

CJSOTF-A



Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Afghanistan
A Short History | 2002-2014

by Michael E. Krivdo



Southeastern Afghanistan, 2003

Weather-wise, 25 August 2003 began as it had in the past few weeks. As the sun cleared the mountains temperatures were in the 90s and would peak above 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The air was heavy with fine dust that clung to everything as vehicle-mounted soldiers of Operational Detachment - Alpha (ODA) 2056 (20th Special Forces Group [SFG]) scanned the area with binoculars. They were responding to the night ambush of an Afghanistan Militia Force (AMF) near the village of Day Chopan in southeast Afghanistan. The AMF had captured a 'live' enemy radio and the intense 'chatter' indicated the presence of a large enemy force in the hills north of Day Chopan. ODA 2056, mounted in two Land Rovers, a Toyota HiLux pickup truck, and an unarmored high mobility multi-wheeled vehicle (HMMWV) (military utility vehicle known as a 'Humvee'), was accompanied by two vehicles of AMF soldiers.¹

At 0630 hours outside the small settlement of Da'udza'i, ODA 2056 received small arms fire from some hills two hundred meters on their flank. The SF team took immediate action and assaulted the attackers, who pulled back. Surprisingly, the Americans were re-engaged by

even greater numbers. The Taliban were determined to keep friendly forces out of the area. While engaging the enemy, the team leader radioed details of the contact to higher headquarters. Recalcitrant enemy intentions raised suspicions at the CJSOTF-A. When the Joint Tactical Air Controller (JTAC) requested close air support (CAS), the Joint Operations Center (JOC) directed two U.S. Marine Corps AV-8B 'Harrier II' attack aircraft to support the ODA. They also forwarded the ODA 2056 contact report to Task Force (TF) 180, the headquarters for all American forces in Afghanistan, to add to their targeting cycle. The 'Harriers' made multiple bombing runs, temporarily reducing the enemy's volume of effective fire.²

At the end of the day when ODA 2056 reported 14 enemy dead and many more wounded, the Taliban were stubbornly maintaining contact by replacing their losses. The CJSOTF-A had been getting more contact reports from other units operating in the Day Chopan District. These reports indicated the presence of a very large enemy stronghold. As the traffic volume grew at JTF 180, conventional U.S. Army forces made plans to exploit the SF findings. Special reconnaissance (SR) ODAs 'fixed' a substantial enemy force, prompting JTF 180 to plan, coordinate, and execute a major coalition offensive action that was labeled Operation MOUNTAIN VIPER.³

For the next two weeks SOF elements from CJSOTF-A provided the 'eyes' that pinpointed the Taliban forces and kept them 'fixed' with CAS to enable conventional ground force attacks against the stronghold in Day Chopan. MOUNTAIN VIPER became one of the most successful operations of 2003 in Afghanistan. SOF elements and coalition forces teamed up to inflict heavy casualties on the Taliban, denying them a base of operations in Zabul Province.⁴ Iraq reduced U.S. military interest thereafter.



Map of the Day Chopan valley in northwest Zabul Province, showing the high relief. ODA 2056 conducted a mounted reconnaissance from Day Chopan to Da'udza'i on 25 August 2003, an action that led to Operation MOUNTAIN VIPER.

IAW USSOCOM Sanitization Protocol for Historical Articles on Classified Current Operations, pseudonyms are used for majors and below who are still on active duty, unless names have been publicly released for awards/decorations or DoD news release. Pseudonyms are identified with an asterisk. The eyes of personnel in photos are blocked out when not covered with dark visors or sunglasses, except when the photos were publicly released by a service or DoD. Source references (end notes) utilize the assigned pseudonym.

“On my orders the United States military has begun strikes against al Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan”

**George W. Bush,
President of the
United States,
7 October 2001⁵**



This article covers the creation of the CJSOTF-A in early 2002, general operations for 13 years, and its deactivation in 2014. Organized by Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) phases, the key operational events which caused the CJSOTF-A to assume new missions are highlighted and placed in context with operational and strategic decisions redirecting efforts. While how the command and control functioned in CJSOTF-A is central, what happened at levels above and below makes the rationale for role and mission changes more understandable.



OEF (Afghanistan) Phase I (Liberation):

11 September 2001 - 30 November 2001

In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, President George W. Bush directed military action against the perpetrators.⁶ Having determined that Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda (AQ) terrorist network were responsible and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan were providing them with support and safe haven, the National Command Authority made plans to defeat AQ and topple the Taliban in Afghanistan. Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) had a key role in those plans. The Special Operations Command of U.S. Central Command (SOCCENT) formulated and

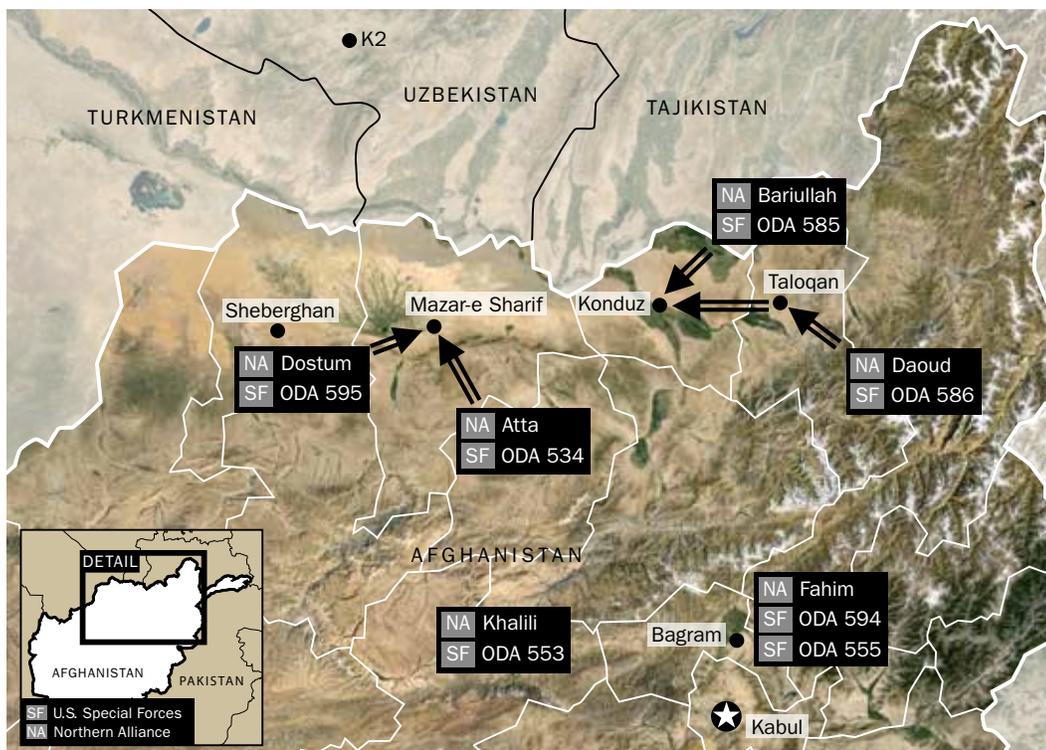
conducted an unconventional warfare (UW) campaign to advise and assist Afghan elements willing to overthrow the Taliban in Afghanistan.⁷

The SOF UW campaign had two major components, each designed to fit the situation on the ground in Afghanistan. In northern Afghanistan, where indigenous forces (like the Northern Alliance [NA]) had long been fighting the Taliban, SOCCENT initially created JSOTF-North with an Air Force Special Operations unit tasked with Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) operations. Air Force Colonel (COL) Frank J. Kisner, Commander, 16th Operations Group, Hurlburt Field, FL, got to Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Airbase in Uzbekistan on 5 October 2001 just as the advance echelon (ADVON) from 5th SFG arrived. The U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) air campaign was scheduled to begin 7 October.⁸ And, it did with air and missile attacks throughout Afghanistan.⁹

However, the intent of the National Command Authority (NCA) had been to put ‘boots on the ground’ in Afghanistan. U.S. Army SOF would spearhead that effort.¹⁰ As SF ODAs were infiltrating into Afghanistan to advise and assist the anti-Taliban groups, Army Rangers made parachute assaults to seize key Taliban leaders. Based on wartime alignment with CENTCOM, the 5th SFG, Fort Campbell, KY, would provide the Special Forces. COL John F. Mulholland Jr. would assume command of JSOTF-North when his SF teams began entering Afghanistan (10 October 2001). Understanding the sensitivity of that relationship, COL Kisner blended the two staffs into one seamless



Aerial view of Karshi Khanabad (K2) Airbase, Uzbekistan, early 2002.



Map showing initial SF ODAs operating with Northern Alliance (NA) forces in Northern Afghanistan, October 2001.

organization while suborning himself to Mulholland as Deputy Commander, JSOTF-North.¹¹

As the situation changed, SOCCENT divided Afghanistan roughly in half; JSOTF-N would conduct Unconventional Warfare (UW) in the northern half. Its mission was to kill or capture AQ leaders and to seize control from the Taliban. They would do this by training, equipping, and advising the Afghan forces willing to fight the Taliban. A major SF task was to control and direct U.S. and allied airpower to support the attacks on Taliban positions. ODAs, augmented by U.S. Air Force Combat Control Teams (CCT) and tactical air control parties (TACP), finalized preparations in isolation. In the darkness of 19-20 October 2001, the first two ODAs were flown into northern Afghanistan. MH-47E 'Chinook' helicopters from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR)

overcame challenges of inclement weather, high mountains, and low visibility to deliver the teams to their specified landing zones. More ODAs were inserted in the next few days, each establishing contact with anti-Taliban leadership throughout the north. Together with coalition air support, they pushed the Taliban from power, forcing withdrawals into the mountainous border regions.¹² On 22 October, General (GEN) Tommy R. Franks, CENTCOM Commander, approved the redesignation of JSOTF-North to Task Force (TF) DAGGER.¹³

Southern Afghanistan had different problems. Populated predominantly with Taliban-supporting Pashtun tribes, the south had few indigenous forces to advise and assist. Thus, the CJSOTF-South, formed on 17 October 2001, focused on Direct Action (DA) and SR missions rather than UW. U.S. Navy Captain Robert S. Harward, the Naval Special



COL John F. Mulholland Jr. (L), Commander, JSOTF-North/Task Force DAGGER, providing GEN Richard B. Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a brief at Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Airbase in Uzbekistan.



Personnel assigned to JSOTF-North/TF DAGGER were awarded the Joint Meritorious Unit Award (above left) as well as the Army Presidential Unit Citation (above right) for actions in Afghanistan from 6 October 2001-28 February 2002 (DAGO 9; 18 November 2005, DAGO 32; 29 December 2009).

Warfare Group One (NSWG-1) commander, renamed his headquarters TF K-BAR.¹⁴ CJSOTF-S/TF K-BAR controlled other Naval Special Warfare units (SEALs), a battalion of Army Special Forces, Air Force SOF assets, U.S. Marines, and Coalition SOF from seven nations. The two Marine Expeditionary Units (Special Operations Capable) (MEU [SOC]) had organic aviation, fire support, and combat service support elements. By late October TF K-BAR had dislodged enemy fighters from the Kandahar area and was liberating the adjacent provinces to free the southern and eastern regions from Taliban control. By taking the fight to the leaders, they rapidly reduced the ability of the Taliban and AQ to dominate the populace.¹⁵



OEF (A) Phase II (Consolidation I):

1 December 2001 - 30 September 2006

By December 2001, the collective efforts of JSOTF-North and CJSOTF-South had forced the Taliban from power and most of Afghanistan was controlled by allied indigenous forces. SOF had been the supported force for the capture of Kabul on 13 November and Kandahar on 7 December. That status was reversed to supporting when conventional forces in Afghanistan assumed the long-term missions of stabilization and elimination of the bypassed strongholds of Taliban and AQ.¹⁶

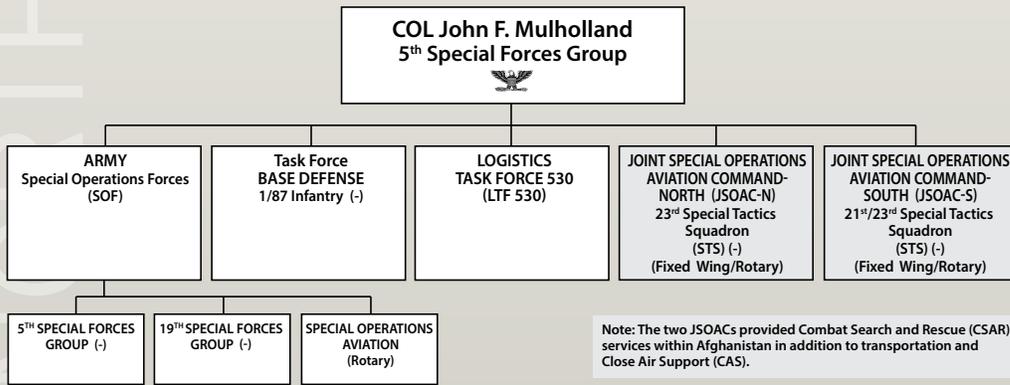


For its actions, the personnel of CJSOTF-S/TF K-BAR were awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Presidential Unit Citation.

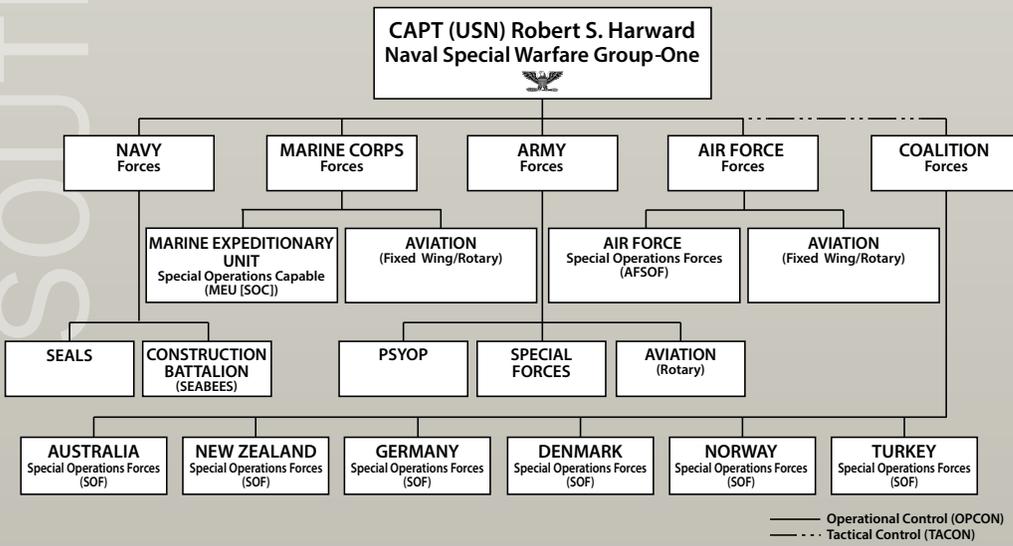
As storm clouds continued to grow over Iraq, SOCCENT closed out CJSOTF-North (TF DAGGER) on 15 March 2002 and expanded the CJSOTF-South (TF K-BAR) mission to encompass all Afghanistan. The new CJSOTF-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A) consolidated the staffs and transferred all SOF elements under one command responsible for conducting UW missions country-wide.¹⁷ With the 5th SFG rotating back to the States for new contingencies, COL Mark V. Phelan, 3rd SFG, assumed command of CJSOTF-A at Bagram Airbase on 30 March. Commensurately, SOCCENT authorized CJSOTF-A additional staffing and granted expanded authorities--operational control (OPCON) of all joint SOF and tactical control (TACON) of assigned coalition SOF elements.¹⁸

During the transition period, CJSOTF-A inherited a commitment to Operation ANACONDA, the largest military operation in the war to date. Several SF ODAs and Navy SEAL platoons had been sent to perform strategic reconnaissance and to 'fix' the reported AQ and Taliban forces concentrating in the steep mountainous caverns in the Shahi-Kot region of eastern Afghanistan. Other SOF units had been brought in to block and contain the enemy forces with anti-Taliban forces (ATF) as they were located.¹⁹ The ATF had been promised considerable air support. To exploit SOF successes, infantry battalions from the U.S. 10th Mountain and 101st Airborne Divisions were helicoptered into assault positions while the SOF and ATF blocked the exits from the Shahi-Kot valley. Instead of breaking contact and escaping into Pakistan, the Taliban and AQ forces fought from strong defenses under well-directed protective fire of mortars and artillery. Consequently, U.S. conventional forces, decisively engaged, relied heavily on airpower. The stalemated fighting lasted until 8 March 2002 when CENTCOM proclaimed ANACONDA a success. U.S. casualties were light: eight killed in action (KIA) and

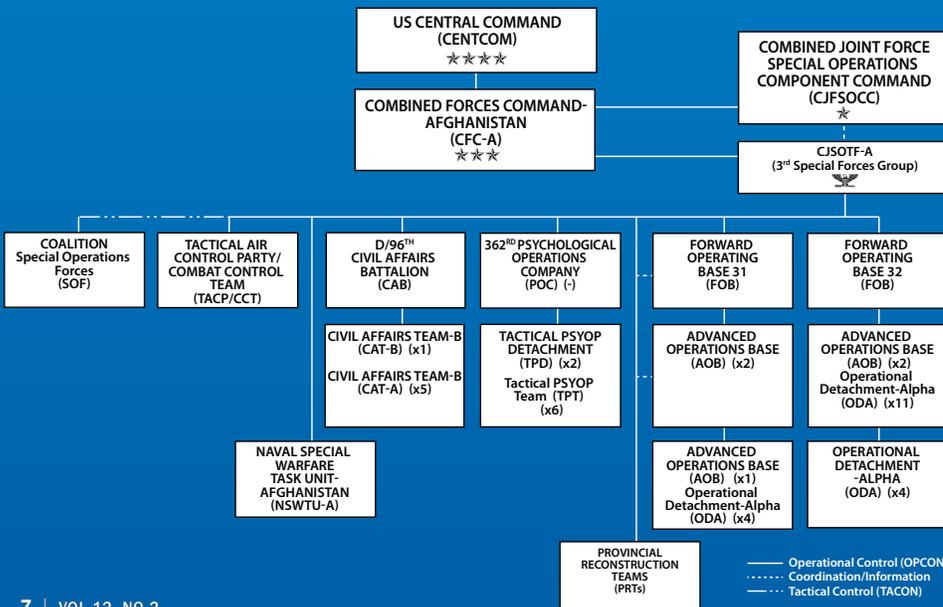
Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (JSOTF-N)/Task Force DAGGER



Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-South (CJSOTF-S)/Task Force K-BAR



Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A)



TWO BECOME ONE

TF DAGGER & TF K-BAR, Before and After

Initially, USCENTCOM divided responsibility for Afghanistan between two separate and distinct SOF structures: JSOTF-North/TF DAGGER and CJSOTF-South/TF K-BAR. On 15 March 2002 SOCCENT combined the SOF assets of both organizations into a new CJSOTF-Afghanistan structure, initially formed around CJSOTF-S. On 30 March 2002, COL Mark V. Phelan (3rd SFG commander) assumed command of CJSOTF-A at Bagram Airbase. The 3rd SFG played a major role in CJSOTF-A for the next twelve years, until it was officially deactivated on 31 October 2014.

Map showing SF ODAs operating with anti-Taliban Militia (ATM) forces in Southern Afghanistan, October - December 2001.



The old Russian control tower as it appeared when the first U.S. forces arrived at Bagram Airbase in late 2001. The tower, a familiar landmark to deployed service members and civilians who worked there, was built on Bagram Airbase in 1976 during the Soviet Union's period of economic collaboration with Afghanistan.



46 wounded. The Taliban and AQ casualty figures, difficult to confirm, were much higher.²⁰ Official estimates said “Up to several hundred enemy fighters were killed. The rest fled the Shahi-Kot Valley, leaving it in the control of U.S. and allied forces.”²¹ Impact on the new CJSOTF-A headquarters was minimal because much of the coordination to support the SOF in the fight had already been arranged before ANACONDA. Still ‘lightly-manned,’ the CJSOTF-A had its hands full with communications and sustainment requirements.

The second task involved constructing a secure base in-country. The old Soviet airbase outside of Bagram was much closer to the fight than K2 Airbase in Uzbekistan. Bagram was quickly assessed as being safe enough to house its JSOTF headquarters and personnel without excessive risk. On 30 November 2001, GEN Franks decided that Bagram

Airbase would be the Forward Operating Base (FOB) for all combat and humanitarian operations in Afghanistan. It posed its own challenges. Just fifty-five kilometers north of Kabul, the Taliban and Northern Alliance had fought over Bagram for more than a decade. As one would expect of a constant battleground, the infrastructure was in shambles and few amenities remained. Nonetheless, American and coalition units began offloading tons of supplies and materials. An operational command and control facility was key to transferring control from K2 to Bagram. The top engineer priority was to rehabilitate the runway for cargo jet aircraft operations. Facilities were a close second. The CJSOTF-A headquarters staff competed with advance parties of the several units assigned to establish ‘homes’ on Bagram Airbase (see article on Camp Abel).²²

“When we were here before, we began the process of building the ANA. Coming back this time, three brigades had been completed and it allowed us to start maneuvering and utilizing the ANA battalions on the battlefield. And that has had a dramatic positive impact.”

**COL Joseph D. Celeski,
two-time Commander of
CJSOTF-A, 2003³⁰**



COL Joseph D. 'Joe' Celeski, CJSOTF-A and 3rd SFG commander, in Afghanistan. COL Celeski served twice as the commander of CJSOTF-A in its formative days, adding a degree of stability and cohesion to that organization during a particularly difficult period of its history.

A third challenge for the combined/joint headquarters staff was to effect a change of command less than two months after formation and in the midst of combat operations. When COL Phelan assumed command of CJSOTF-A on 30 March 2002, he was already slated for reassignment after two years of command. COL Joseph D. 'Joe' Celeski, his successor, arrived in Bagram in mid-May and became familiar with the situation. On 28 May, COL Celeski took command of the 3rd SFG and CJSOTF-A during a simple ceremony outside the motor pool. A combat veteran of DESERT STORM with considerable experience in Somalia, COL Celeski focused on his immediate critical key tasks.²³ Combat operations continued as planned, but the expansion of GWOT to include Iraq had distinct impacts.

With the eviction of the Taliban from power and all major cities and towns now under coalition control, America's attention shifted to future combat in Iraq. The Afghanistan war slipped into shadow because Iraq's large conventional military forces mandated a major strategic shift to accommodate that fight--manpower, funding, and support priorities were significantly reduced. GEN Tommy L. Franks shifted responsibility for all combat operations in Afghanistan to a corps-level Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF)-180 headquarters formed on 1 June 2002 using the XVIII Airborne Corps staff.²⁴ The CJSOTF-A became a supporting command under the Tactical Control (TACON) of Lieutenant General (LTG) Dan K. McNeill and CJTF-180. This arrangement was in effect until December 2005. The

SOF elements of CJTF-180 produced a prodigious amount of intelligence in support of conventional force operations.²⁵ As that relationship matured during the formation of an Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) in June 2002, SOF assumed a larger Foreign Internal Defense (FID) role.

In addition to finding (Special Reconnaissance), fixing, and engaging the enemy, SOF was advising and assisting the Afghan militias in combat operations against the Taliban and al Qaeda. But, more significantly, the CJSOTF-A was tasked to train a new Afghan National Army (ANA). This would be done at a new training camp near Kabul (Kabul Military Training Center). Defense Secretary Rumsfeld authorized another SF battalion for that mission, raising the SF battalions to three. CJSOTF-A began supervising the formation, training, and equipping of new ANA units.²⁷

The 1st Battalion, 3rd SFG created a specially-tailored Program of Instruction (POI) approved by the CJSOTF-A headquarters. SF instructors were to produce a fully-equipped, trained to standard, Afghan National Army (ANA) battalion every ten weeks. During recruit training, the SF cadre also selected natural Afghan leaders to serve as instructors in successive classes. This was done purposefully to commit the Afghan military to train-to-standard. These progressive transfers of responsibility went smoothly. At the first ANA battalion graduation ceremony, Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Kevin M. McDonnell (1/3 SFG battalion commander and ANA Training Program Manager [PM]) said, "We're here to help the Afghans ensure

“I would get reports from my subordinate headquarters, which was CJTF-180, then CJTF-76, and they got reports from CJSOTF [Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force], and they got reports from all their various component piece parts out there.”

**LTG David W. Barno,
Commander, Combined
Forces Command -
Afghanistan,
2003-2005²⁶**

that the people that attacked us . . . do not come back and terrorize the civilians of Afghanistan.”²⁸ After watching the first three battalions in action, COL ‘Joe’ Celeski, CJSOTF-A commander, said that their combat proficiency made them valuable assets. It “allowed us to start maneuvering and utilizing ANA units on the battlefield. And that has had a dramatic positive impact” in the Afghan conflict.²⁹

Until October 2003, CJSOTF-A had three SF battalions in-country; one in the north operating from K2, a second in Kandahar to cover the large swath of border region in the south and east; and a third dedicated to training the Afghan National Army (ANA) in Kabul. Coalition SOF elements (see sidebar) and a Navy SEAL platoon rotated the SR and DA missions throughout Afghanistan. In later years the SEAL platoons grew to SEAL team-size (roughly SF battalion equivalent) and U.S. Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC) battalions and companies were added to rotations. The SEAL Team and Marine Special Operations Battalions (MSOBs) also replaced SF battalion Special Operations Task Forces (SOTFs) for a number of cycles. Initially, the assigned Civil Affairs (CA) battalion

and tactical Psychological Operations (PSYOP) company ‘pushed’ detachments to CJSOTF-A subordinate SOTFs, Advanced Operating Bases (AOBs), and individual ODAs when needed. In succeeding rotations, the CA commitment to CJSOTF-A shrank to company size because of Iraq.³¹

The early SF rotations in Afghanistan were predominantly borne by the 3rd and 7th SFG headquarters, augmented by individuals and elements from other active component SF Groups and the two Army National Guard (ANG) SF Groups (19th and 20th SFGs). The 20th SFG also covered the CJSOTF-A command element commitment for one six-month period. Eventually, every active SF battalion and most ANG SF battalions served at least one deployment with many returning several times. The 3rd and 7th SFG staffs habitually rotated as the nucleus of the CJSOTF-A headquarters. Force planners at USSOCOM and USASOC soon developed a long-term rotation plan centered on 3rd SFG as the executive agent for CJSOTF-A with 7th SFG providing some relief from that commitment. Tour lengths became standardized to better manage troop rotations. USSOCOM coordinated the assignment of other service SOF components into the

Trainees from the 1st Battalion, Afghanistan National Army (ANA), graduate at the Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC) in Kabul, Afghanistan. *DoD Photo.*



COALITION SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 9/11, several nations contributed Special Operations Forces (SOF) to fight alongside U.S. SOF in Afghanistan. The first seven nations to contribute such forces were Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, and Turkey. Most were national Counter Terrorism (CT) forces that specialized in Direct Action (DA) missions. Because of that, the coalition SOF were initially assigned to Task Force K-BAR (CJSOTF-South), and transferred in May 2002 when CJSOTF-A was formed.¹

Serving in elements that ranged from teams to companies, these were extremely capable in their own right. Elements often performed Special Reconnaissance (SR) or DA missions, or served as ready reaction forces for emergency backup. The various contingents rotated in and out of theater according to agreements and commitments made by their national government. The coalition SOF units filled important gaps in the CJSOTF-A structure and reinforced the international commitment for combat action in Afghanistan.²

The Original Coalition SOF Forces Assigned to CJSOTF-A

There are a number of terms that describe relationships between U.S. Forces and military units from other nations. To help clarify those relationships, we have provided definitions for some of the more commonly used terms. These definitions are found in Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*.

Alliance

The relationship that results from a formal agreement between two or more nations for broad, long-term objectives that further the common interests of the members. See also coalition; multinational.

Coalition

An arrangement between two or more nations for common action. See also alliance; multinational.

Combined

A term identifying two or more forces or agencies of two or more allies operating together.

Multinational

Between two or more forces or agencies of two or more nations or coalition partners. See also alliance; coalition.

NATO

North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (Can be a sub-set of coalition, allied, or multinational forces)



The Afghanistan war is “by design and necessity, an economy-of-force operation. There is no getting around that. Our main focus, militarily, in the region and in the world right now is rightly and firmly in Iraq.”³⁴

**Admiral Michael G. Mullen,
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff**

deployment plan. The pattern of replacing elements after six-month intervals became the *modus operandi* which allowed the U.S. Army Special Forces Command (USASFC) and USSOCOM to draw from a larger population base.³²

By late 2003, Afghanistan had clearly become an economy of force effort. The primary focus of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) was Iraq. Troop levels in 2007 reinforced that status; 166,000 troops in Iraq versus 25,000 in Afghanistan, almost seven times larger. Conventional and SOF manning in Afghanistan dropped to minimal levels by mid-2003.³³ A shift in SOF operational focus caused other changes in CJSOTF-A missions.

The ANA training mission disappeared in mid-2003 for American SOF when the CJTF-180 commander, LTG Lloyd J. Austin, transferred that responsibility to 10th Mountain Division.³⁵ This would be done by a newly-formed TF PHOENIX (June 2003). That prompted a mission analysis by CJSOTF-A resulting in SOF forces continuing to train Afghan militia and targeting key AQ and Taliban leaders for capture or elimination. SF teams were reduced.³⁶ And, when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) assumed responsibility for northern Afghanistan, the CJSOTF-A repositioned its SOF teams to cover the Pakistan border. Hence, by September 2003, there were only two SF battalions (minus) at Bagram and Kandahar. These two American SF FOBs, augmented by Naval Special Warfare elements and coalition SOF, focused on DA and SR missions.³⁷

A rise in politically motivated violence and criminal activities led to more conventional forces being committed to Afghanistan to stabilize the situation. In April 2004, the newly-organized Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan (CFC-A) led by Major General (MG) David W. Barno, divided the area of operations (AO) into Regional Command (RC) South and RC East for Operation TICONDEROGA. CJSOTF-A was to concentrate forces on the Pakistan border while conventional forces conducted stability and support operations (SASO) in the interior. Civil Affairs (CA) teams were allocated to help non-SOF Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) country-wide.³⁸

Spreading its reduced assets to cover more than 750 miles of rugged mountains that dominated the Pakistan-Afghanistan

border presented major challenges: First, there were insufficient Afghan forces partnered with SOF to properly do the border security mission; Second, by concentrating SOF along the border, its presence was removed from large portions of the interior and their well-cultivated sources of intelligence on enemy activities and movement went untended; Third, SOF support in Iraq had reduced sustainment in Afghanistan to a trickle. Twenty-five SF ODAs distantly arrayed along the long border region were extremely difficult for CJSOTF-A to resupply, let alone interdict Taliban and AQ fighters and supplies coming into Afghanistan nightly through remote mountain passes and trails.³⁹ Nonetheless, some progress was made.

In December 2004, just before Afghan national elections, a few CJSOTF-A elements were partnered with ANA *kandaks* (battalions) to bolster their fighting spirit in combat. This proved beneficial to both in April 2005 when a *kandak* in RC South successfully attacked a long-established AQ sanctuary (Operation NAM DONG).⁴¹ The ANA accomplishments got the attention of American and Afghan military leaders. The significant part played by SF led to major changes in the CJSOTF-A mission set.



SF soldiers from SOTF-South and ANA soldiers prepare at Kandahar in 2009 for a combined night combat mission.

“Special Operations Forces had killed or captured hundreds of terrorists and insurgents using precisely targeted offensive operations.”

**GEN Bryan D. ‘Doug’ Brown,
Commander, USSOCOM, 2005 ⁴⁰**

COMMANDERS AND SENIOR ENLISTED ADVISORS

CJSOTF-A

COMBINED JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS TASK FORCE-AFGHANISTAN

UNIT	DATES	COMMANDER	SENIOR ENLISTED ADVISOR
NSWG-1	03/14/02 - 03/30/02	CAPT (USN) Robert S. Harward	BMCM (SEAL) Ronald D. Cooper
3 rd SFG	03/30/02 - 05/28/02	COL Mark V. Phelan	CSM Christopher W. Abel
3 rd SFG	05/28/02 - 09/18/02	COL Joseph D. Celeski	CSM Francis McFadden
20 th SFG	09/18/02 - 03/29/03	COL James G. Champion	CSM Albert Allen
3 rd SFG	03/29/03 - 09/21/03	COL Joseph D. Celeski	CSM Francis McFadden
3 rd SFG	09/21/03 - 07/01/04	COL Walter M. Herd	CSM Thomas A. Reesman / CSM George A. Bequer
3 rd SFG	07/01/04 - 12/01/04	COL Patrick M. Higgins	CSM Francis McFadden
7 th SFG	12/01/04 - 07/01/05	COL Jeffrey D. Waddell	CSM Keith W. Kocher
3 rd SFG	07/01/05 - 02/01/06	COL Patrick M. Higgins	CSM Francis McFadden / CSM David J. LaFountain
7 th SFG	02/01/06 - 09/01/06	COL Edward M. Reeder Jr.	CSM Christopher R. Zets
3 rd SFG	09/01/06 - 04/01/07	COL Christopher K. Haas	CSM David J. LaFountain
7 th SFG	04/01/07 - 11/01/07	COL Edward M. Reeder Jr.	CSM Christopher R. Zets
3 rd SFG	11/01/07 - 05/29/08	COL Christopher K. Haas	CSM Terry L. Peters
7 th SFG	05/29/08 - 01/29/09	COL Sean P. Mulholland	CSM George A. Bequer
3 rd SFG	01/29/09 - 07/29/09	COL Gus Benton II	CSM Jeffrey W. Wright
7 th SFG	07/29/09 - 01/30/10	COL James E. Kraft	CSM George A. Bequer
3 rd SFG	01/30/10 - 04/01/10	COL Gus Benton II	CSM Jeffrey W. Wright
3 rd SFG	04/01/10 - 05/16/11	COL Donald C. Bolduc	CSM Jeffrey W. Wright / CSM Richard P. Meffert
3 rd SFG	05/16/11 - 04/02/12	COL Mark C. Schwartz	CSM Richard P. Meffert
7 th SFG	04/02/12 - 03/30/13	COL Antonio M. Fletcher	CSM Brian D. Edwards
3 rd SFG	03/30/13 - 11/30/13	COL Patrick B. Roberson	CSM Brian C. Rarey
7 th SFG	11/30/13 - 07/31/14	COL Christopher N. Riga	CSM Amil Alvarez
3 rd SFG	07/31/14 - 10/31/14	COL Robert L. Wilson	CSM Brian C. Rarey

CJSOTF-A TIMELINE

2001

11 September

Terrorists attack targets in the United States. **Phase I of Afghanistan Campaign (Liberation of Afghanistan) begins.**

14 September

President Bush authorizes call-up of 35,000 Reserves. Congress passes Joint Resolution 23, "Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists."

20 September

ARSOF elements deployed to U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF). Initially organized into task forces assigned to the Special Operations Command, Central Command (SOCCENT). **SOCCENT activates the Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A) in Qatar.**

15 October

Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (JSOTF-N) formed from 5th SFG (A), 160th SOAR; USAF 16th SOW; COL John F. Mulholland Jr. commanding. On 23 October JSOTF-N is also designated as Task Force DAGGER, and tasked to conduct Unconventional Warfare (UW) operations in Northern Afghanistan.

17 October

CFSOCC-A activates Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-South (CJSOTF-S) from Task Force K-BAR, a unit formed from Naval Special Warfare Group One (NSWG-1) (commanded by Navy Captain Robert S. Harward); ARSOF; and Coalition SOF. CJSOTF-S will deploy to Kandahar in November 2001 to conduct combat operations in that region and along the border with Pakistan.

19 October

Special Forces (SF) Operational Detachment - Alpha (ODA) 555 and ODA 595 infiltrate into Northern Afghanistan and establish contact with Northern Alliance forces. SOF assists indigenous forces in fighting the Taliban and al Qaeda.

14 November

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1378 invites member nations to provide peacekeeping troops and assist in governing Afghanistan.

30 November

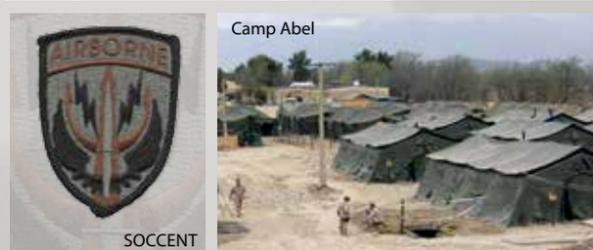
Conflict in Afghanistan shifts from SOF-led effort to conventional fight. **Phase II of Afghanistan Campaign and Phase I of Consolidation begin.**

6 December

The Battle for Tora Bora begins in the White Mountains of Eastern Afghanistan. The attempt to kill or capture Osama bin Laden, leader of al Qaeda, ends on 17 December with Coalition Forces in control of the area. The al Qaeda leader escaped.

20 December

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1386 authorizes the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to help the Afghan Interim Authority maintain security in Kabul and surrounding areas. ISAF later expands to cover all of Afghanistan.



2002

January

USSOCOM tasks 3rd SFG (A) to provide troops and focus on the Afghanistan region.

2 March

Operation ANACONDA, to destroy remaining Taliban fighters in the Shahi-Kot Valley in Paktia Province, commences. It ends on 18 March after inflicting heavy casualties on the Taliban.

15 March

Afghanistan SOF reorganization occurs. **CJSOTF-A** formed from CJSOTF-S (TF K-BAR) and JSOTF-N (TF DAGGER). CJSOTF-A is given Operational Control (OPCON) of all Joint SOF and Tactical Control (TACON) of Coalition SOF in Afghanistan. **CFSOCC-A inactivated.**

30 March

3rd SFG (A) commander COL Mark V. Phelan assumes command of CJSOTF-A at Bagram Airbase, Afghanistan.

28 May

COL Joseph D. Celeski takes command of 3rd SFG (A) and CJSOTF-A. This begins a rotational pattern in transferring CJSOTF-A responsibilities.

13 June

Loya Jirga appoints Hamid Karzai as Interim President.

18 September

20th SFG (A) assumes CJSOTF-A mission for six months.

2003

20 March

U.S. begins the invasion of Iraq. Operation Iraqi Freedom becomes the main effort in the Global War on Terror; units in Afghanistan must compete for resources, support, and funding.

4 June

Task Force PHOENIX activated, assumes former CJSOTF-A mission as primary trainer of the Afghan National Army.

11 August

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) assumes responsibility for ISAF in and around Kabul.

7 November

CJSOTF-A supports the 10th Mountain Division in Operation MOUNTAIN RESOLVE. For about a month, CJSOTF-A elements serve as the 'anvil' in a conventional force-led 'hammer and anvil' operation.

14 December

Constitutional Loya Jirga begins Afghanistan self-rule.

2004

9 October

Afghanistan holds first democratic elections. Hamid Karzai becomes first democratically elected President of Afghanistan.



2006

30 September

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)/ISAF assumes responsibility for security over all of Afghanistan. **Phase III of Afghanistan Campaign and Phase II of Consolidation begin.**

2007

10 January

U.S. announces plans for a troop surge in Iraq.

24 July

First ANA Commando *Kandak* graduates at Camp Morehead.

2008

17 November

Signing of U.S.-Iraq Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) sets the date for all U.S. Forces to be out of Iraq: 31 December 2011.

2009

31 January

CFSOCC-A re-established in Afghanistan under the command of BG Edward M. Reeder Jr. Coalition Force numbers increased in Afghanistan as troop numbers in Iraq decreased. The increase in ISAF headquarters levels result in a flag rank command to conduct SOF planning and coordination. CJSOTF-A is OPCON to CFSOCC-A.

15 June

GEN Stanley A. McChrystal assumes command of ISAF. Develops and implements a strategy for population-centric counterinsurgency (COIN).

July

CFSOCC-A and CJSOTF-A establish the first Community Defense Initiative (CDI) site at Nili village, Daykundi Province (SF ODA 7224). CDI later becomes Local Defense Initiative (LDI), and by 2010 is commonly called *Village Stability Operations (VSO)*.

21 August

USSOCOM assigns 3rd Special Forces Group primary responsibility for Afghanistan region. It formalized SF assignment of regions in the Middle East. The directive also stabilized tour lengths. 7th Group to assist in that responsibility.

30 November

President Barack Obama authorizes an increase of 30,000 U.S. forces in Afghanistan, raising the total to 100,000.

Phase IV of Afghanistan Campaign (Consolidation III) begins 1 December 2009.

2010

1 April

A realignment is made where CFSOCC-A becomes OPCON to ISAF. CJSOTF-A is still commanded by CFSOCC-A, but its subordinate SOTFs are placed in direct support of the conventional force Regional Commands (RCs). CJSOTF-A continues to conduct Village Stability Operations (VSO) and FID as primary missions.

13 May

First ANA Special Forces Qualification Course graduates at Camp Morehead.

4 July

GEN David H. Petraeus assumes command of U.S. and ISAF forces in Afghanistan.



UNITED NATIONS



ANA Commando SSI



GEN Stanley A. McChrystal



SOFA Signed



VSO Site, Nili, ODA 7224



MG Edward M. Reeder Jr.



GEN David H. Petraeus



3rd SFG



ANA SF SSI



ANA Commando Graduate

20 November

NATO nations agree to the Lisbon Summit to transfer security responsibilities to Afghanistan and withdraw NATO combat forces by the end of 2014.

2011

2 May

Operation NEPTUNE SPEAR, the mission to capture or kill Osama bin Laden, is successful. Bin Laden killed in raid on his house in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

22 June

President Barack Obama announces plans for a drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan and a plan to transfer all security responsibilities to Afghanistan forces by the end of 2014.

30 June

Phase V of Afghanistan Campaign (Transition I) begins 1 July 2011.

18 December

Last U.S. forces depart Iraq. Attention and priorities shift back to Afghanistan.

2012

1 July

CFSOCC-A transitions to NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (NSOCC-A)/Special Operations Joint Task Force-Afghanistan (SOJTF-A), a two-star headquarters (MG Raymond A. 'Tony' Thomas III) with command authority over all Allied SOF in Afghanistan.

2013

18 June

Afghanistan National Army (ANA) assumes responsibility from NATO forces for all military and security operations.

2014

29 September

New Afghanistan government: Dr. Ashraf Ghani elected as Afghanistan President; Dr. Abdullah Abdullah becomes Chief Executive Officer.

30 September

New Afghanistan government signs Bilateral Security Agreement and SOFA.

31 October

CJSOTF-A deactivated at Camp Vance, Bagram Airbase, Afghanistan.

1 November

Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (SOTF-A) assumes command of all U.S. SOF assigned to advise-assist missions in the country. It remains OPCON to SOJTF-A.

31 December

United States ends all direct combat operations in Afghanistan.

Phase V of Afghanistan Campaign (and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM) ends.

2015

1 January

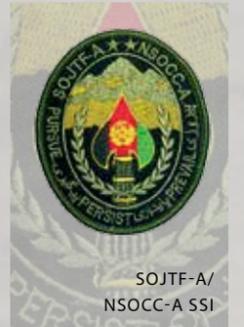
Transition II (and Operation FREEDOM'S SENTINEL) begins.



Operation NEPTUNE SPEAR



US Drawdown in Afghanistan



SOJTF-A/
NSOCC-A SSI



ANA



Dr. Ashraf Ghani



Camp Vance



Operation FREEDOM'S SENTINEL

COMMANDERS AND SENIOR ENLISTED ADVISORS

CFSOCC-A

COMBINED FORCES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMPONENT COMMAND-AFGHANISTAN

DATES

01/31/09-03/10/10
03/10/10 - 07/01/11
07/01/11 - 07/01/12

COMMANDER

BG Edward M. Reeder Jr.
BG Austin S. Miller
BG Christopher K. Haas

SENIOR ENLISTED ADVISOR

CSM Kurt D. Lugo
CSM Ledford 'JR' Stigall
CSM David R. Gibbs/CSM Jeffery D. Stigall

NSOCC-A / SOJTF-A

NATO SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMPONENT COMMAND-AFGHANISTAN/
SPECIAL OPERATIONS JOINT TASK FORCE-AFGHANISTAN

DATES

07/01/12 - 06/13
06/13 - 07/01/14
07/01/14 - 06/01/15
06/01/15 - Present

COMMANDER

MG Raymond A. 'Tony' Thomas
MG Austin S. Miller
MG Edward M. Reeder Jr.
MG Sean P. Swindell

SENIOR ENLISTED ADVISOR

CSM Jeffrey W. Wright
CSM Ledford 'JR' Stigall
CSM Channing C. Bell
CSM James D. Napolett

(L to R) Army COL Donald C. Bolduc, CJSOTF-A Commander and CJSOTF-A Army CSM Jeffrey W. Wright, unveil a commemorative wooden plaque for placement in the CJSOTF-A Hall of Heroes. The men and women of the unit hosted a Memorial Day 'Honor and Remembrance' Ceremony at Camp Vance, Bagram Airbase, 31 May 2010.



“...when several of the [enemy] leaders tried to return to the villages after Operation NAM DONG, they were run out of town by the people they had suppressed for years.”⁴²

Soldiers from the 3rd Company, 6th Afghan Commando *Kandak* conduct a room clearing exercise in the 'tire house' at Camp Morehead, Kabul, Afghanistan, in 2011. The training is supervised by SF soldiers assigned to CJSOTF-A. DoD photo.



Throughout Phase II of OEF-A (May 2002 – September 2006), CJSOTF-A forces focused on DA and SR to provide intelligence to support a conventional force offense. But their efforts were clearly minor compared to the major initiatives going on in Iraq. By mid-2006, coalition partners were voicing concerns that the security situation in Afghanistan was getting worse. With Iraq as the top American priority, political and military leaders faced a dilemma—how to improve conditions in Afghanistan sufficiently to allow a reduction of military forces. The conundrum prompted SOCCENT to come up with resourceful solutions for the next phase of the long campaign. These initiatives modified SOF missions in Afghanistan.



OEF (A) Phase III (Consolidation II):

1 October 2006 - 30 November 2009

In the winter of 2006, Brigadier General (BG) Francis H. 'Frank' Kearney, the SOCCENT commander, directed COL Edward M. Reeder Jr., the 7th SFG/CJSOTF-A commander, to investigate the possibility of creating Special Forces-type units within the ANA. After a thorough analysis COL Reeder concluded that the Afghan military “did not have the core capability to develop, task-organize, equip, train and sustain” SF units. However, Reeder felt that light-infantry commando forces like the U.S. Army Rangers could be organized and trained.⁴³ The commando battalions could spearhead ANA offensive operations. BG Kearney approved a 'pilot' program to prove the concept.

Based on his assessment, COL Reeder set out to “build a well-organized, well-trained, and well-led infantry fighting force.”⁴⁴ One hundred ANA soldiers were selected and sent to Jordan to be trained in small unit leadership skills by 5th SFG soldiers. When they returned home the graduates became the instructors for a new Commando Training Course set up at the Camp Morehead near Kabul. The ANA instructors, working closely with COL Reeder's SF advisor teams, then selected, organized and trained volunteers from the 201st Corps to become the first ANA Commando *Kandak* (battalion). Over three months the SF teams provided the trainees with combat marksmanship, small-unit tactics, reconnaissance skills, and land navigation. Organized as squads and platoons for collective training, the future commandos practiced small raids and direct action missions.⁴⁵

The 1st Commando *Kandak* graduated on 24 July 2007. Its 'baptism of fire' operation came in September in Nangarhar Province near the Pakistan border. They captured a high value target (HVT), the Taliban bomb-maker Haji Shir Khan, 80 kilograms (176.5 pounds) of opium, and uncovered two large weapon caches. This success established the reputation of the Commandos and demonstrated their 'value added' to the ANA. Subsequent Commando *kandaks* increased their *elan*. Today, nine Commando *kandaks* are stationed throughout Afghanistan to 'spearhead' ANA combat operations. CJSOTF-A teams provided a true 'force multiplier' to the Afghan military and became partnered with the Commandos.⁴⁶

2007 was also the year that the CJSOTF-A started using the proper doctrinal term Special Operations Task Forces (SOTF) to denote its subordinate battalion-size headquarters

Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs)



PRTs in Afghanistan, 2005

In late 2002, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan formed Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) “to provide a safe and secure environment so that reconstruction work can be done.”¹ PRTs were “an integrated civil-military organization” that allowed centralized international assistance efforts in Kabul to reach into and influence conditions within the most remote provinces.² The 50-100 person PRTs contained both military and civilian personnel, task-organized for service in particular locations. On the military side, most soldiers were Civil Affairs specialists with a security element included to allow the PRT to perform its tasks. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provided most of the civilian component. At first, PRT team leaders were assigned by the Ambassador to ensure the team’s efforts were aligned with the strategic level requirements. The leaders could be either military or civilian, depending on the situation in the PRT’s target area. Later in the war, ISAF assumed control of all PRTs and appointed team leaders.³

Allied components often created PRTs from their own national structure, usually for operating within their nation’s sector of operations. For example, New Zealand created a PRT to operate in Bamian, a province covered by New Zealand forces. Similarly, the Canadians created their own PRT for the Kandahar area when they had responsibility of that area.⁶

By 2007, there were twenty-five PRTs operating in Afghanistan, all under ISAF control.⁷ About half were U.S.-led; the remaining ones were led by coalition nations. By 2013, the PRTs were deactivated in preparation for the full transition to Afghan government control scheduled for the end of 2014.⁸ Their mission ended when the Afghanistan government assumed responsibility for its own security and affairs.



A U.S. Army CPT, the Civil Affairs (CA) team chief and the officer in charge of the Orgun detachment of the Paktika PRT, speaks with local residents of Warjana Kalay, and Orgun district to determine the village’s most-pressing needs and concerns. DoD photo

Essentially, PRTs created “an environment that is secure and stable enough” in their province to allow “international and Afghan civilian agencies to provide development support.” (USAID Report)⁴ Their broad mandate allowed the PRT to focus on three main tasks:

- “Increase provincial stability through international military presence and assist in developing nascent host nation security and rule of law capacity;”
- “Assist the establishment and improvement of local government;” and
- “Facilitate reconstruction at a pace” to:
 - “Provide basic services.”
 - “Provide an economic system that supports the people.”
 - “Gain popular buy-in for change and support of representative government.”
 - “Ensure popular expectations for international assistance are met or debated.”⁵



Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, left foreground, receives a tour of the Camp Morehead Afghan Commando Training Camp by Afghan National Army (ANA) LTC M. Farid Ahmadi in Kabul, Afghanistan, June 4, 2007. DoD photo



ANA Commando SSI

The “nine Commando kandaks. . . remain the most effective fighting force in the Afghan Army.”

BG Edward M. Reeder Jr.⁴⁷

elements. SOTF replaced the previously used Forward Operating Bases (FOBs), a term that conventional forces adopted for specific locations and bases. SF battalion-sized SOTFs were more than support organizations; they directed and supported subordinate special operations elements in the field (AOBs and ODAs), making SOTF the proper term. In time, the SOTFs became aligned with the conventional Regional Commands (RCs) that controlled sections of Afghanistan.⁴⁸

U.S. Army SOF brigadier generals were integrated into the special operations command structure in 2009 as the situation stabilized in Iraq. After six years of benign neglect, the Taliban and AQ had come out of hiding to pose a major threat to American, coalition, and ANA forces. With the creation of the Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command - Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A) on 31 January 2009, an Army SOF general officer became part of ISAF planning and insulated CJSOTF-A from the ‘staff overmatch’ caused by the number of senior commands that had sprung up in Afghanistan as the war progressed.

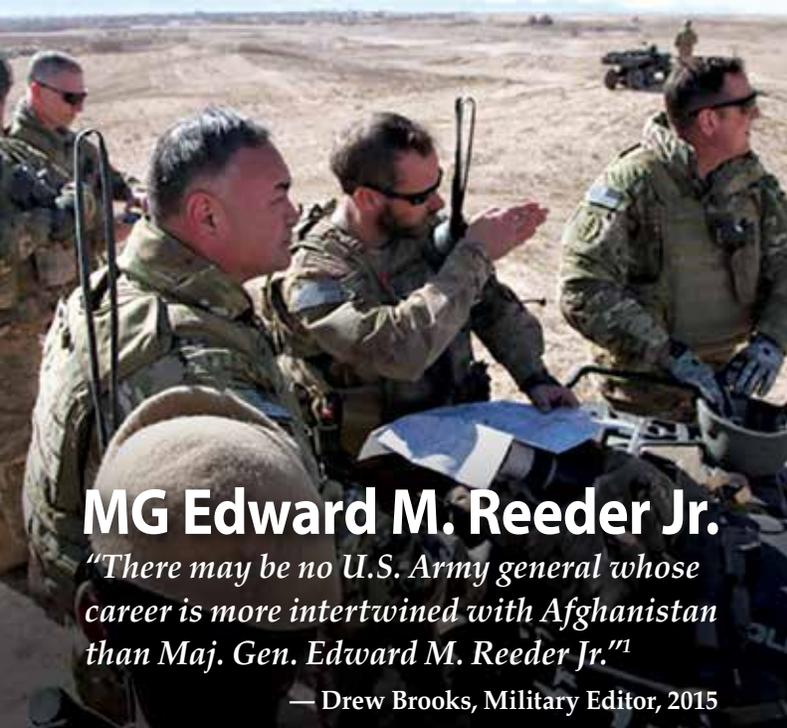
Assigning BG Edward M. Reeder Jr. to command CFSOCC-A put an experienced ‘Afghan hand’ in charge of all UW. Reeder, an El Salvador and JUST CAUSE (Panama) SF veteran, had commanded 2/3 SFG in Kandahar (2002-2003) and had been the CJSOTF-A commander at Bagram twice while 7th SFG commander (2005-2007).⁴⁹ His experience with Afghans and their problems paid dividends. With CJSOTF-A operationally controlled by CFSOCC-A, BG Reeder sought ways to improve local security by “applying unconventional warfare (UW) principles to the fight against Anti-Afghan Forces.” Knowing that Special Forces in Vietnam had relied heavily on Civilian Irregular Defense



Soldiers from ODA 7224 conduct Village Stability Operations (VSO) in Nili, Daykundi Province, 2009.

Group (CIDG) forces to protect rural villages and hamlets, BG Reeder challenged his staff to develop a similar program to be implemented at province level.⁵⁰

Shortly after assuming his post as ISAF commander (15 June 2009), GEN Stanley A. McChrystal introduced his vision of a new population-centric counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy for Afghanistan.⁵¹ BG Reeder’s UW-centric concept embedded SF ODAs at the village level to increase security, provide stability, and lend legitimacy to the central government of Afghanistan. These soon became referred to as Village Stability Operations (VSO). The first VSO site



MG Edward M. Reeder Jr.

“There may be no U.S. Army general whose career is more intertwined with Afghanistan than Maj. Gen. Edward M. Reeder Jr.”¹

— Drew Brooks, Military Editor, 2015

BG Edward M. Reeder Jr., commander of the U.S. Army Special Forces Command (USASFC), visits with special operations forces in Kandahar, 6 January 2012. During the trip, he received updates on the progress being made in village stability operations. MG Reeder had a wealth of experience with SOF in Afghanistan. *DoD photo*

Career Assignments

1982	Commissioned as an Infantry Officer	
1986	Attended Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC)	
1988	Advisor, El Salvador	
1989	Commander, ODA 786, Operation JUST CAUSE, Panama	
2001-2003	Commander, 2 nd Battalion, 3 rd SFG	
2002	Commander, SOTF 32, OEF-A	
2003	Commander, SOTF 32, OEF-A	
2005-2007	Commander, 7 th SFG	
2006	Commander, CJSOTF-A, OEF-A	
2007	Commander, CJSOTF-A, OEF-A	
2009-2010	Commander, CFSOCC-A, OEF-A	Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command - Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A) SSI
2010-2012	Commanding General, U.S. Army Special Forces Command	
2012-2013	Commanding General, USAJFKSWCS	
2013-2014	Commanding General, SOJTF-B	
2014-2015	Commanding General, SOJTF-A/NSOCC-A, OEF-A	

- Denotes combat assignments

established in the village of Nili in Daykundi Province in July 2009 would become the model (see article on VSO – “The Nili Experiment”).⁵²

As more military leaders began treating the mission in Afghanistan as counterinsurgency, BG Reeder directed CJSOTF-A to expand VSO to more locations. Continued success firmly established the program as the way for the future in Afghanistan. By the end of 2009, almost all SF ODAs had moved into VSO sites across the country. CFSOCC-A began soliciting more SOF to cover requests from more VSO coverage. COL Donald C. Bolduc, the CJSOTF-A commander at the time, considered VSO expansion in late 2009 to be “the strategic shaping phase” of the overall ISAF COIN campaign plan.⁵³

On 21 August 2009, USSOCOM emphasized personnel stability and continuity of leadership as critical to the COIN-based strategy for Afghanistan. The 3rd SFG, designated as the ‘framework group’ for forming CJSOTF-A, would provide about 40 percent of the headquarters personnel; the remainder would be sourced from “across the joint special operations community.” CJSOTF-A staff tours were extended from seven months to a year, and SF battalion deployments went from seven months to nine months. These initiatives were designed to increase organizational stability, provide more predictability to plan individual and collective training, lengthen time at home between rotations, and build area familiarity and cultural knowledge in Afghanistan.⁵⁴



OEF (A) Phase IV (Consolidation III):

1 December 2009 - 30 June 2011

The next eighteen months were marked by large-scale expansion of VSO country-wide. Success in the field overcame initial reluctance from Afghan officials. It proved to be the most viable stability program introduced by the American military. On 14 July 2010, Afghan President Hamid Karzai spoke in behalf of the “village stability initiative,” stating that the program meshed with the coalition’s overall counterinsurgency strategy. Karzai’s endorsement of VSO led to the creation of Afghan Local Police (ALP) units to improve security from the bottom up. ALP units were formed and trained in the villages. Local volunteers were key. This capability was expanded upwards first into the districts and then the provinces.⁵⁵ President Karzai’s decree reinforced GEN McChrystal’s COIN vision with SOF spearheading the ISAF effort.

CFSOCC-A became the executive agent for VSO in Afghanistan. As “a bottom-up COIN initiative ... to promote local governance and development,” it involved “establishing ...Village Stability Platforms (VSPs)” around embedded ODA-sized units in key villages countrywide. Enablers (Civil Affairs, PSYOP, medical, and logistics support personnel and dog handlers were attached to

“If you’ve seen one VSO site...you’ve seen one VSO site.”

Often-repeated statement by VSO veterans emphasizing the vast differences between sites.⁵⁷



A Special Operations Task Force-East (SOTF-E) Cultural Support Team (CST) member conducts a women’s *shura* for Konduz province. The CST members are providing health awareness, education, and a sewing project, 5 April 2011. DoD Photo



Afghan Local Police (ALP) fill sand bags during the construction of a traffic checkpoint in Jegdalay district, Kabul Province, Afghanistan, 5 March 2014. ALP assisted by U.S. Special Forces soldiers assigned to CJSOTF-A. The checkpoint disrupted insurgent freedom of movement. DoD Photo



A U.S. Special Forces soldier analyzes targets with ANA soldiers during training in Staging Area Tinsley in Uruzgan Province, Afghanistan, 9 May 2011. Soldiers from CJSOTF-A train Afghan national security forces on soldiering skills and security measures to protect the local populace. DoD Photo

ODAs committed to VSO as needed. Conventional infantry squads ‘beefed up’ security in the more remote sites. VSO teams, living in the small towns and villages, worked closely with local leaders to improve health, education, and economic conditions. The Afghan central government was legitimized by supporting community projects. In 2011, select female soldiers, trained as Cultural Support Teams (CSTs), were attached to some ODAs to work with the females and children. SOF conducting VSO also recruited local volunteers for training as ALP. Once formed the SF soldiers advised and assisted in the performance of guard duty and accompanied local security patrols.⁵⁶

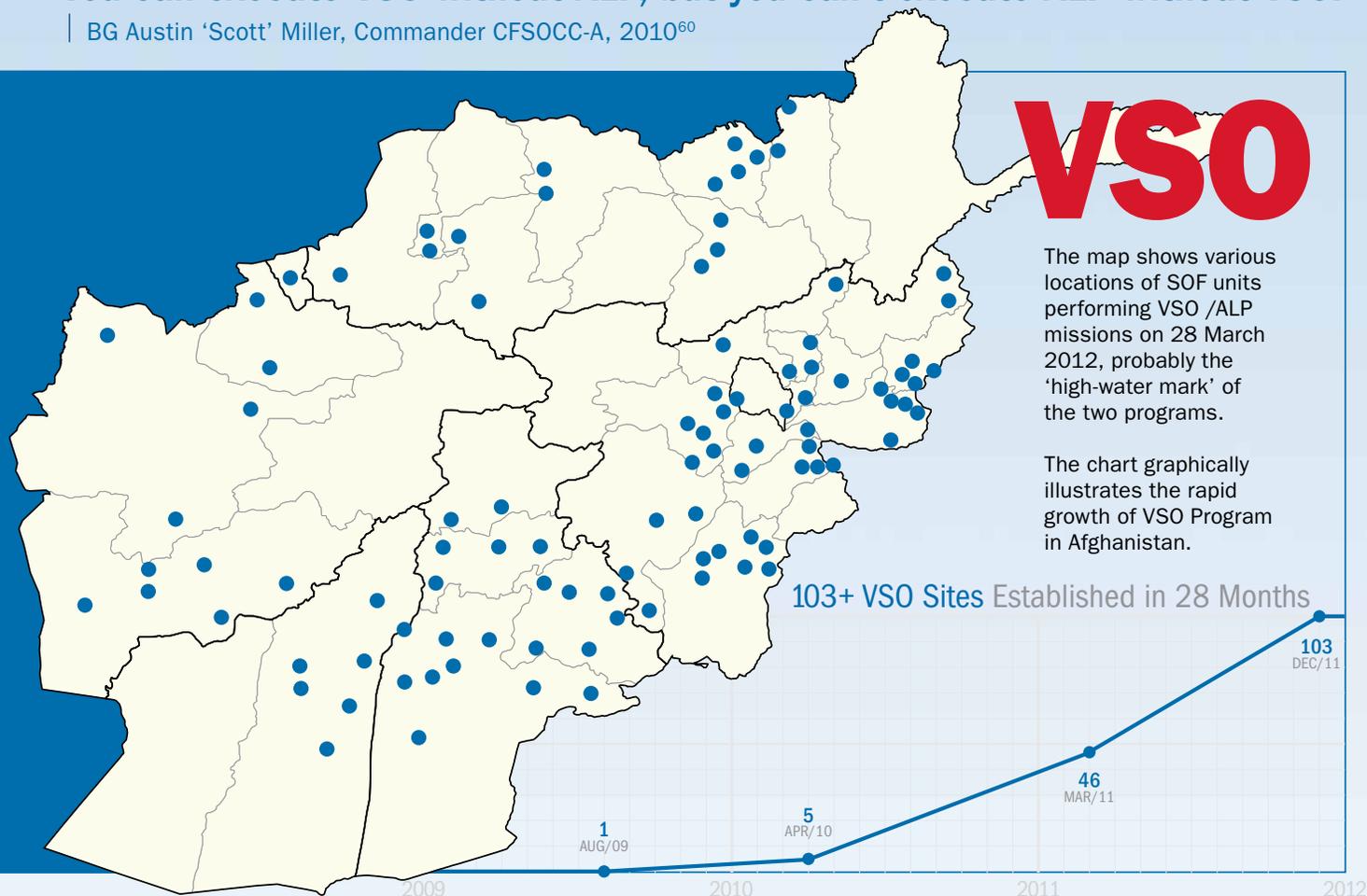
CFSOCC-A made VSO and its ancillary ALP requirement the primary focus of CJSOTF-A. While training, equipping, and advising ALP was more Foreign Internal Defense

(FID), it was an integral part of the VSO mission. The two complemented each other. The ‘bottom-up’ execution worked well with the ‘top-down’ planning and management to support the ISAF COIN strategy. CJSOTF-A Operational Order (OPORD) MUSTAQUILANA (‘Afghans standing up for themselves’) provided the guidance necessary to duplicate the successes achieved by ODA 7224 and earlier UW experiences.⁵⁸

Expanding VSO to ‘blanket’ Afghanistan required a significant increase in SOF personnel and ‘enablers.’ All services ‘surged’ SOF assets into the country to accommodate the demand. VSO grew from one ‘pilot’ site in July 2009 to five by April 2010. Forty-six sites existed by March 2011. By the end of the year there were 103 VSO or ALP training sites spread throughout Afghanistan. By then, the CJSOTF-A had grown from 2,900 to more than 6,000 personnel.⁵⁹

“You can execute VSO without ALP, but you can’t execute ALP without VSO.”

| BG Austin ‘Scott’ Miller, Commander CFSOCC-A, 2010⁶⁰



Special Forces Weapons Sergeants from ODA 7224 conduct weapons training with Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan Local Police (ALP) on a range near Nili, Daykundi Province, 2009.



In addition to performing VSO and training ALP in 2010, CJSOTF-A relooked another capability that was first raised back in 2006—creation of ANA Special Forces. In 2006, COL Reeder felt that the condition of the ANA would not support that capability at that time. As the CFSOCC-A commander in 2010, BG Reeder reevaluated his earlier assessment and concluded that the ANA had now reached the level of maturity where it could raise and sustain a SF component. He envisioned ANA SF units specifically trained to operate within their own complex multi-ethnic and multi-cultural environment. Trained professionals could “leverage the local ethnicity and tribal affiliations” to their advantage in combat operations.⁶² After getting his concept approved by the ISAF commander and Afghan Minister of Defense, BG Reeder directed the CJSOTF-A to create ANA Special Forces.⁶³

By the end of February 2010, the SOTFs were recruiting and screening volunteers from existing Commando *Kandaks* to attend the first ANA SF Qualification Course (SFQC). Medical screening was followed by physical fitness tests and mental aptitude evaluations at the two SOTF bases. The potential candidates did pushups, situps, and pullups before a two kilometer run. Then, they were given literacy and math tests. After the results were analyzed, packets of

those qualified were sent to the CJSOTF-A to select the best-qualified twenty-five soldiers to attend the first ANA SFQC, scheduled to begin in March 2010 at Camp Morehead.⁶⁴

As SF personnel screened candidates at the SOTFs, the CJSOTF-A staff prepared a program of instruction (POI) for ANA SFQC. While loosely based on the SFQC conducted by the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (SWCS) at Fort Bragg, NC, it was uniquely tailored for Afghanistan and conducted over a ten-week period. FID and COIN were reduced to internal Afghanistan defense and counterinsurgency tasks. During weapons training students mastered only Soviet weapons common in the region. Instead of foreign language and culture training, the program stressed improving literacy. Basic knowledge of the other ethnic groups in Afghanistan was included. ANA SF ODAs, while mirroring U.S. specialties, consisted of fifteen personnel. The other three men were an intelligence sergeant; an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) sergeant; and a religious officer. The first ANA SF class graduated at Camp Morehead on 13 May 2010.⁶⁵

To further enhance ANA SOF capabilities during VSO, CJSOTF-A implemented the Afghan Information Dissemination Operations (AIDO) Planners course, the first of which began on 19 September 2010. AIDO training



The first class of ANA SF graduated at Camp Morehead, Kabul, on 13 May 2010.



ANA Commando SSI

“These [ANA SF] teams provide immediate rapport with the local populace and at times have ties with the locals. The ANA SF teams take the lead in the villages, and they add legitimacy to the mission.”

| BG Edward M. Reeder Jr.



Some Afghan National Army Commando and Special Forces personnel were trained in Afghan Information Dissemination Operations (AIDO) by U.S. PYSOP soldiers at Camp Morehead, Afghanistan.



ANA soldiers from the 8th Commando *Kandak* conduct deliberate clearing operations, 2011. U.S. SF soldiers accompanied the Commandos, providing advice and support.

involved U.S. PSYOP personnel instructing Afghan Commandos on Military Information Support Operations (MISO) (formerly PSYOP) principles. The AIDO course was essentially a translated, modified version of the U.S. Psychological Operations Qualification Course (POQC). While AIDO's primary Military Occupational Specialties remained combat arms, they also functioned as the MISO Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) within their units, with the end-goal of 'improved public perception of Commandos, ANA, ANP, and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) as a whole.' By early 2011, 250 Commandos were already AIDO-qualified.⁶⁶

After graduation, ANA SF ODAs were sent to select VSO sites to join the Commando *Kandaks*, countering insurgency in Afghanistan. The CJSOTF-A provided the "tactical framework for supporting CFSOCC-A operational priorities" to conduct the ISAF campaign. Authorities were broadened to allow VSO sites to "move at the speed of the populace and the insurgent," said COL Bolduc. Tactical commands (SOTFs and below) had to be agile and flexible to accommodate rapid situational changes encountered daily at the lowest levels.⁶⁷ From 2010 until 2012, VSO and ALP training grew hand-in-hand with the ANA SF ODAs as they often jointly occupied areas. In these cases coalition SOF leaders could mentor ANA COIN partners during hundreds of combat operations to dramatically increase the experience base of Afghan SOF.⁶⁸



OEF (A) Phase V (Transition I):

1 July 2011 – 31 December 2014

This phase of the war was seriously affected by major GWOT strategy shifts. On 2 May 2011, U.S. forces killed AQ leader Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan.⁶⁹ This caused President Barack Obama to announce that all U.S. forces would be out of Iraq by 31 December 2011.⁷⁰ Plans to transfer some of those assets to Afghanistan were forestalled when Congressional pressure for an 'exit strategy' prompted President Obama to announce his plans on 22 June 2011. He stated that by 31 December 2014 the Afghan government would assume responsibility for its security.⁷¹ With the end dates firmly set, coalition forces accelerated efforts to prepare Afghan forces to assume responsibilities.

The SOF commands had to adjust quickly. On 1 July 2012 the CFSOCC-A morphed into a two-star Special Operations Joint Task Force – Afghanistan (SOJTF-A) and the NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (NSOCC-A) under ISAF. MG Raymond A. 'Tony' Thomas III, a former CFSOCC-A commander and more recently the deputy commander of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) at Fort Bragg, NC, became its first commander. The larger SOJTF headquarters

“Our contribution to the strategy revolves around U.S. SOF living among the people in rural villages . . . , building relationships and assisting the local populace to stand up against insurgents.”

**COL Donald C. Bolduc,
Commander CJSOTF-A, 2011⁶¹**

commanded all U.S. SOF and tactically controlled NATO and Afghan SOF forces. “Our mission set spans the entire spectrum of special operations” stated MG Thomas. “13,000 special operators and support people from 25 partner nations (perform missions) ranging from direct action to capacity-building.”⁷² Reducing SOF headquarters minimized redundancy, concentrated power in high level decisions, and integrated all special operations capabilities. And, it downsized the American presence in Afghanistan.⁷³

SOJTF-A strategy anticipated a drawdown of coalition SOF and a calculated transfer of security responsibilities to the Afghans in 2014. VSO would enter a Transition Phase. Afghan officials at district and province levels and local and national police and ANA forces would assume primary responsibility for the country’s security. Coalition SOF would transition to secondary roles as advisors. How the roles would be shifted was the major challenge and central focus of MG Austin S. ‘Scott’ Miller when he assumed command of the SOJTF-A in June 2013. MG

Miller, like MG Thomas before him, brought considerable Afghanistan experience to the position.⁷⁴

As COL Patrick B. Roberson (3rd SFG commander at the time) viewed it, the central question was “How do you put the Afghans in the lead?” With an “outsider’s eye for detail” Roberson analyzed the challenge leveraging his three years of Iraq experience. He visited COL Antonio M. Fletcher, the 7th SFG commander in charge of the CJSOTF-A at that time, and discussed the question while becoming familiar with the different nuances of SOF operations in Afghanistan.⁷⁵ Roberson would soon have to answer that question.

The soon-to-be CJSOTF-A commander focused on two lines of effort: first, build the capacity of the Commando *Kandaks* and Afghan SF to assume missions being done by coalition SOF; second, raise VSO and ALP initiatives to the next level. His SOF had to relinquish dominant roles with the local Afghan leaders and become mentors who focused ‘up’ on district and provincial officials.⁷⁶ The efforts had



COL Patrick B. Roberson, commander of 3rd Special Forces Group and CJSOTF-A, addresses U.S. service members assigned to Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan on Nov. 28, 2013, at Bagram Airbase, Parwan Province, Afghanistan. *DoD photo*



Afghan National Army (ANA) LTC Saifullah Najribi (center), 4th Special Operations Kandak commander, talks to Afghan and U.S. Special Operations soldiers through an interpreter (right), during a transfer of authority (TOA) ceremony at the Village Stability Operations (VSO) site at Parmakan, Shindand District, Herat Province, 26 September 2013. *DoD photo*



NSOCC-A/SOJTF-A SSI



“Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them.”

COL Thomas Edward Lawrence,
‘Lawrence of Arabia’⁷⁹

An American Special Forces captain observes how his Afghan trainees do on their own as they meet villagers near Taliban territory in Parwan Province, 2014.
Photo: Diego Ibarra Sanchez for The New York Times



“If you want to put Afghans in the lead, you’re going to have to accept the fact that they are, in some ways, going to be less capable.”

**COL Patrick B. Roberson,
3rd SFG/CJSOTF-A Commander, commenting
on ‘expectation management.’⁸⁴**

the same goal – to ‘cut the Afghan reliance on coalition capabilities cord’ while instilling confidence in their ability to protect and govern themselves.⁷⁷

COL Roberson and other SOF leaders knew that the hardest part would be curbing the American tendency to lead. “I always thought that if you are going to put partner forces in the lead, you’ve got to have ‘forcing functions’ or compliance mechanisms to get guys to do what you want done.”⁷⁸ Measures had to be put in place to reduce the SF urge to get out in front and convince them to move aside and let the Afghans take charge.

To change SF behavior, Roberson ‘capped’ the number of Americans accompanying the Afghan SOF and local police on field operations. “When you place that force ratio out there [10 Afghans per American], it definitely makes our guys put Afghans out front, keeps them away from the leading edge, and forces them into a command and control role. If American SOF outnumber Afghans [in an assault], they are much more predisposed to take charge and take buildings by themselves.” What was needed at that phase in the war was to get the Afghans to lead by example, not vice versa. SF, as advisors, had to be

content to hold back and mentor the Afghan SOF leaders. “You’re not accompanying them to teach troop leading procedures, but to encourage them to take charge and do it on their own.”⁸⁰

Along the second line of effort (VSO and ALP programs), CJSOTF-A began turning over select VSO sites to partner forces and other sites were eliminated. ALP training with only Afghan instructors was consolidated at provincial training centers. ODAs originally responsible for VSO sites maintained contact with district leaders and conducted ‘tactical overwatch’ presence patrols as reassurance during the transitions.⁸¹ Basically, a mounted ODA would irregularly circulate through old VSO areas. As time passed and Afghan confidence and experience grew, the number of ODAs in-country could be reduced as SF ‘stepped back’ and put mentoring/advising in the forefront.⁸²

By late 2013, the environment and U.S. role had changed dramatically in Afghanistan. “I had 72 SOF teams when I went to Afghanistan [in March 2013]. I had 45 in October,” COL Roberson recalled. He had succeeded in changing the American SOF mindset and enabled the Afghan SOF to lead their country’s fight.⁸³



The last CJSOTF-A command group commemorates the unit deactivation on 31 October 2014 with a photo in front of the CJSOTF-A Memorial Wall, Camp Vance, Bagram Airbase. From left to right are: CW5 Edward K. Hall, COL Robert L. Wilson, and CSM Brian C. Rarey.

Subsequent CJSOTF-A commanders followed suit while the conventional force ‘footprint’ shrank. As Operation ENDURING FREEDOM came to a close in late 2014, the CJSOTF-A had transitioned to advising and assisting. The commensurate reduction of coalition forces had forced CJSOTF-A to operate from a handful of strongpoints. The impact of medevac, fire support, and sustainment limited SOF operating ranges. Commanders assessed calculated risks carefully. SOF elements were positioned where they could optimally influence ANA SOF.



OEF (A) Ends, Operation FREEDOM’S SENTINEL

Begins (Transition II): 1 January 2015 - Present

By Presidential decree, OEF ended on 31 December 2014 and was replaced by Operation FREEDOM’S SENTINEL (OFS), which continues today.⁸⁵ The NATO mission, labeled Operation RESOLUTE SUPPORT, is to “train, advise and assist the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces.”⁸⁶ American SOF remains key to fulfilling the NATO mission in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The proud legacy of CJSOTF-A continues forward with the Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (SOTF-A), albeit on a much smaller scale.⁸⁷

At the deactivation of the CJSOTF-A on 31 October 2014, the 3rd Battalion, 3rd SFG commander, LTC Michael P. Sullivan, became the first commander of SOTF-A, the smaller, SF battalion-sized organization that commanded the remaining UW-focused U.S. SOF in Afghanistan. His headquarters and subordinate elements were to train, advise, and assist the newly-created ANA Special Operations Command (ANASOC) and select Afghan National Police (ANP) units.⁸⁸ LTC Sullivan had ‘shadowed’ his 3rd SFG commander (and final CJSOTF-A commander), COL Robert L. Wilson, and forged a good relationship with BG Mark C. Schwartz (a previous CJSOTF-A commander and the Deputy Commanding General, SOJTF-A, to MG Edward M. Reeder Jr). Together authorities were allocated, redistributed, and adjusted. LTC Sullivan viewed his task to “work the SOTF-A out of job.”⁸⁹ The new ‘way ahead’ for Afghanistan was clear.

EPILOGUE

What are the ‘takeaways’ and legacy of CJSOTF-A? First, the organization validated joint doctrine that a Special Forces Group had the capacity to act as a CJSOTF in wartime. It did this for an extended period of time in combat – more than twelve years. While initially two SOF task forces were used (TF DAGGER and K-BAR) to prosecute the CENTCOM war in Afghanistan, SOCCENT and its elements were the ‘supported’ command. When American conventional forces grew to dominate the battlefield, CENTCOM changed SOF to a ‘supporting’ role. Consolidating all coalition SOF under one command, the CJSOTF-A, proved to be a logical progression. Its flexibility to accommodate mission changes was proven over time.

Second, SFGs had commanders and functioning staffs to facilitate accommodating additional missions and SOF elements. And USSOCOM could capitalize on Army’s command selection process instead of having to convene boards for CJSOTF leaders. It could also provide personnel augmentees from the other services as well as the Reserves and National Guard. SFG commanders dual-hatted as

Major 'Lessons Learned' from Operational Analysis of CJSOTF-A performance

- ❑ Validates the doctrinal model for command and control of Joint SOF
- ❑ Highlights the inherent strengths of building a 'framework' around an SF Group
- ❑ Advantages of utilizing existing command selection processes
- ❑ Maximizes on 'reachback' capability to fill gaps and preserve force
- ❑ Demonstrates the versatility and flexibility of the CJSOTF-A in extended combat environments
- ❑ Successfully got Afghan SOF to assume responsibility as the primary engagement force

CJSOTF-A commanders could 'tap' their rear echelons and access higher Army SOF commands in CONUS to get assistance. These capacities were skillfully 'tapped' throughout the life of CJSOTF-A.

Lastly, VSO supported by ALP were a major success story in Afghanistan. The CJSOTF-A demonstrated its nimbleness when ISAF expanded the program country-wide. VSO paved the way towards making Afghan officials responsible for the security, economic recovery, and future of their country. Coalition SOF commanders had to restrain the inherently American cultural tendency to take charge and enforced advise and assist roles. They did, and Afghan

SOF leaders 'stepped up' to fill the void. Today, Afghan SOF elements lead the fight against insurgents. That is the ultimate measure of SOF success in Afghanistan.

The twenty-three commanders of CJSOTF-A (five of whom served twice) and their staff contributed in turn to the progressive achievements of SOF in Afghanistan. The combined joint special operations command was a central player in the fight for Afghanistan for twelve critical years. CJSOTF-A played a key role in every major development in that war. Everyone that served in CJSOTF-A throughout its long history should be justifiably proud of their contributions and sacrifices. 📌

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Endnotes

- 1 Gentext Message, CDR3DSFGA FWD to COMCJTF-180 and COMJFSOCC EF, 242100ZAUG03, "CJSOTF-AFG SITREP 24 AUG 03," copy in USSOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL, 5-6; Gentext Message, CDR3DSFGA FWD to COMCJTF-180 and COMJFSOCC EF, 242100ZAUG03, "COMCJTF180 SITREP 24 AUG 03," copy in USSOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL, 1-2. ODA 2056 is in the 20th Special Forces Group (SFG) (Airborne), a National Guard unit headquartered in Birmingham, Alabama. Day Chopan village has also been spelled as Deh Chopan, Daichopan, and several other variations. Located in Southeastern Afghanistan near the border with Pakistan, the surrounding mountains have long provided a safe haven for Taliban fighters, and before that for the Afghans who fought against soldiers from the Soviet Union. The unarmored or lightly armored High-Mobility Multi-Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV), or 'Humvee' was the standard military tactical utility vehicle at the time.
- 2 Gentext Message, CDR3DSFGA FWD to COMCJTF-180 and COMJFSOCC EF, 252100ZAUG03, "CJSOTF-AFG SITREP 25 AUG 03," copy in USSOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL, 4-5; Gentext Message, CDR3DSFGA FWD to COMCJTF-180 and COMJFSOCC EF, 252100ZAUG03, "COMCJTF180 SITREP 25 AUG 03," copy in USSOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL, 1-2; Lon Nordeen, *AV-8B Harrier II Units of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM* (Oxford: Osprey Press, 2014), 30-31; WO1 Michael J. McInerney, "The Battle for Deh Chopan, Part I," *Military.com*, on Internet at: http://www.military.com/NewContent/0,13190,SOF_0804_Afghanistan1,00.html, accessed 25 June 2015.
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- 4 COL Celeski interview, 13 March 2015; Noor Khan, "U.S., Afghan Forces Kill at Least 14 Guerrillas," *Stars and Stripes*, Kandahar, Afghanistan, 26 August 2003, 7; Sayed Salahuddin, "Aircraft Bomb Big Taliban Force," *Ariana*, Kabul, Afghanistan, 25 August 2003; Noor Khan, "At Least 14 Die in Afghan Bombing," *Associated Press*, Kandahar, Afghanistan, 26 August 2003; "U.S. General: Taliban Streaming from Pakistan to Afghanistan," *USA Today*, Gardez, Afghanistan, 8 September 2003; n.a., "Up to 100 Afghan Militants Killed in Operation 'Mountain Viper,'" *Voice of America*, 29 October 2009. Although enemy casualty figures were hard to ascertain, reports from all sources indicate a large number of Taliban or ACM fighters were killed during Operation MOUNTAIN VIPER. The official U.S. Army history of the action noted that "the Taliban stood and fought for the first time since March 2002," and that "U.S. forces routed the enemy, killing one hundred forty to two hundred insurgents." Center of Military History, *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, March 2002-April 2005. The United States Army in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2011), quote from 43. U.S. losses were limited to one ARSOF soldier killed (Sergeant First Class Mitchell A. Lane, assigned to 2nd Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group [Airborne]). SFC Lane died of injuries sustained during a night fast rope accident while inserting for a combat assault. From USASOC History Office, *The Last Full Measure of Devotion: ARSOF Fallen from the War on Terrorism, 2001-2014* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2015), 27.
- 5 From "Presidential Address to the Nation," 7 October 2001, as quoted in *New York Times*, 8 October 2001.
- 6 107th Congress, Senate Joint Resolution 23, "Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists," 14 September 2001, Enacted 18 September 2001.
- 7 Charles H. Briscoe, et al., *Weapon of Choice: U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan* (Reprinted [2003]; Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 41-42; RADM Bert Calland, Commander, Special Operations Command, U.S. Central Command, interview by Kalev I. Sepp, 3 May 2002, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 8 COL John F. Mulholland Jr., interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe and MAJ Tom Searle, 12 July 2002, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Gentext Message, USCINCCENT to multiple addressees, "Subj: USCINCCENT Operation ENDURING FREEDOM Karshi-Khanabad Mod," 010901Z Oct 01, copy in USSOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL; Briscoe, et al., *Weapon of Choice*, 68. COL Kisner's mission was to conduct Combat Search and Rescue operations throughout Afghanistan when the American forces began their attack on the Taliban.
- 9 According to Gentext Message, JSOTF Khanabad UZ to COMSOPCENT, "SITREP02/ENDURING FREEDOM/07OCT01," 080700Z Oct 01, copy in USSOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL, on 7 October 2001, USCINCCENT commenced engaging hostile targets within Afghanistan.
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- 11 Mulholland interview, 12 July 2002; Briscoe, et al., *Weapon of Choice*, 52-54, 57-58, 74-75;

- 12 Mulholland interview, 12 July 2002; Briscoe, et al., *Weapon of Choice*, 52-54, 72-80, 96-99. JSOTF-North, led by COL John Mulholland (also Commander, 5th SFG [A]), controlled Joint SOF forces operating in the northern portion of Afghanistan from the time of first infiltrations on 19 October 2001, until the creation of the CJSOTF-A organization on 15 March 2002. On that date CJSOTF-A gained operational control (OPCON) of all U.S. SOF elements operating within Afghanistan (except JSOC) and Tactical Control (TACON) of all coalition SOF assets.
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- 14 USCENCOM FRAGO 020, 17 Oct 2001.
- 15 Dwight Jon Zimmerman, "Task Force K-Bar – Special Operations Forces and Operation Enduring Freedom," *Defense Media Network*, 19 September 2011, on Internet at: <http://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/operation-enduring-freedom-the-first-49-days-6/>, accessed on 19 February 2015. CJSOTF-South, also known as TF K-BAR, had been formed around Naval Special Warfare Group-One (NSWG-1) (Commanded by Navy Captain Robert Harward). On 7 December 2004, President George W. Bush presented the unit with a Presidential Unit Citation.
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- 18 "USCENTCOM OEF Command Chronology," 80; Briefing slides, USCENCOM Joint Operations Center (JOC), "JOC Floor Update," 30 March 2002, copy in USSOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL. According to GENTEXT Message, 3RDSFGAFWD to COMJFSOCC and COMJTF Afghanistan, "SITREP/CJSOTF-A/30301530ZMAR02," copy in USSOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL, "CJSOTF-Afghanistan assumed C2 of all SOF in Afghanistan at 301300ZMAR02."
- 19 Richard W. Stewart, *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, October 2001-March 2002 (The United States Army in Afghanistan)* (Washington, DC: GPO, Center of Military History, 2004), 32.
- 20 "USCENTCOM OEF Command Chronology," 73-74.
- 21 Richard Krugler, *Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan: A Case Study of Adaptation in Battle* (Case Studies in Defense Transformation Number 5) (Center for Technology and National Security Policy, 2007), on Internet at: http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA463075%25262location%3DU2%2526doc%3DGetTRDoc.pdf&ei=mNojVbTCH8iQsAWKwILODg&usg=AFQjCNEiP_WXQNVY7_qVAO_-mUqvxvhuSQ&bv=m-bv.89947451.d.eXY, accessed on 1 April 2015, quote from 1.
- 22 Message USCINCENT 302200Z Nov 2001, "FRAG 02-020, Establishment (TF) Bagram (U)," copy at "USCENTCOM OEF Command Chronology," 36; SGM (Ret.) Richard C. Kimmich, interview by Dr. Michael E. Krivdo, 4 August 2015, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 23 COL Celeski interview, 13 March 2015; COL Joseph D. Celeski, interview by MAJ Jeff Davis, 11 September 2003, Bagram, Afghanistan, original at SOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL; Email correspondence, COL (Ret.) Joseph D. Celeski to Dr. Michael E. Krivdo, 13 April 2015, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Document "Change of Command," 28 May 2002, CJSOTF-A, Bagram, Afghanistan, USSOCOM History Office, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL.
- 24 "USCENTCOM OEF Command Chronology," 129; Center of Military History, *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, March 2002-April 2005, The United States Army in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2011), 13.
- 25 Christopher N. Koontz, General Editor, *Enduring Voices: Oral Histories of the U.S. Army Experience in Afghanistan, 2003-2005* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2008), 13; Commander, Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) 180, CJTF-180 Operations Order (OPORD) 02-01 [CJTF Assumption of Authority for Operations in Combined Joint Operations Area (CJOA) Afghanistan], 23 May 2002, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, *passim*; Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A), "CJSOTF-A Campaign Plan Jun-Oct [20]03," 11 June 2003, Headquarters, CJSOTF-Afghanistan, Camp Vance, Bagram, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, 9. LTG Dan K. McNeill also concurrently commanded the XVIII Airborne Corps. For a good description of the issues raised by subordinating the CJSOTF to the lead conventional force, see MAJ Grant M. Martin, "Special Operations and Conventional Forces: How to Improve Unity of Effort Using Afghanistan as a Case Study," School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2009, 19-22.
- 26 Koontz, Ed., *Enduring Voices*, 57.
- 27 SFC Kathleen T. Rhem, "American Soldiers Training Afghan National Army," *American Forces Press Service*, Washington, DC, 21 May 2002, on Internet at: <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=44032>, accessed on 2 April 2015.
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- 29 COL Celeski interview, 11 September 2003.
- 30 COL Celeski interview, 11 September 2003. COL Celeski commanded the CJSOTF-A for two separate rotations (May-September 2002, and March-September 2003).
- 31 CJSOTF-A Campaign Plan Jun-Oct 03, ANNEX A (Task Organization), ANNEX C (Operations), Headquarters, CJSOTF-Afghanistan, Camp Vance, Bagram, 111000Z June 2003, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. The size and composition of the CJSOTF organization changed constantly throughout its existence. Each rotation was different in some way to previous ones, although there were a few features that were fairly predictable. The same applied to the coalition SOF elements that also changed from time to time.
- 32 Findings from the analysis of the historical patterns from CJSOTF-A command assignments, unit deployments and mission taskings.
- 33 Donald P. Wright, et al., *A Different Kind of War: The United States Army in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), October 2001 - September 2005* (Combined Studies Institute, Washington, DC: GPO, 2010), 238-39; Robert Burns, "Mullen: Afghanistan Isn't Top Priority," *USA Today*, 11 December 2007, on Internet at: http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/washington/2007-12-11-3963072919_x.htm, accessed 13 October 2015.
- 34 Burns, "Mullen: Afghanistan Isn't Top Priority," *USA Today*, 11 December 2007, quote from text.
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- 36 Wright, et al., *A Different Kind of War*, 232-33.
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- 39 CMH, *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, March 2002-April 2005*, 56-57.
- 40 U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Armed Services Committee, *Statement of General Bryan D. Brown, U.S. Army*, 109th Cong., 1st Sess., 22 April 2005, 7.
- 41 CJSOTF-A Public Affairs, "Operation Nam Dong: ANA Soldiers Take the Fight to the Insurgents in the Heart of Afghanistan," U.S. Central Command Press Release, 12 May 2005; Donald P. Wright, et al., *A Different Kind of War: The United States Army in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), October 2001 - September 2005* (Combined Studies Institute, Washington, DC: GPO, 2010), 288; Major D. Scott Mann, "Combat-Advising the ANA," *Special Warfare* 18: 3 (November-December 2005), 17-19.
- 42 Mann, "Combat-Advising the ANA," *Special Warfare* 18: 3, quote from 18-19.
- 43 "Q&A with Brigadier General Edward M. Reeder Jr.," *Special Warfare* 24, Issue 4 (Oct-Dec 2011) (hereafter "Q&A with BG Reeder"), quote from 20.
- 44 "Q&A with BG Reeder," 20.
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- 46 "Q&A with BG Reeder," 20-21; Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson, "New Afghan Commandos Take to the Frontlines," *National Public Radio*, 23 July 2007, on Internet at: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12127848>, accessed 13 February 2015; Donna Miles, "Gates Visits New Afghan Commando Training Site," *American Forces Press Service*, Kabul, Afghanistan, 4 June 2007, on Internet at: <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=46277>, accessed on 13 February 2015; "Afghan Commandos Nab Taliban Leader in First Raid," *American Forces Press Service*, Washington, DC, 14 September 2007, on Internet at: <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=47446>, accessed on 14 February 2015.
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- 49 John D. Gresham and Shawna Gorman, "Interview with Brigadier General Edward M. Reeder, Jr.," *Defense Media Network*, 2 July 2012, on Internet at: <http://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/interview-with-brig-gen-edward-m-reeder-jr-usa/>, accessed 27 April 2016.
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- 51 Michael A. Cohen, "Tossing the Afghan COIN: The U.S. Military's Reinvented Counterinsurgency Turns Out to be the Same Old Game," *The Nation*, 16 December 2010, on Internet at: <http://www.thenation.com/article/tossing-afghan-coin/>, accessed on 22 October 2015. Counterinsurgency is defined in Joint Pub 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: GPO, 8 November 2010 [As amended through 15 February 2016]), 53, as the "Comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes. Also called COIN."
- 52 Madden, "Evolution of Precision Counterinsurgency," 2-5. In Afghanistan, the original concept was known as the Community Defense Initiative (CDI). CDI was also later referred to as the Local Defense Initiative (LDI), but by the time the concept matured was widely expressed in the term Village Stability Operations (VSO). Therefore, for the sake of clarity VSO is used throughout this article.
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