. Moreover, MISO can target the state sponsor of the resistance movement or insurgency by exposing their sponsorship to the international community to garner collective action against the sponsor nation. In addition, MISO experts will be instrumental in training, advising, and assisting HN military counterparts
to counter adversarial messaging, employ precision targeted psychological acts, and distribution of civil information.

**Counterterrorism.** Joint Publication 3-26 *Counterterrorism* describes CT as “activities and operations are taken to neutralize terrorists, their organizations, and networks in order to render them incapable of using violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, I-5). According to JP 3-05 *Special Operations*, CT is part of a larger DoD combating terrorism framework consisting of CT and antiterrorism (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-7). Moreover, USSOCOM is DOD’s global planner and synchronizer of CT with other government agencies and multinational partners to achieve unity of action (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-7-II-8).

CT operations can be a standalone operation or integrated into other special operations and activities such as FID, COIN, SO, and UW. CT missions conducted as special operations can be executed in a “covert, clandestine, or low visibility means” to gather intelligence on terrorist organizations, disrupt or destroy terrorist network and infrastructure, or can be employ for hostage rescue or recovery of sensitive equipment from terrorist control (Department of the Army 2012, 2-4). CT operations have spanned the globe to disrupt or destroy terrorist organizations.

CT operations executed in Iraq ranged from unilateral DA missions against terrorists to train, advise and assist missions to build capability and capacity of Iraqi CT forces. Finally, CT is a main effort in a C-UW strategy. CT operations can conduct DA missions to disrupt or destroy resistance leaders, networks, and infrastructure. In addition, CT operations can train, advise, and assist HN CT forces to employ against terrorist threats. Also, CT operations can be executed in sanctuary areas within the sponsor nation, or in cross border areas.
**Counter Weapons of Mass Destruction.** Joint Publication 3-40 *Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction* (CWMD) defines CWMD as “efforts against actors of concern to curtail the conceptualization, development, possession, proliferation, use, and effects of weapons of mass destruction, related expertise, materials, technologies, and means of delivery” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, GL-5). SOF support U.S. government activities to counter the development, possession, and use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) by state and non-states actors. (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-7). SOF provides expertise and special teams to support other government entities in locating, tagging and tracking WMD, conduct DA in denied areas to secure or destroy material or devices, and train partners to build CWMD capacity (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-7).

CWMD is a supporting mission to a C-UW strategy. Specially trained SOF can conduct DA in sensitive areas against insurgents or other organizations to recover or destroy WMD and to interdict WMD material and mechanisms at the source or in transit from a sponsor to the resistance or insurgent area of operation. Equally important is SOF training, advising and assisting partners to develop capabilities to counter WMD.

**Security Force Assistance.** Joint Publication 3-22 *Foreign Internal Defense* defines SFA as “DOD’s contribution to a unified action effort to support and augment the development of the capacity and capability of foreign security forces (FSF) and their supporting institutions to facilitate the achievement of specific objectives shared by the USG” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2010, I-16). According to Joint Publication 3-05 *Special Operations*, SFA’s primary role is assisting a HN protect its self from “internal and transnational terrorist threat to stability, it also prepares FSF to defend against external threats and to perform as part of a MNF [multinational force]” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-11).
SFA can support a broader U.S. government FID operation. SFA can support tactical to strategic level forces or institutions to include military, police, intelligence, coast guard, and paramilitary forces (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-11). SOF’s primary role in SFA includes assessments of HN security forces and recommend plans for implementation to build capacity and capability; train, advise and assist security forces on lethal and non-lethal means; or build institution training capabilities (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-11). Furthermore, SOF can support HN combat operations if approved by the National Command Authority (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-11).

An objective of SFA is building partner security forces capability to support a MNF. One example is Colombian SOF supporting Coalition forces in Afghanistan. In 2009, Colombian SOF deployed to Afghanistan to fight alongside U.S. SOF against the Taliban (Logan 2009). Lara Logan reported that Colombian SOF were trained by U.S. Special Forces over the last decade and they developed into a high quality special operations force (2009). This is only one example of many showing how SOF can build partner capacity. This will be important to build partner capacity to counter UW. As a result, SFA is a main effort to support a C-UW strategy. Building HN security forces capability and capacity is instrumental to countering internal threats from a resistance movement, insurgency, or transnational VEO.

Counterinsurgency. Joint Publication 3-24 Counterinsurgency defines COIN as “comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2013, GL-5). The population is the center of gravity for the counter insurgent and insurgent. Other SOF operations and activities contribute to an overall COIN effort.
SOF can deploy small teams to train, advise and assist HN security forces to influence relevant populations through direct and indirect approaches. DA can target key insurgent leadership and MISO and CA employed to influence the population towards the government. SOF has been a key force support U.S. government COIN operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. SOF’s ability to work with local populations at the village level improved civil and security conditions enabling the HN to mitigate threats to internal security.

COIN is a primary operation in a C-UW strategy. SOF’s unique position in a COIN operation is that there are specific units manned, trained, and equipped to conduct UW. This expertise is important to train, advise, and assist HN security forces in COIN operations. In addition, SOF has DA forces that can effectively target insurgent leaders, network, and infrastructure.

**Hostage Rescue and Recovery.** Joint Publication 3-05 *Special Operations* define hostage rescue and recovery (HRR) as “sensitive crisis response missions in response to terrorist threats and incidents. Offensive operations in support of hostage rescue and recovery can include the recapture of U.S. facilities, installations, and sensitive material overseas: (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, II-12). HHR is a supporting activity in a C-UW strategy. Selected SOF forces can rescue U.S. and designated personnel or recover sensitive equipment capture by the insurgents or terrorists. Private First Class Jessica Lynch’s rescue in Iraq 2003 is one example of SOF executing a rescue operation.

**Foreign Humanitarian Assistance.** Joint Publication 3-29 *Foreign Humanitarian Assistance* (FHA) describes FHA as “Department of Defense activities conducted outside the U.S. and its territories to directly relieve or reduce human suffering, disease, hunger, or privation” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2014, ix). SOF’s participation in FHA is in a supporting role to
other U.S. government agencies—Department of State or United States Agency for International Development. Joint Publication 3-05 *Special Operations* points out that SOF can provide rapid deployable forces in a region; can work in austere conductions; have cultural and language capabilities; provide assessments for follow-on forces; can temporarily secure and manage airfields; establish communications nodes; and can employ limited transportation and medical assets (2014, II-14).

Moreover, CA forces are the primary SOF force to support FHA operations. In November 2013, Super Typhoon Haiyan slammed into the Philippines causing substantial damage. Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines (JSOTF-P) located in Zamboanga, Mindanao responded rapidly to the humanitarian disaster. JSOTF-P assets conducted aerial surveillance to assess airfields, ports, road routes, and looked for distress signals (Parker et al 2015, 7). SOF provided “critical needs and damage assessment” to support planning for the responders in the disaster areas (Parker et al 2015, 7). FHA is a supporting activity in a C-UW strategy. SOF can support FHA operations in HN to improve the government’s response to the humanitarian operations. The next section outlines SOF means to support a C-UW strategy.

**SOF Contribution to a Counter- Unconventional Warfare Strategy - Means**

The United States Special Operations Command and its subordinate Theater Special Operations Commands and Service Component Commands will play an important role in planning, providing forces, and executing special operations to support a national C-UW strategy. This section outlines USSOCOM and Service Component Commands missions, provides an overview of USSOCOM and SOF assigned to each component, and assesses the role of each component in a C-UW strategy.
United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM)

Mission Statement. “USSOCOM synchronizes the planning of Special Operations and provides Special Operations Forces to support persistent, networked and distributed Global Combatant Command operations in order to protect and advance our Nation’s interests” (USSOCOM 2016, 14).

Overview. Special Operations failures in Operation EAGLE CLAW (Iran hostage rescue) and Operation URGENT FURY (Grenada) sparked discussions in Congress to address the underlying causes of the failures. This discussion culminated in the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 that reorganized the Department of Defense (DoD) warfighting chain of command from DoD and the Service Chiefs to better support the Geographic Combatant Commanders with ready, trained, and equipped forces. The Act did not address SOF challenges but it paved the way for Congress to do so.

The Cohen-Nunn amendment to the FY87 National Defense Authorization Act established USSOCOM, assigned it Service-like responsibilities to train and equip special operations forces, and provided a special line of funding—major force program 11—for SOF (Shelton 1997, 51). USSOCOM responsibilities include monitoring SOF readiness and professional development; developing SOF tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), managing SOF appropriated funds; conducting research and development for SOF peculiar items; developing MISO capabilities for the joint force; and synchronizes DoD efforts in the global war against violent extremist organizations (Alvarez et al 2015, 2-1).

Moreover, Commander, USSOCOM exercises command authority over eight sub-unified commands and four service component commands. All of the sub-unified commands except the
Joint Special Operations Command are referred to as Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs). The sub-unified commands are:

- Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC);
- Special Operations Command Africa (SOCAFRICA);
- Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT);
- Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR);
- Special Operations Command Korea (SOCKOR);
- Special Operations Command North (SOCNORTH);
- Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC); and
- Special Operations Command South (SOCSOUTH).

JSOC remains under control of USSOCOM and the TSOCs are under the operational control of their assigned GCCs (Alvarez et al 2015, 2-1). Figure 4.4 depicts the GCC’s area of responsibility and the TSOCs align accordingly with one exception. SOCKOR does not have a broad regional responsibility, rather it is focused on the Korean peninsula. The TSOC’s plan and integrate special operations into GCC theater campaign plans, coordinates with interagency and multinational partners, and exercises operational control of SOF forces deployed in theater to achieve theater and national objectives.
USSOCOM’s four Service Component Commands are: United States Army Special Operations Command, Naval Special Warfare Command, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command. An overview of each command’s mission and forces overview follows:

United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC)

**Mission Statement:** USASOC “mans, trains, equips, educates, organizes, sustains, and supports forces to conduct special warfare and surgical strike across the full range of military operations and spectrum of conflict in support of joint force commanders and interagency partners, to meet theater and national objectives” (USASOC 2016, 2).

**Overview.** USASOC provides USSOCOM and GCCs with trained and equipped Special Forces, Rangers, Special Operations Aviation, Military Information Support, Civil Affairs, and Special Operations Sustainment personnel for worldwide operations. USASOC has four subordinate commands which provide trained and equipped forces—1st Special Forces
Command (Airborne) (Provisional) (1st SFC (A) (P)), United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJKSFWCS), United States Army Special Operations Aviation Command (USASOAC), and the 75th Ranger Regiment (75th RR).

The 1st SFC (A)(P) has the majority of assigned forces consisting of Special Forces (SF), Military Information Support Operations (MISO), Civil Affairs (CA), and Special Operations Sustainment. The 1st SFC (A) (P) provides the GCCs with regionally aligned SF, PSYOP, and CA forces that have cultural and language training specific to their assigned regions. SF are trained to execute UW, FID, SFA, COIN, DA, SR, CT, CWMD, and preparation of the environment (PE). MISO and CA support core special operations executed across the range of military operations.

USAJKSFWCS is the institutional learning base for Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF). It provides USASOC “training, personnel, doctrine, and policy to support ARSOF” (Alvarez et al 2015, 3-21). Also, USAJKSFWCS recruits, train, and educates SF, PSYOP, and CA. The training and education includes initial Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), advance skills, and professional military education.

USASOAC provides oversight, resourcing, training, doctrine, and program management for Army Special Operations aviation. (Alvarez et al 2015, 3-29). The primary subordinate unit is the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (160th SOAR). Its mission is to organize, equip, train, resource, and deploy special operations aviation forces to support crisis or contingency operations around the world (Alvarez et al 2015, 3-29).

Finally, the 75th RR conducts joint forcible entry operations; conducts special operations raids to kill or capture high value individuals; destroy enemy nodes or facilities; recovery designated personnel and equipment; conducts offensive infantry operations from platoon to
regimental size; and conducts airfield seizures for follow-on special operations or conventional force operations (Alvarez et al 2015, 3-24).

ARSOF are the primary SOF to support a C-UW Strategy. ARSOF can execute all of their assigned special operations and activities across the range of military operations. USASOC is USSOCOM’s lead organization for UW. This includes training, developing doctrine, and operations. Within 1st SFC (A) (P) reside the SF, MISO, and CA assets that provide the capabilities to affect the military component of a C-UW strategy. These forces possess cultural and language skills that enable building partner capacity (BPC), a vital means of countering UW. SF is the only force in DoD that is manned, trained, and equipped to conduct UW. This makes them the force of choice to support the UW component of a C-UW strategy. Rangers and Army Special Operations aviation can support a C-UW strategy with their ability to strike targets and increase the cost of aggression to an adversary.

Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM)

Mission Statement: NAVSPECWARCOM “Man, train, equip, educate, deploy, resource, and sustain forces to conduct direct action and special reconnaissance, support advise-and-assist programs, and build partner capability, in or out of the maritime environment, by employing tailored capabilities in support of military commanders, Chiefs of Mission, interagency, and foreign partners and allies” (USSOCOM 2016, 22).

Overview. NAVSPECWARCOM provides naval special warfare capabilities to execute the core activities DA, SR, FID, CT, information operations, SFA, COIN and can be involved with other activities such as UW, counterdrug, personnel recovery, and special activities (Alvarez et al 2015, 4-1). NAVSPECWARCOM’s operational units are Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) and Special Warfare Combat-craft crewman. SEAL teams are trained and equipped to
accomplish a range of special operations, SEALs are proficient in “DA and SR, including sabotage, demolition, intelligence collection, hydrographic reconnaissance, as well as the training and advising of friendly military or other forces” (Alvarez et al 2015, 4-10). Moreover, the Special Boat Teams are trained, equipped, and employ watercraft in “maritime, coastal and riverine environments” to insert and exfiltration of SOF and conduct coastal patrols and interdiction operations (Alvarez et al 2015, 4-12). Also, the Special Boat teams can airdrop craft to infiltrate an operational area.

Naval SOF can support a C-UW strategy. SEALs are the primary force for special operation waterborne operations. Naval SOF can train, advise and assist partners to build capabilities on DA, SR, CT and maritime interdiction operations.

**Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC)**

Mission Statement: AFSOC “organize, train and equip Airmen to execute global special operations…We are America’s Air Commandos” (USSOCOM 2016, 26).

Overview. AFSOC provides special operations aircrew and air platforms, special tactics teams, and combat aviation advisory teams and execute the following core mission areas: “agile combat support; aviation foreign internal defense; special tactics; command and control; precision strike; information operations; intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance; and specialized air mobility” (Alvarez et al 2015, 5-2). Special Tactics Airman provide capabilities in combat controllers, pararescue, special operations weather, tactical air control, and special operation surgical capability. Combat controllers can infiltrate by air, land, or sea in hostile or combat environments to establish landing zones, conduct air traffic control, fire support, DA, CT, FID, SR, and humanitarian assistance (USSOCOM 2016, 28).
Pararescuemen conduct recovery operations on land or sea (USSOCOM 2016, 28).

Special Operations Weather Teams provide environment assessments and weather forecast in hostile or denied areas. Tactical Air Control Party members deploy with other SOF to execute close air support operations and establish communications networks (USSOCOM 2016, 28).

Special Operations Surgical Teams provide a rapidly deployable surgical team capable of advanced life saving measures and casualty evacuation from land, air, or sea platforms (USSOCOM 2016, 28). Finally, AFSOC Special Operations Aviators fly specialize aircraft that can operate in periods of darkness; conduct aviation FID; provide specialized air mobility; conduct precision air strikes; provide air command and control; and conduct intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) (USSOCOM 2016, 28).

AFSOC can support a C-UW strategy with manned and unmanned aerial platforms. These platforms can provide important ISR capabilities to inform U.S. military and HN security forces as they plan and execute C-UW activities. AFSOC medical capabilities can augment humanitarian assistance operations in a HN to bolster the legitimacy of both HN government and military. If required, AFSOC air platforms can provide precision strike against designated targets to raise the cost of aggression beyond what a potential adversary is willing to pay.

**Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC)**

**Mission Statement:** MARSOC “recruit, train, sustain, and deploy scalable, expeditionary forces worldwide to accomplish special operations missions assigned by U.S. Special Operations Command. To accomplish that, MARSOC equips and trains Marines to succeed in austere conditions against a wide range of adversaries. MARSOC executes complex, distributed operations in uncertain environments, achieving silent success and strategic impact” (USSOCOM 2016, 30).
Overview. MARSOC is the newest SOF unit formally established in 2006. MARSOC recruits, organizes, trains, equips, and deploys Critical Skills Operators and Special Operations Officers to conduct SOF core activities DA, SR, CT, FID, SFA, COIN, support to CWMD and support to UW (Alvarez 2015, 6-2). In addition, MARSOC has special operations capabilities and combat service specialists including Joint Terminal Attack Controllers to call in air strikes and indirect fires; communicators who plan, establish, and maintain communication networks; intelligence enablers; multi-purpose canine and handlers; and Explosive Ordnance Disposal technicians (USSOCOM 2016, 33).

MARSOC forces can support C-UW with three regionally aligned Marine Special Operations battalions. Each has language and cultural skills appropriate for either AFRICOM, CENTCOM, or PACOM (Alvarez 2015, 6-1). This enables MARSOC to build partner forces capability and capacity, a vital component of a C-UW strategy. They can also provide an ability to directly attack an adversary and deter their aggression.

Summary

This section outlined SOF means that can provide the military component of a C-UW strategy. All SOF units have capabilities to support a C-UW strategy that vary in scope across the USSOCOM Enterprise but all can build partner capacity in their area of expertise. SF is the key force within USSOCOM to plan, integrate, and execute the special operations contribution to a national C-UW strategy because they are trained and equipped to conduct UW. In addition, MISO and CA have important supporting roles as part of a special operations approach to C-UW. The next section will analyze Russian UW activities in Ukraine to develop an understanding of their TTPs.
Russian Unconventional Warfare in Ukraine

Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and subsequent aggression in eastern Ukraine has caused concern among the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). A key factor cited by the Russians as an excuse for their aggression in both cases was their “protection” of the ethnic Russian population. The Baltic states are concerned that they may be the next targets for Russian aggression. While the ethnic Russian population in Ukraine is 17.3 percent (Central Intelligence Agency 2016), by comparison Latvia has the largest Russian speaking minority at 36 percent of the population; Estonia has 28 percent; and Lithuania has a relatively modest 8 percent (Mercator 2012).

Based on their stated doctrine, Russia could leverage Baltic states ethnic Russian population in a UW campaign to coerce or disrupt their governments, rather than open aggression. A direct, attributable attack against one or all of the Baltic states would cross NATO’s Treaty Article 5 threshold. Such an attack would activate collective action by all 28 NATO countries to maintain their security (NATO 2016). How would the Russians go about such a UW campaign? To answer that question, this section analyzes the operational environment from the Russian perspective and examines the ends, ways, and means of Russian UW activities already undertaken in Ukraine.

Russian leaders have made no secret that they are determined to restore the Russian Federation as a regional and global power. Russia is employing aggressive diplomatic, informational, military, and economic measures in what they refer to as the “near abroad” and beyond. From the Russian perspective, the U.S. has taken advantage of the post-Soviet era to emplace regimes to be more favorable to U.S. interests. According to Charles Bartles, the partitioning of Yugoslavia was an “egregious” action in the eyes of the Russian’s setting a
precedent of interfering in the internal affairs of a country (2016, 32). Moreover, the U.S. regime changes in Afghanistan and Iraq added to Russian concerns and they believe the U.S. has taken a new approach to overthrow governments.

Russia believes the U.S. prepares the environment with “the installment of a political opposition through state propaganda (e.g., CNN, BBC), the internet and social media, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)” (Bartles 2016, 32). These beliefs were reinforced by Russian military leaders at the 2014 Moscow International Security Conference. Michael Kofman and Mathew Rojansky reported that “Russian generals and leading defense officials blamed the West for instigating color revolutions, fomenting protests, destabilizing countries through political warfare, subversion, and eventually employing military operations to replace governments with those more favorable to Western interests” (2015). The Russian view of the operational environment highlights and explores these activities.

General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian General Staff, published a 2013 groundbreaking article in the Military-Industrial Kurier that provides multiple insights into the Russian view of the operational environment. Gerasimov’s article posited a framework for the operational environment shaped by the U.S. actions in Iraq 1991 and 2003 as well as the 2011 U.S. operation in Libya that established a no-fly zone, imposed a blockade, and used military contractors to work with the opposition. It also incorporated lessons from the Arab Spring (Gerasimov 2013, 24-25).

In the context of the Arab Spring, Gerasimov assessed that the rapid spread of instability showed that the character of warfare to achieve political goals had changed stating, “The very ‘rules of war’ have changed. The role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their
effectiveness” (2013, 24). Figure 4.5 depicts Gerasimov’s vision of the role of nonmilitary methods in the resolving interstate conflict aligned with the phases of conflict development.

![Gerasimov Graphic on The Role of Nonmilitary Methods in the Resolution of Interstate Conflicts.](image)

Even though Gerasimov’s graphic is based mostly on their view of U.S. actions around the world, it reflects how the Russians view the operational environment. Using such a mental framework, Russian military strategists will analyze the environment and develop strategies to
counter adversarial actions, seek opportunities, and gain a position of relative advantage. The next section will explore Russian UW activities in Ukraine and show how the Russians have already used Gerasimov’s thoughts to guide their actions. The U.S. Army War College Strategy Model—Lykke model—that strategy equals the alignment of ends, ways, and means will be used as a framework to present the data.

**Russian Ends/Objectives.** This section examines the strategic regional objectives of the Russian Federation to devise their strategic objectives for Ukraine. The collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War and the subsequent expansion of NATO eastward to the very doorstep of the Russian Federation shape their foreign policy today. President Vladimir Putin described the fall of the Soviet Union as the greatest “geopolitical disaster” of the twentieth century (Zakem et al 2015, 17). Putin’s apparent goals are to overturn agreements signed after the fall of the Soviet Union and establish the Russian Federation as a great global power along the lines of the former Soviet Union (Czuperski et al 2015, 20; Zakem et al 2015, 13). Russia seeks an “independent” foreign policy where Russia is not subordinate to any country and they are not handicapped by having weaker economic and military power (Zakem et al 2015, 13). These regional strategic objectives set the stage for the recent Russian aggression in Ukraine.

According to a Johns Hopkins University (2015) study on Russian UW in Ukraine, Russia’s motivations were further shaped by the 1990s “period of shame” and the West’s continued “encroachment into Russia’s historical sphere of influence” (Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2015, 36). Moreover, the study includes as strategic factors leading to Russian aggression in Ukraine: “domestic politics, reaction to the expansion of the EU and NATO, strategic value of the Black Sea, Russia’s need to maintain influence in peripheral states as a buffer against Western invasion, and President Putin’s desire to strengthen the new EEU
[Eurasian Economic Union] in former Soviet sphere of influence” (Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2015, 36). In addition to these strategic factors, Russia’s foreign policy emphasizes protecting Russian speaking “compatriots” – people living both in neighboring countries and what it terms the near-abroad.

At the end of Yeltsin’s presidency, the Russian legislature passed a law “On State Policy of the Russian Federation in Relation to Compatriots Living Abroad” outlining Russia’s commitment to protecting their rights (Zakem et al 2015, 15-16). The law defines the rights:

- To use the Russian language (or “other native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation”),
- To exercise cultural autonomy and to create social, religious, and media organizations,
- To participate in non-governmental organizations at the national and international levels,
- To contribute to, “mutually advantageous relations” between Russia and their states of residence,
- To maintain connections among themselves and to Russia, and to obtain information from Russia, and
- To choose freely whether to remain where they live or return to Russia (Zakem et al 2015, 16).

The law has laid out very broad rights for compatriots living aboard. Russia can use this law for two main purposes. Russian can use the law to build support from the domestic audience and justify actions taken to protect compatriots beyond its borders.

Today, Russian still boast its protection of compatriots abroad and Russia has used force to protect them. Protecting Russian compatriots was a reason used in both the 2008 Georgian conflict and the current frozen conflict with Ukraine. Countries with a considerable Russian diaspora within their borders will need to continually assess their Russian speaking population for signs of external actors trying to form a resistance movement. The next section analyzes the Russian “ways” it conducted UW in Ukraine.

Russian Ways. Russia employed a whole-of-government approach with a wide range of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic instruments of power to annex Crimea and
implement aggression in eastern Ukraine. There are several key factors that have an impact on Russia’s successes and failures in the current conflict with Ukraine. The first factor is that Russia and Ukraine share a border which made (and still makes) it easier for Russia to operate from safe areas on their side of the border.

The second factor is that Russia has numerous military bases near their common border. In Crimea, Russia used their established military bases to impart freedom of movement to the flow of forces and supplies into the area. They also provided a secure site from which to conduct UW activities supported by conventional forces. Currently in eastern Ukraine, the proximity of a number of military bases to a common border enables the staging of military forces along the border as well as establishing logistical centers to support resistance and military forces operating in Ukraine.

The third factor is the presence of a sizeable ethnic Russian population in Ukraine. According to the Ukrainian census of 2001, the ethnic Russian population in Crimea was the majority at 58.5 percent (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine 2004). This provided a veneer of plausibility that the intervention was a rightful one. It also provided a willing pool of supporters, reducing the need for overt employment of military force. On the other hand, the ethnic Russian population in eastern Ukraine is significantly less numerous. This has forced Russia to employ more military resources to back the resistance movement to prevent their defeat by Ukraine security forces.

Figure 4.6 outlines key principles of Russian UW employed in Ukraine. Subsequent paragraphs will discuss how Russia did indeed follow their principles in their activities in Ukraine.
Russia employed diplomatic and economic means to shape events in Ukraine. The 2010 Presidential election of Victor Yanukovych was held during a period of rising tensions between pro-Western and pro-Russian groups. President Yanukovych was pro-Russian but attempted to do a balancing act between the aspirations of both sides. Yanukovych signaled a closer relationship with the EU even though he was under pressure from Moscow not to join. As part of his balancing act, Yanukovych renegotiated an agreement with Russia to reduce the cost of natural gas while Russia received an extended lease agreement to use Ukrainian Black Sea ports to include Sevastopol (Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2015, 27).

In 2013, Yanukovych indicated he favored signing the Association Agreement to integrate better into the EU. Russia brought tremendous diplomatic pressure to bear to change his mind. They succeeded and Yanukovych decided not to sign the agreement. Rather, he would seek to develop better ties with Russia (Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2015, 28). His decision sparked pro-EU demonstrations in Kyiv and around the country—also known as the Euromaidan movement. The explosive growth of the movement caused Presidents Yanukovych and Putin to move quickly in an attempt to dampen the protests.
They signed the Ukrainian-Russian Action Plan whereby Russia discounted Ukraine’s natural gas prices by one third and promised to buy $15 billion in Ukrainian government bonds to relieve the debt crisis (Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2015, 29).

The agreement did not have the desired effect and protests continued to grow. Yanukovych applied more pressure to stop the protesters which led to an eruption of violence in February 2014. In reaction to the violence, the Ukraine Parliament voted to remove Yanukovych from power. This was a trigger point for Russia to move into Crimea at the request of a paramilitary leader Sergei Aksyonov and pro-Russian supporters in Crimea (Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2015, 31). Russia and the New Crimea government signed a treaty on March 18, 2014 making Crimea part of the Russian Federation.

Weeks after the annexation of Crimea, Russia’s efforts focused on pro-Russia resistance movements in eastern Ukraine. Russia deployed operatives to organize and run the resistance military component and Russia had already planted political agents to run the civil governance component of the resistance movement. In the spring of 2014 Donbas region, the pro-Russian resistance movement proclaimed the Peoples Republic of Donetsk. Aleksander Borodi, a political agent of Moscow, was designated President and his Defense Minister was Igor Girkin a known Colonel in the Federal Security Service (FSB) (Czuperski et al 2015, 4, 20). The preceding examples clearly illustrate how Russia employed economic and political means in Ukraine to shape an outcome favorable to Moscow. The next section will examine how the Russians employed information operations to that end.

Russia implemented a massive information operations (IO) campaign to support its objectives in Ukraine. The IO campaign employed misinformation, deception, denial and propaganda to influence the Russian domestic population and compatriots abroad, the Ukrainian
population, and the international community. Russian Information Security Doctrine emphasizes a need “to protect the country from both external threats (e.g. actions contravening international law and regional stability, actions aimed at ousting legitimate regimes adjacent to Russia’s borders, etc.) and internal threats (e.g. activities aimed at destabilizing the ruling regime, informational activities targeting the general population with the intent to undermine patriotic and historic traditions or provoke inter-ethnic and social tensions, etc.)” (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence 2016, 22).

To counter internal and external threats, the doctrine notes the necessity of “joint [effort] by all internet users, journalists, local authorities, civil society organizations etc.” (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence 2016, 22). The Russian doctrine illustrates the depth and breadth they use in an IO campaign to shape target audiences. Propaganda is a key component of a Russian IO campaign. Russia employs all forms of media to deliver propaganda including radio, television, print, Internet, and social media platforms. Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews describe the contemporary Russian propaganda model as a “Firehose of Falsehood” (2016, 1).

According to Paul and Matthews, the characteristics of Russian contemporary propaganda are “high numbers of channels and messages and a shameless willingness to disseminate partial truths or outright fictions. … It is also rapid continuous, and repetitive, and it lacks commitment to consistency” (2016, 1). This type of approach makes it difficult to counter. Getting the narrative out first sets the initial impression of the situation. The counter effect is harder because it has to provide concrete evidence to refute false information which usually takes longer to produce the counter message. The repeated overwhelming false messaging starts to shape target audience’s perception of the information even though the content may be false.
Russia uses the Internet and cyber domain to disseminate propaganda, deception and rumors to advance Russian information objectives and they provide a means to counter negative information against Russia. Russia employs “troll armies” described as “groups of online pro-Kremlin, pro-Putin regime bloggers” who spread disinformation across numerous fake accounts to “post articles and responses to blogs and messages on social media 50 to 100 times a day” (Zakem et al 2015, 40). There are reports of a “troll factory” in St Petersburg where employees are paid over $500 a month to defend the Putin regime and to spread conspiracy theories about western leaders (Zakem et al 2015, 41; NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence 2016, 28).

Russia has employed propaganda, deception, and denial messages during the conflict in Ukraine. There are numerous accounts of propaganda, deception, and denial messages distributed to impact behaviors. One example is their use of Instagram to distribute misinformation to influence perception on the ground in Ukraine. In June 2014, the Children’s Ombudsman under the President of the Russian Federation, announced there were 7,000 Ukrainian refugees that arrived in Rostov Oblast over a twenty-four hours’ period, but the Rostov government office reported the refugee count did not exceed 712 (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence 2016, 28).

Another example is Russia’s continued denial that Russian military forces were operating in Ukraine. Russian forces were directed to remove insignia from uniforms and conceal the identifying features of their military vehicles in an attempt to conceal their involvement (Czuperski et al 2015, 3). Russian denials continued despite mounting evidence to the contrary. The Russian media apparatus maintained that the fighting in Donbas was a civil war conducted
by legitimate local separatists’ forces even though some of these forces had equipment and wore uniforms unique to the Russian military (Czuperski et al 2015, 4).

Finally, the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 by a Russian supplied Buk surface-to-air missile system is another story of denial. Russia responded to the Ukrainian counter offensive in the east by sending more “artillery, tanks, and anti-aircraft missiles” (Czuperski et al 2015, 5). The Russian backed separatist launched a surface-to-air missile which downed the civilian airliner. Russia denied it provided the missile system but numerous reports collaborate that Russia had a role in the incident (Czuperski et al 2015, 5). The next section will examine Russian UW military actions in Ukraine.

Russia employed special forces—Spetsnaz—in Crimea and eastern Ukraine to conduct UW operations to set the conditions for follow-on operations. After President Yanukovych’s removal from office in late February 2014, Russia dispatched Spetsnaz to Crimea “to create a ‘popular uprising’” with the goal of annexing the region (Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2015, 54). Simultaneously, Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) of the General Staff used bribery tactics among the ethnic Russian population to secure support for further military action and the annexation of Crimea (Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2015, 54).

On February 27, 2014, elements of the Special Operations Command, 45th Spetsnaz, Spetsnaz GRU, and naval infantry began operations by seizing the parliament building, securing airports, blockading Ukrainian military bases, and takeover of the Ukrainian military headquarters (Bukkvoll 2016, 17; Galeotti 2014). Spetsnaz operations in Crimea were decisive in setting the conditions for follow-on military forces to secure the gains. It only took 19 days
from the seizure of the Parliament building to the signing of the Crimea treaty making it part of Russia (Bukkvoll 2016, 17).

Russia changed its military focus after the annexation of Crimea to the eastern region of Ukraine. Reports indicate that Russian intelligence operatives and Spetsnaz were leading demonstrations and assisting in the takeover of public buildings in the Donbass region (Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2015, 58-59). The Spetsnaz role in eastern Ukraine has been training local insurgent forces and providing them intelligence for their operations (Bukkvoll 2016, 19). Other roles may have been coordinating efforts across insurgent groups, supplying groups, using intimidation to keep the insurgent forces in line with Russian objectives, and conducting sabotage in Ukrainian rear areas (Galeotti 2014; Bukkvoll 2016, 19).

The use of proxies is an element of UW. It is alleged that Russia employed proxy forces in Ukraine to fill gaps in military personnel shortages. One alleged paramilitary organization is the “Wolves’ Head Battalion—a Cossack group known to have fought with the Russians in Georgia in 2008” (Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2015, 59). Members of the battalion claimed they came to Ukraine for their own “ideological reasons, to defend the Russian Orthodoxy and the Russian regime” (Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2015, 59). Moreover, the members admitted in an interview with a Time magazine journalist that they were “paid, equipped, and deployed by Vladimir Putin’s government” (Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2015, 59). The next section will describe Russia’s special forces who conduct UW.

**Russian Means.** Russia has a broad range of special operations forces that operate in the homeland and abroad. This section will focus on those Russian SOF most likely to conduct UW. The employment of SOF abroad is codified in a 2006 law stating that “the President may use the
armed forces and SOF abroad in order to prevent terrorism, defend the rights and freedoms of Russian citizens, and defend Russian sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity” (Bukkvoll 2015, 604). Russian SOF mission sets are similar to those of U.S. SOF.

The primary Russian SOF force is known as Spetsialnya Naschenye or SPETSNAZ. SPETSNAZ units are found across the military, intelligence, and security services (Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2015, 43). A 2008 Russian planning document describes SOF tasks as:

- Raids and sabotage [direct action],
- Special reconnaissance,
- Combating enemy SOF,
- Psychological operations,
- Military assistance,
- Support for one’s own non-SOF forces,
- Search and rescue operations, and
- Peace support operations. (Bukkvoll 2015, 606)

The primary tasks related to Russian UW are military assistance and psychological operations. Military assistance encompasses the military tasks to organize, train, and equip a resistance movement or insurgency to achieve national security objectives. Psychological operations employ messages to delegitimize the hostile government, gain the support of the local population and strengthen the morale of the resistance movement. In Ukraine, Russian SOF had an important role in supporting resistance forces on the ground. According to Bukkvoll (2016), Russian SOF executed the following missions in Crimea and Donbas (Figure 4.7):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Crimea</th>
<th>Donbas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct Action</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Reconnaissance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Assistance</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covert Action</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.7 Russian SOF Activities in Ukraine
SPETZNAZ executed direct action missions in Ukraine consisted of seizing government facilities, conducting sabotage behind Ukrainian lines, and conducting attacks on Ukrainian convoys (Galeotti 2014). Special Reconnaissance operations gathered intelligence on Ukrainian military positions (Bukkvoll 2016, 17). Military assistance included training, advising, assisting, equipping, and leading resistance elements (Galleotti 2014; Bukkvoll 2016, 17-19). Finally, SPETSNAZ conducted covert action intelligence activities to establish human networks and organize protest while concealing the sponsor—Russia (Bukkvoll 2016, 18).

There were numerous Russian SOF units deployed in Ukraine but there were two units having significant impact on mission success—SPETSNAZ GRU and Special Operations Command. SPETSNAZ GRU is the primary Russian SOF unit that conducted UW operations. SPETSNAZ GRU established intelligence networks and supported the resistance movement in Ukraine. SPETSNAZ GRU has seven brigades with an estimated strength of 1,500 personnel per brigade. This includes both field operators and support servicemen (Bukkvoll 2016, 14). Bukkvoll suggests that SPETSNAZ GRU may be “compared to the US Rangers rather than to the US Delta Force” (2016, 14).

The Special Operations Command is the premier SOF unit in the Russian military. The Special Operations Command (Komanda spetsial’nikh operatsiy; KSO) is a new unit announced by the Chief of General Staff in 2013 (Galeotti 2014; Bokkvoll 2016, 15). The KSO is a strategic asset and its design is similar to the United Kingdom’s Special Air Service and US Delta Force (Bukkvoll 2016, 15). The KSO has five special operations division with an estimated 50 operators per unit and an overall strength of 1,500 personnel including support personnel (Bukkvoll 2016, 15). The KSO had a decisive impact on the early stages of the Crimea operation when they seized key government buildings and secured the Ukrainian military
headquarters (Bukkvoll 2016, 17). The next section will provide comparison analysis between US SOF and Russian SOF executing UW.

There are both similarities and differences in the manner US SOF and Russian SOF execute UW operations and activities. Both SOF conduct UW in a covert, clandestine or overt manner to train, advise, assist, and equip resistance forces. Psychological operations are employed by both to delegitimize the hostile government and influence the local population to support the resistance, and shape regional and global perspectives. Russia has demonstrated a particular adeptness at employing overwhelming psychological warfare and information operations from all media platforms to shape and influence local, regional and global perceptions.

Moreover, Russia is more agile in employing psychological warfare principally because unlike US SOF, Russian SOF are not constrained on its use. Russia employs a more aggressive approach by getting the message out first to shape the narrative and they will lie or use disinformation to confuse the situation. This was clearly demonstrated in Russia’s psychological and information operations campaign in Ukraine. Russia continued to deny it was conducting military operations in Ukraine despite the fact there was evidence to refute their claim. One example that stands out is the shooting down of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17. Evidence points to Russia suppling the separatist movement in eastern Ukraine with a surface-to-air missile system responsible for shooting down the plane. In spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the Russians have continued to insist they had no role in the shoot down—even suggesting that the Ukrainians were to blame (Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2015, 60).
There is another key difference between U.S. and Russia employing UW. It lies in the command relationship with the resistance movement or insurgency. The U.S. definition of UW illustrates this point. The U.S. method is conducting UW to “enable” the resistance movement or insurgency by operating “through or with” the elements of the resistance. By way of contrast, Russian implants hand-picked government leaders into the governance structure of the resistance movement. They also provide key military leadership for resistance units. This all ensures that Russian objectives are met first and foremost. From the U.S. perspective, the resistance movement leads with the U.S. supporting to meet mutual objectives. This is particularly important in the case of an overthrow scenario because the new government must be perceived as legitimate in the eyes of the population.

A simple analogy can be used to describe the difference, a taxi cab with a driver and back seat passenger. The U.S. is represented by the passenger in the back seat. The passenger provides information, advice, and funds to reach an end point and the driver is in the lead having the final determination on the route to reach the end point. In contrast, Russia has taken the role of the driver of the resistance in Ukraine by leading the resistance to Russian ends. Based upon the ends, ways and means of Russian SOF and their activities in Crimea and Ukraine, the following section provides recommendations for the U.S. to consider in building a C-UW strategy.

**Recommendations for a U.S. C-UW Strategy**

Congress identified a gap in the United States’ ability to counter adversarial unconventional warfare activities. The result was language being placed in the National Defense Authorization of Act for FY 2016. The Act directed DOD to develop a C-UW strategy based on
nine framing questions. This thesis will use several of those questions as a guide to make the following recommendations.

As a matter of first principles, DOD cannot execute a C-UW strategy alone. It requires a whole-of-nation approach and employing all elements of national power to achieve desired effects. Moreover, to obtain a lasting basis for achieving national security objectives the strategy must integrate allies and partners. Within DOD, SOF and conventional forces have different roles in support a C-UW strategy. However, SOF are more likely to successfully support a C-UW strategy for several reasons. As outlined above, SOF operations and activities have primary and supporting efforts to support a national C-UW strategy. SOF has forces manned, trained, and equipped to execute UW operations along with language and cultural skills that are important to develop understanding of the environment, build trust with partners, and advise allies and partners on adversarial UW TTPs.

**Recommendation One.** *DOD should invest in advanced technologies that enable a more effective means to collect information from government and private sector sources to build deep knowledge of the operational areas of interest.* This would include establishing a data repository that is searchable, accessible with data that can be shared at appropriate levels of access. It includes the tools to analyze the data and produce reports to support decision making. Deep understanding of the operational environment and adversarial UW TTPs are instrumental to developing an effective C-UW strategy. Developing a deep understanding of the environment requires a proactive approach enabled by persistent presence on the ground that provides indicators and warning of a rising problem. Early identification of a resistance movement developing enables decision makers to address the challenges before they elevate to a level requiring major resources to confront the problem. Moreover, deep knowledge is gained by
leveraging intelligence data, information on the ground, and from experts across government and
the private sector.

**Recommendation Two.** *Authorities and permissions should be established that permit whole-of-government action that includes allies and multinational partners to execute an effective C-UW strategy against state, non-state, or proto-state actors.* Current authorities limit a holistic approach to counter adversarial UW. To gain deep knowledge of the operational environment and providing early indicators and warnings requires authorities, permissions, and funding lines to maintain a persistent presence. Currently, there are such authorities, permissions, and funding lines for combating terrorism (CT) around the globe. However, CT authorities, permissions, and funding lines are too narrow to execute a whole-of-government C-UW strategy that integrates allies and multinational partners as well. A C-UW strategy may employ forces to counter adversarial UW that is not linked to a designated terrorist organization. Therefore, authorities, permissions, and funding streams should be established to execute C-UW activities against state, proto-state, and non-state actors.

**Recommendation Three.** *The DOD should consider grooming and selecting SOF officers with UW expertise for key leadership and staff positions at the operational and strategic levels of war.* Planning and executing a C-UW strategy requires leaders and staff who understand UW. Conventional forces have the majority of forces which impacts leadership and staff positions at the Joint Staff, GCC, and Service components. This would enhance DOD capacities to plan and execute a counter UW strategy. In addition, the number of SOF liaison officers should expand to interagency and key multinational partners to provide advice and expertise on the military aspects of UW. This will enhance understanding of UW across the
government and multinational partners providing a method to coordinate and integrate C-UW supporting strategies.

**Recommendation Four.** *Develop an alternative planning construct to formulate C-UW strategy.* The joint campaigning construct is not adequate for executing a C-UW strategy. The current construct is based on the notion of conducting major combat operations through five phases. Most C-UW activities will remain below the threshold of major combat operations; therefore, DOD should develop an alternative campaigning construct that is more agile, can adapt to the changing situations on the ground, and provides strategic and operational planners with a means to plan and execute operations below the threshold of major combat operations.

**Recommendation Five.** *Require that all intelligence collection efforts recognize the primacy of the human environment in support of a C-UW strategy.* Threat based intelligence collection, analysis, and reporting is still important to developing a C-UW strategy, but the focus must include the collection, analysis, and reporting on the human factors in the environment. A thorough understand of the human environment is critical to identifying indicators of a forming resistance movement and identifying a potential external supporter. This early recognition allows decision makers to expose the external support and may assist with securing partner support to counter the UW activities.

**Recommendation Six.** *Develop the full spectrum of C-UW doctrine.* Currently, joint doctrine covers the majority of operations and activities required to execute a C-UW strategy, but lacks a unifying document to execute a strategy. DOD should develop a Joint Operating Concept for Countering Unconventional Warfare to ensure leaders and planners have a guide for how to execute a C-UW strategy.
Summary

This chapter provided findings and analysis to answer the research question: *What role does special operations forces play in a United States countering unconventional warfare strategy?* The research proved the hypothesis: *Special operations forces’ core operations and activities contribute greatly to support an overall Department of Defense and whole-of-government countering unconventional warfare strategy to meet U.S. national security objectives.* This Chapter analyzed unconventional warfare from a U.S. perspective; described the operational context; posited the ends, ways, and means for SOF to support a C-UW strategy; analyzed Russian unconventional warfare activities in Ukraine; and provided recommendations to enable the US to successfully implement a future C-UW strategy. Chapter 5 provides a synopsis of the thesis, draws conclusions, and recommends future research.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Overview

An examination of the data has identified that the U.S. does not have a C-UW strategy, thereby revealing a strategic gap based upon the U.S. National Level vision of the future operating environment. The NSS and NMS pose a future operating environment that will be more complex with threats from revisionist states and non-state actors. State and non-state actors will seek opportunities to gain a position of advantage by employing asymmetrical approaches to achieve objectives. Some of these approaches will employ UW. State actors will push the limits of action to secure national security interests while trying to stay below the trigger point launching a major state-on-state conflict.

This thesis explored SOF’s operations and activities to contribution to a C-UW strategy using the U.S. Army War College Strategy Model (ends, ways, and means). The research identified SOF’s operations and activities have primary and supporting lines of operations and efforts to support a C-UW strategy. Analysis led to the conclusion that SOFs expertise in unconventional warfare make them the force of choice to execute the military component of a C-UW strategy.

Research and analysis further identified Russia’s ends, ways, and means in conducting UW in Ukraine. Russian SOF played an important role in the annexation of Crimea and supporting resistance forces in the Frozen Conflict in eastern Ukraine. In both Crimea and Ukraine, Russia employed a massive psychological warfare and information operations to influence the local, regional, and global population. Moreover, the analysis of Russian UW activities in Ukraine identified similarities and differences in how the U.S. and Russia execute UW.
Finally, an analysis of the findings led to a set of recommendations to allow the U.S. to develop a C-UW strategy. Many of them were applicable across the whole-of-government. However, of utmost importance to DOD is the development of the full spectrum of C-UW doctrine beginning with writing a Joint Operating Concept. This would ensure leaders and planners have a guide on how to execute a C-UW strategy.

Synopsis of the Thesis

Chapter 1 Introduction laid the foundation for this thesis by identifying a U.S. strategic gap in countering adversary UW activities. Russia’s annexation of Crimea and actions in eastern Ukraine surprised the West and have caused grave concern in former Soviet Union satellites states with ethnic Russians located in their country. The U.S. Congressional review of Russia’s actions in Crimea and Ukraine has resulted in language inserted into the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 which directs the Department of Defense to develop a strategy for countering unconventional warfare.

This thesis examined SOF’s supporting role to a national strategy to counter adversarial UW campaigns. It also assessed SOF activities in support of a whole-of-government approach to a national counter unconventional warfare strategy. The attendant research and analysis answered the following research question: What role does special operations forces play in a United States countering unconventional warfare strategy?

The thesis research methodology proved the hypothesis: Special operations forces’ core operations and activities contribute greatly to support an overall Department of Defense and whole-of-government countering unconventional warfare strategy to meet U.S. national security objectives. It did so by using a dependent variable (securing US national security interests/objectives) and multiple independent variables (direct action, special reconnaissance,
countering weapons of mass destruction, counterterrorism, unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, security force assistance, hostage rescue and recovery, counterinsurgency, foreign humanitarian assistance, military information support operations, and civil affairs operations).

Chapter 2 Literature Review provided an overview of current data related to the research question. The literature reviewed depicted three key observations that shaped the development of this thesis. First, the initial assessment of the operational environment depicts a future characterized by more competition between states and non-state actors for control over relative populations. State and non-state actors will use indirect approaches to achieve national objectives pushing the limits, but keeping the activities below the point of triggering major state-on-state conflict between the major power states. The historical review of conflict over the past 200 years suggests that the majority of conflict has been irregular in nature (Gorka and Kilcullen 2011, 15). The overview of the future operating environment also postulates that conflict in the future will remain mostly irregular warfare (Gorka and Kilcullen 2011, 15). Therefore, states and non-state actors will continue employing unconventional warfare.

Second, the literature identified a number of policy and other gaps at the national level which would inhibit building strategies to counter state and non-state actors UW campaigns. Several of the authors reviewed advocated for a national C-UW strategy that integrates JIIM partner efforts to counter state and non-state actor’s hybrid and UW campaigns which attempt to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow allies and partner governments. Third, numerous authors reviewed emphasized special operations forces have increased their role in national security approaches to the point where they would have a significant role in executing a C-UW to achieve U.S. national objectives.
Chapter 3 Methodology posited the thesis research methodology, research framework, and data collection. This thesis used Qualitative research methods of both content data analysis and case study approach. Further, this thesis used the U.S. Army War College Strategy Model—also known as the Art Lykke model (Figure 3.1)—strategy = ends + ways + means to both frame data collection and display the results of the analyzed data. Ends are objectives (securing US national security interests/objectives), ways are strategic concepts/courses of action (SOF core operations and activities), and the means are resources (SOF).

In addition, the model was applied to analyze Russian UW Strategy in Ukraine with a case study approach. The Lykke Model also directed research and organization of data collection. The data collected for this case study undergirds its conclusions on how Russia conducts UW. It also guided the development of recommendations for a countering unconventional warfare strategy. The Lykke Model provided a framework to answer the research question, prove or disprove the hypothesis, and test the variables against the hypothesis.

Content analysis discovered discrepancies between the documents and reports from U. S. Government Departments and Agencies related to nation and international security; U.S. Joint and Service doctrine on special operations; international organizations; academic and private sector research organizations, books on strategy and irregular warfare; and websites related to national security.

Chapter 4 Findings and Analysis laid out the findings from the thesis research using the U.S Army War College Strategy Model described by Chapter 3. The findings proved the hypothesis and answered the research question of Chapter 1. Chapter 4 used the U.S. Joint Doctrine definition for UW as a common frame of reference; described the operational context; posited the ends, ways, and means for SOF to support a C-UW strategy; analyzed Russian
unconventional warfare activities in Ukraine; provided similarities and differences between U.S. and Russia UW approach to the working with a resistance; and provided recommendations for a C-UW strategy.

The next section provided an overview of the early 21st Century operational environment to provide context for analysis. It highlighted the complexity of the security environment and pointed out the four-major perceived state and non-state actor threats to national security outlined in the NSS and NMS—Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and ISIL. The research data strongly supported the view that state and non-states actors named above are conducting various UW activities to attain their national security objectives. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter has acknowledged the complex challenges present in every region of the world. Carter claimed the current security environment is “the age of everything, as threats become more transnational, more transregional, and cannot be addressed in isolation” (2015).

The U.S. NSS and NMS were reviewed to identify national security objectives. The NSS (2015) outlines eight strategic national security objectives—ends. The objectives are: strengthen our national defense; reinforce homeland security; combat the persistent threat of terrorism; build capacity to prevent conflict; prevent the spread and use of weapons of mass destruction; confront climate change; assure access to shared spaces—cyber, space, air, and oceans; and increase global health security. The NMS posited three National Military Objectives: “to deter, deny, and defeat state adversaries; to disrupt, degrade, and defeat VEOs; and to strengthen our global network of allies and partners” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2015, 6). The National Military Objectives were examined to see how SOF operations and activities contribute to securing them.

The thesis research identified SOF operations and activities (ways) codified in U.S. law and current military doctrine. The research discovered nuanced differences in the data
describing SOF operations and activities. Joint Publication 3-05 *Special Operations* identified twelve SOF core operations and activities: DA, SR, UW, FID, CA, MISO, CT, CWMD, SFA, COIN, HRR, and FHA. The SOF operations and activities were analyzed to determine the utility of each to support a C-UW strategy. Each SOF operation and activity was determined to have either a primary or supporting effort to a C-UW strategy.

SOF means were analyzed to determine if the various components have the capability to support the military component of a C-UW strategy. The research data determined all SOF units have capabilities that vary in scope across the USSOCOM Enterprise to support a C-UW strategy but all can build partner capacity in their area of expertise. The analysis of research led to the conclusion that SF was the key force within USSOCOM to plan, integrate, and execute the special operations contribution to a national C-UW strategy because they are trained and equipped to conduct UW.

Russia’s actions in Ukraine were assessed for potential UW TTPs, compare the Russian and U.S. approaches to supporting a resistance movement, and assist with making recommendations to develop a C-UW strategy. General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian General Staff, 2013 graphic on “The Role of Nonmilitary Methods in the Resolution of Interstate Conflicts” provided the Russian perspective on the operating environment. The U.S. Army War College Strategy Model was used to capture and present Russian ends, ways, and means for executing UW in Ukraine.

A comparative analysis discovered significant similarities and differences between the U.S. and Russian methods for working with a resistance movement. The most glaring difference was in the area of sponsorship. While the U.S. preferred a collaborative approach, the Russians
prefer to have as much direct control of the resistance movement as possible. Analysis showed that Russia has indeed taken a leading role of the resistance movement in Ukraine.

The National Defense Authorization of Act for FY 2016 directed DOD to develop a C-UW strategy based on nine framing questions. The framing questions and research data where analyzed and resulted in six recommendations for DOD to consider in developing a C-UW strategy. The data identified a gap in C-UW doctrine. One key recommendation of this thesis was that DOD develop a Joint Operating Concept for C-UW to guide planning and execution of the strategy.

**Summary of Findings**

The U.S. government lacks a national strategy and military doctrine to counter adversarial UW activities. Russia’s annexation of Crimea and actions in eastern Ukraine surprised the U.S. government. After the fact, Congress conducted an investigation on the situation that resulted in language in the National Defense Authorization of Act (NDAA) for FY 2016 directing DOD to develop a C-UW strategy based on adversarial state and non-state actor UW threats. DOD should develop a C-UW strategy and doctrine for the primary state and non-state actor threats as soon as possible to comply with the NDAA.

The U.S. must prepare for more threats from state and non-state actors conducting UW. State and non-state actors will continue UW operations and activities against allies and partners to destabilize alliances and thereby gain a position of advantage. The U.S. must lead the C-UW efforts and integrate allies and partners. While the U.S. has the largest military force, it does not have the resources necessary to unilaterally counter all UW security threats.

Building partner capacity is key to a C-UW strategy. Elements within SOF are manned, trained, and equipped to execute UW operations and activities. SOF’s UW knowledge will
enhance partners understanding of adversarial UW activities and will enhance the partner’s ability to counter UW in their own country. Therefore, SOF are the military force of choice to support a C-UW strategy.

Russian poses a clear UW threat. Russian foreign policy emphasizes protecting Russian speaking “compatriots.” The primary focus of this policy is for people living in former Soviet Union Satellite states (often referred to in Russian policy documents as the ‘near abroad’). Protecting Russian compatriots was a reason used in both the 2008 Georgian conflict and the current frozen conflict with Ukraine. To counter future threats the U.S. should prioritize C-UW efforts to counter Russian UW within NATO alliance countries which have Russian diaspora within their borders. Also, the U.S. should build these allied partners capacity to counter Russian UW.

Russia employs IO across all media platforms to influence local, regional, and global perspectives. The Kremlin has employed propaganda, deception, and denial messages during the conflict in Ukraine. Russia is more agile in employing psychological warfare principally because unlike US SOF, Russian SOF are not constrained in its use. President Putin allows a more aggressive approach by getting the message out first to shape the narrative and they will lie or use disinformation to confuse the situation. The U.S. should review current authorities and policies to streamline the foreign target audience messaging process.

The U.S. government lacks authorities and permissions that permit whole-of-government action that includes allies and multinational partners to execute an effective C-UW strategy against state, non-state, or proto-state actors. Current authorities limit a holistic approach to counter adversarial UW. The U.S. should develop authorities, permissions, and funding lines to gain deep knowledge of the operational environment by maintaining persistent presence in high
priority countries to provide early indicators and warnings; and train, advise, assist, and equip partners to counter UW.

Future Research

The NDAA for FY 2016 directed the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with other appropriate departments and agencies, to develop a DOD C-UW strategy. This thesis only examined SOF’s contribution to a DOD C-UW strategy. Future research should examine other DOD capabilities to support a C-UW strategy and on other U.S. government departments and agencies capabilities to support a national C-UW strategy.

This thesis examined a narrow case study on Russian UW activities in Ukraine. The NSS and NMS identified three other state actors—China, Iran, and North Korea—and one non-state actor—ISIL. Future research should examine the UW threats from each of the actors described in the NSS and NMS. Each state and non-state actor will have nuanced difference in how they conduct UW. It is important to understand their TTPs in order to develop an effective counter strategy.

Russia relies very heavily on information warfare to support their UW efforts. The Johns Hopkins University Study on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare identified that, “A critical first step toward confronting modern Russian information warfare is to develop an understanding of its charter and conduct” (2015, 63). Future research should examine Russia’s information warfare TTPs to inform decision makers on those procedures which enables leaders to develop policy, authorities, and funding lines to counter Russian information warfare.

A USSOCOM White Paper “Countering Adversary Unconventional Warfare through All Aspect Cyber Preeminence” points out that state and non-state actors will use the cyber domain to enable UW operations (2016). The cyber domain could be used to: “recruit, train and
mobilize local partners and surrogates; communicate with their own UW forces in a target country; carry out offensive attacks on target regimes’ intuitions and critical infrastructure; and conduct a broad-spectrum influence campaign among multiple regional and global audiences” (USSOCOM 2016, 2-3). Future research should examine further how the cyber domain can be used to both conduct UW and counter UW.
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