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10TH SFG(A) AND EUROPE IN 2016: Old Wine in New Bottles?

“The 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) is back in Europe.”

Is this statement true or misleading?

Paradoxically, it is both. This article separates the truth from the myths about the 10th Special Forces Group in Europe in 2016 and clarifies our future efforts.

BY COLONEL BRIAN PETIT

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

On July 10, 2015, the nominee for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford, declared in his Senate Armed Services committee confirmation hearing that “Russia is the greatest threat to our national security.” In the era of the perpetual counterterror fight, Gen. Dunford’s statement sounded like an anachronistic Cold War sound bite. In truth, his plain language declaration signaled a new geopolitical reality: the global interests of the U.S. and its allies are challenged by an expeditionary-spirited, irredentist Russia.

The most obvious symbols of Russia’s expansionism are three recent Russian campaigns: the March 2014 annexation of Crimea; the hybrid war in Eastern Ukraine, initiated in summer 2015 and ongoing; and Russia’s September 2015 military intervention in Syria in support of the Bashar Al-Assad regime.⁰¹

To respond to and counter-pressure Russian expansionist tendencies, the United States and its allies responded with diplomatic, political, military and economic measures to counter, contain or deter Russian strategic aspira-

tions. This is a global effort that expands beyond the confines of Europe and involves partners other than the 28-members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Within the European theater of operations, the main military component of the deterrence effort is Operation Atlantic Resolve; this is a “demonstration of continued U.S. commitment to the collective security of NATO and to ensure peace and stability in the region, in light of Russia’s illegal actions in the Ukraine.”⁰²

The special operations component of OAR is led by the Stuttgart, Germany-based Special Operations Command – Europe. The U.S. Army Special Operations Forces components of SOCEUR bring special warfare capabilities to this new geostrategic challenge. Europe-focused ARSOF include the 4th Military Information Support Group (Airborne), the 92nd Civil Affairs battalion and the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne).



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10th SFG(A) Soldiers meet with then-Army Chief of Staff General William Westmoreland and the Corps General of the Italian Alpini, an elite mountain warfare unit, in the early 1970s. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE USASOC HISTORY OFFICE

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The Trojan Horse Crest was worn by members of the Group on their berets during the 1950s and remains as the symbolic, if unofficial, 10th SFG(A) crest.

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Members of the 10th SFG(A) stand next to Estonian SOF during the opening ceremony for Joint Exercise Spring Storm 2014. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. TIMOTHY CLEGG



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10TH SFG(A)

The 10th Special Forces Group, recognized by the distinctive Trojan horse insignia, has been European-oriented since its activation on June 19, 1952.⁰³ Headquartered at Fort Carson, Colorado, the 10th Special Forces Group has maintained a forward presence in Europe since 1953, when then-Col. Aaron Bank deployed the 10th SFG(A) elements forward to Bavaria, West Germany. In 1989, the 1st Battalion, 10th SFG(A) relocated from Bad Tolz, Bavaria, to Stuttgart, where 1st Battalion, 10th SFG(A) has remained as the group's forward-based battalion.

In 2015, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command directed a regional realignment of Special Forces Groups. The realignment was in response to U.S. security policy vis-à-vis Russian aggression combined with a reduced commitment to Central Asian counterinsurgency and stability operations. The realignment directed the 3rd Special Forces Group to return to Africa, relieving in place the 10th Special Forces Group elements operating under Special Operations Command – Africa. This geographic shift enabled the 10th Special Forces Group to devote greater attention and assets on the European theater. This regional shift is currently underway. In practical terms, what does this mean? What is truth and what is fiction?

MYTH #1: "10TH SFG(A) IS GOING BACK TO EUROPE."

THE TRUTH: The 10th SFG(A) *never left* Europe. Since 10th Group's initial stationing in Bad Tolz, Germany in 1953, the 10th SFG (A) has maintained a forward-presence in Europe. Even during the heart of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and enduring commitments to Africa, 10th SFG(A) remained consistently engaged in Europe with Europeans. Over the past two decades, partner engagements have expanded from 10th Group's traditional west and northern European partners to building SOF partnerships with East European partners, most notably, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania.

On a macro-historical scale, the evolution of 10th SFG(A) engagement in Europe reflects the dynamic history of European security since "Victory in Europe" day, declared May 8, 1945. The (simplified) mission chronology in the sidebar on the right represents the arc of 10th SFG(A) engagement in Europe over the past 65 years.



10TH SFG(A) ENGAGEMENT IN EUROPE

This simplified mission chronology represents the arc of 10th SFG(A) engagement in Europe over the past 65 years.

- Unconventional warfare and support to resistance following a Soviet invasion⁰⁴
- Commando operations in mountainous, extreme cold-weather environments
- Remote area operations behind enemy lines to destroy critical enemy infrastructure
- Development of partner-nation military capabilities (foreign internal defense)
- SOF support to major theater war and nuclear war
- Engagement of East European partners following the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union
- Coalition and multinational operations (Desert Shield/Storm)
- Peace enforcement and peacekeeping in the Balkans (1990s)
- Counterterror cooperation and collaboration against violent extremists
- Unconventional warfare campaigning (overthrow)
- Support to partner-nation SOF generation (NATO SOF)
- Joint operations with partner SOF contributions in Afghanistan (ISAF SOF)
- Support to partner-nation defense plans: resistance, UW, sabotage, subversion, cyber
- Special warfare: enabling information, civil actions and special operations effects with partners and within sovereign partner-nation borders
- Special Operations Command Forward – East Europe (SOCFWD-EE), a joint headquarters that extends the command of COMSOCEUR on a 365-day forward mission model (1-10th)

Following the 9/11 attacks on the U.S., the 10th SFG's main effort immediately shifted to expeditionary campaigns outside of the European theater. The 10th SFG(A) campaigned with SOF, joint and multinational forces in the Iraq, Afghanistan and African theaters. These other-than-European theater commitments did reduce 10th Group's capacity aligned against European security issues.

Given this history, a more accurate statement is that the 10th SFG(A) is now *weighting its effort* toward Europe. In practical terms, the 10th SFG(A) is focusing its intellectual and military power to support SOCEUR and European partner nations more consistently and — where merited — with more capacity. The most obvious indicators of this shift are an invigorated intelligence focus, adjusted language requirements, increased engagements events, expanded partnership opportunities, improved deployment pre-study and preparation, improved SOF-Conventional Force integration, and increased high-tactical and operational-level command emphasis.

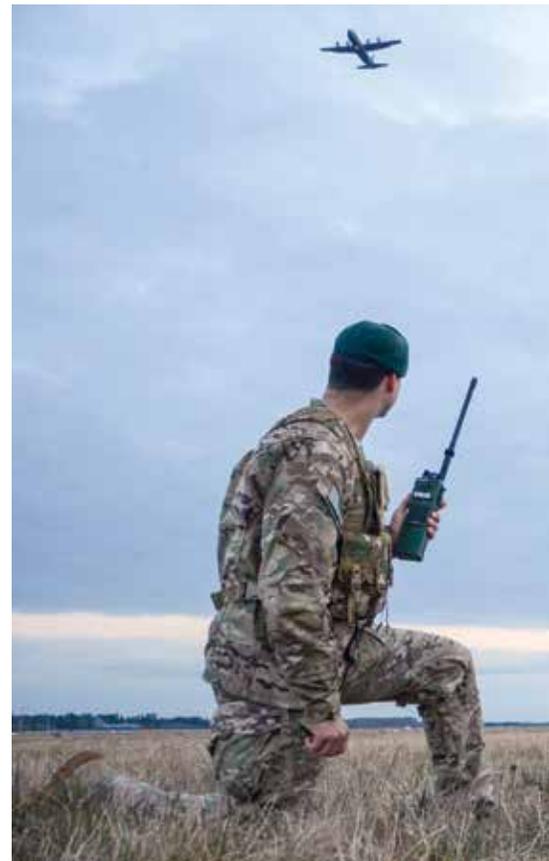


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MYTH #2: "IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN CREATED LOST TIME FOR 10TH GROUP AND EUROPE."

THE TRUTH: This is a myth. In fact, the opposite is true. The last decade of desert wars — principally, Afghanistan — galvanized European SOF partners around growing, sustaining and fighting their joint SOF formations. In Afghanistan, the International Security Assistance Force numbered more than 52 nations at its peak. The SOF component of ISAF, named ISAF SOF, consisted of more than 20 contributing nations: a strategic coalition by any measure.

The Afghanistan theater of war served as an expeditionary proving ground for many European SOF units, whose primary missions were typically domestic-defense focused. NATO SOF served as the coordinating headquarters that validated the pre-deployment training infrastructure, command and control, medical evacuation, and fire support infrastructure to enable European SOF nations to aggressively deploy and employ their SOF in high-risk environments. The 10th SFG(A) partnered with multiple European nations, from pre-mission through full combat tours, providing advisory and enabling support (communications, intelligence) as European SOF took the lead role in training, advising and assisting Afghan Security Forces. The decade of partnership with 10th



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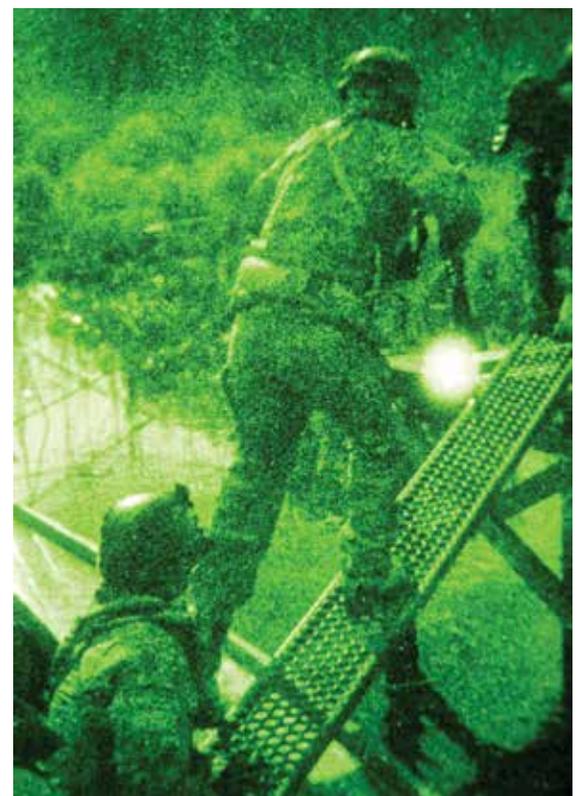
SFG(A) and its European partners – in the unforgiving trial of combat – accelerated relationships and capability far “beyond the joint combined exchange training.”⁰⁵

Within Europe proper, SOF institutions matured apace with the expanding tactical SOF capabilities. The NATO SOF coordination cell was conceptualized to provide a common European-based joint SOF headquarters. Over the last decade, the NSCC grew from a “business start-up” in Stuttgart, Germany to its current state: a strategic, three-star joint SOF command called NATO SOF Headquarters, located in Mons, Belgium.

It is said that the strongest steel is forged in the hottest fire. Many European SOF partners — now partnered with 10th SFG(A) in the European theater — revised their modern identities and developed their capabilities in combat operations in Afghanistan. These same SOF partners now work with their 10th SFG(A) counterparts as part of their national defense strategies. These high-trust partnerships and close personal relationships are paramount as NATO SOF jointly plan, prepare, and posture in the shadow of a revanchist Russia.



themselves as the principal actors in the self-defense of their own countries. It is within this cultural and legal context that today's 10th SFG(A) A-detachments are applying special warfare and UW principles. Europe presents delicate tactical and political environments where UW doctrinal solutions require studied judgment and wholesale understanding of sovereignty to ascertain their value and risk. While these unconventional warfare missions have clear echoes of history, the modern European security environment remains knotty to even the most clear-thinking unconventional warfare practitioners.



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MYTH #3: "10TH GROUP IS RELEARNING UW."

THE TRUTH: Everyone is learning and adapting to modern warfare. The 19th century war theorist Carl von Clausewitz posited that the *nature of war* does not change but the *character of warfare* does.⁰⁶ Whether it is high intensity conventional battles or surreptitious unconventional warfare, the modern era of conflict demands a perpetual review and validation of even the most durable principles of warfare. Toward that end, 10th SFG(A) is both student and teacher: adapting, learning and leading the application of special warfare and its doctrinal subset — UW —in the contemporary European environment.⁰⁷

Organizationally, 10th Group maintains a strong historical and intellectual tradition oriented on unconventional warfare. Even in the heart of the counterinsurgency era (2002-2014), the 10th SFG(A) retained a strong affinity for the study and practice of unconventional warfare. Experientially, the 10th SFG(A) led the joint-force unconventional warfare campaign in Northern Iraq in 2003, executing a doctrinal application of a discrete entry, surrogate warfare operation as part of a major theater campaign. Academically, 10th SFG(A) and Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran Lt. Col. (Ret.) Marc Grdovic synthesized the big ideas and best practices of the Afghanistan and Iraq unconventional warfare campaigns into a series of articles, publications and doctrinal references.⁰⁸ Strategically, the USASOC Commander (2012-2015) and former 10th SFG(A) Commander, Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Charles T. Cleveland, led a renewed call for intellectual clarity on the tactical application and policy implications of UW. Most recently, the 4th Battalion, 10th SFG(A) co-sponsored, with the Naval Post Graduate School, an Advanced UW Academics course that ranged from understanding policy implications to exploring emerging cyber techniques. Within Europe proper, ARSOF are sponsoring or participating with European partners in seminars, conferences and wargames that aim to craft successful UW strategies suitable to local conditions.

10th SFG(A) is also revising its own understanding of UW application where the U.S. is not the primary UW agent.⁰⁹ The Europeans rightly view

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The 3rd BN, 10th SFG(A) colors are unfurled in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 2013 as they assume command of Combined Special Operations Task Force -10, a multinational task force with SOF advisers from Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and the United States.
U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY MAJ. MERITT PHILLIP

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American and Estonian SOF wait for paratroopers to exit an American C-130 and conduct a water infiltration in Estonia as a part of Exercise Spring Storm 2014, an annual training event that has evolved into the largest field training exercise in the Baltic states.
U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY SPC. TIMOTHY CLEGG

MYTH #4: 10TH GROUP'S RETURNING TO ITS COLD WAR MISSION.

THE TRUTH: Despite the historic precedent of countering Russian aggression in Europe, the differences between 2016 and the Cold War era may be more telling than the similarities. Five key differences give pause before subscribing to the simplified Cold War II analogy:

- **Russia.** The threat is Russia — a singular, if massive, country — and not the conglomerate of states once known as the The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics that existed from 1922 to 1991.
- **Ground Forces.** Europe no longer maintains massive standing armies, tactically arrayed on conspicuous invasion corridors, such as the notorious Fulda Gap. Even today's agile U.S. Army Europe presence is a fraction of our peak Cold War posture represented by multiple Corps and Divisions.
- **Cyber.** The cyber domain means new modes of attack and new vulnerabilities to protect.
- **SOF partners.** The growth of partner-nation SOF over the past 20 years gives USSOF new partnership options and long standing, trusted relationships to leverage.
- **The U.S. Joint Force.** In the past 25 years, the U.S. joint force concept has appreciably matured, in both peace and wartime. SOCEUR, with its integrated SOF capabilities, represents that joint SOF capability within the European Command joint force team. Despite a smaller force structure in Europe, today's joint force tendencies are a stark improvement over the questionably synchronized, service-centric era of the Cold War.¹⁰



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Estonian SOF and 10th SFG(A) Soldiers calculate wind speeds during drop zone operations in Estonia. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC TIMOTHY CLEGG

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Soldiers from Poland, Croatia and Romania train along side 10th SFG(A) Soldiers in Poland in 2010 during a joint exercise. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. BRENDAN STEPHENS

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A member of 10th SFG(A) works with a Latvian Special Forces Soldier during weapons familiarization training in Latvia as a part of ongoing support to OAR. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SGT. PAIGE BEHRINGER

THE ACTUAL MISSIONS CONDUCTED — DIRECT ACTION, COUNTERTERROR, UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE — WILL CONTINUE TO SHIFT AS THE CHARACTER OF WARFARE INEVITABLY SHIFTS



MYTH #5: "EUROPEAN SOF IS UW FOCUSED."

THE TRUTH: Some European SOF are UW focused, but not all. Taken together, Europe faces multiple crises: the monetary (euro) crisis; the influx of refugees from North Africa, the Levant, the Middle East and Central Asia; domestic terrorist threats and ethnic strife within internal citizenry; energy dependency; and an expansionist Russia capable of effective hybrid warfare. Each NATO SOF nation, by virtue of its geography, policy, threat and defense capability, configures and missions its national SOF in concert with its defense priorities. For some, the top priority is al-Qaeda or Daesh threats emanating from North Africa and the Levant. Others focus on precision counterterror operations at home or near-abroad. For a select few, their national SOF are chartered to conduct unconventional warfare as a component of their national defense strategies.

For those European countries that employ UW warfare as an element of their deter and defense plans, there is great relevance in the World War II and Cold War era UW and resistance case studies. Elements of PSYWAR, auxiliary-building, citizen resistance networks, sabotage and subversion are modern descendants of their Cold War-era antecedents. While the past is not prologue, nearly all ARSOF engagements in continental Europe are informed and influenced by shared historical and regional knowledge of European resistance histories, both successful and failed.

Thus, 10th Group's renewed focus on applying unconventional warfare is not a uniformly practiced position among European SOF partners. Despite this truth, the real value of partnerships lies in the trust forged over the past two decades, many of them in a combat theater. High trust partnerships underpinned by rehearsed interoperability remains the foundation of our coalition strength with European security forces. This truth remains the foundational idea of 10th SFG(A) engagement in Europe. The actual missions conducted – direct action, counterterror, unconventional warfare – will continue to shift as the *character of warfare* inevitably shifts.

CONCLUSION

This is no myth: In 2016, the 10th Group priority of effort is *in Europe with Europeans*.

For nearly 65 years, 10th Special Forces Group has conducted operations and activities that reflect the evolution of collective security and the shifting threats in Europe. 10th Group veterans take justifiable pride in their contribu-

tion to the post-World War II, Marshall plan-stimulated rise of a prosperous, continental Europe based on democratic principles, free markets, open media, and the respect of human rights. This historical arc includes the past two decades of engagement and partnerships with nations that fell behind the Iron Curtain. These nations face the real potential of Russian aggression on their borders and seek U.S. assurance, assistance and support to maintain their sovereignty and prosperity. At once, this is both a novel challenge *and* familiar terrain for the men and women of the original Special Forces Group. **SW**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NOTES **01.** Hybrid warfare, a non-doctrinal term, is defined here as the blending of conventional escalatory dominance with elements of non-declared insurgent-like activities such as sabotage, surrogate warfare, and misinformation. **02.** United States Army Europe website, www.eur.army.mil (accessed on January 31, 2016). **03.** Aaron Bank, *From OSS to Green Beret* (Presidio Press, Novato, CA 1986), 171. **04.** U.S. Joint Publication 3-05, *Special Operations*, 16 July 2014, defines UW as "operations and activities that are 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." (U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, Joint Publication 3-05, Washington, D.C., July 16, 2014, p. xi). **05.** JCET stands for Joint Combine Exchange Training. These events are normally six to eight weeks in length and usually take place inside the host country. Outside of combat, JCETs are generally the main venue where U.S. and partner SOF work together. **06.** Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 1832. Translated, edited and published as *On War* by Peter Paret and Michael Howard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). **07.** U.S. Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-05, *Special Operations* (31 August 2012), defines special warfare as the "execution of activities that involve a combination of lethal and nonlethal actions taken by a specially trained and educated force that has a deep understanding of cultures and foreign language, proficiency in small-unit tactics, and the ability to build and fight alongside indigenous combat formations in a permissive, uncertain, or hostile environment." **08.** Grdovic, Mark, *A Leader's Handbook to Unconventional Warfare*, Publication 09-1, Ft. Bragg, N.C.: U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, November 2009. **09.** To be clear, this means that the U.S. is assisting partner nations who could enable, organize, sponsor or support irregulars or citizen-brigades in the conduct of UW. **10.** Poor joint interoperability and shoddy inter-service cooperation triggered the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols legislation that mandated joint force requirements. One year later in 1987, the Nunn-Cohen act wrote into U.S. law the creation of standing special operations forces.