



MOVING FORWARD The Special Forces Regiment must maintain balance between focusing on the current conflict and preparing for the next fight. *U.S. Army photo.*

1ST SFG(A) OPERATIONAL CYCLE: THE CONTINUOUS EXECUTION OF FID AND UW

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As in any protracted war, the military of the United States has adjusted to the contemporary environment by restructuring its forces, shifting the way it trains to meet the current threat, and focusing on a rotational cycle of train, deploy and reset. The Special Forces Regiment has not been immune to these changes as all the groups within the regiment have deployed in support of combat operations in the CENTCOM theater of operations. The pitfall of focusing on the current conflict is the high potential to compromise readiness in preparing for the next fight. In Special Forces, this means sustaining the regiment's proficiency in waging unconventional warfare.¹ The 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) has been unique within the regiment in that the advanced operational bases and operational detachment—alphas have been executing theater campaign plan events within the PACOM area of responsibility and then quickly reposturing to execute combat deployments in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom—Philippines and Operation Enduring Freedom—Afghanistan. The AOBs and ODAs of 1st SFG(A) hone their experience and expertise in waging unconventional warfare through a cycle of diverse mission sets in OIF, OEF-A, OEF-P and TCP operational engagements by leveraging relationships with host-nation counterparts and exporting tactics, techniques and procedures from one mission to the next.

With large parts of the military focused on winning the current fight in Afghanistan and beginning to shift focus toward redefining regional engagement through regional alignment and operationally tailored forces, the Special Forces Regiment continues to execute missions all over the world through the entire range of Special Forces doctrinal missions. Every day, throughout the PACOM area of responsibility — an area encompassing about half of the Earth's surface — the 1st SFG(A) is preparing, teaching, training or executing its doctrinal missions.² These operations are being conducted by special operations task forces,

AOBs and ODAs that are immediately cycling from one mission to the next. Often times, these Special Forces units are planning for their next operation while in the middle of another operation and sometimes deploying directly from one mission to the next. It is not uncommon to have an ODA return from a deployment in Afghanistan, conduct a Joint Chiefs of Staff exercise on the Korean Peninsula, execute a joint, combined exchange training exercise in Thailand, deploy to support OEF-P and prepare for their next joint, bilateral exercise. This high operational tempo and changing environment allows for the units to maintain and build proficiency in their diverse doctrinal skill sets. The 1st SFG(A) has an operational focus, vision and strategy that entails everyday operations and training to synchronize with theater special operations command and theater objectives in combat and in training. The missions of 1st SFG(A) form a unique operational cycle whereby each mission develops and expands the skill sets that contribute and feed into the success of the other mission sets.

The 1st SFG(A) Cycle

The unique mission cycle that 1st SFG(A) executes lends itself well to maintaining readiness for the conduct of UW. Each mission set (OEF-A, OEF-P and TCP events) accomplishes the operational objective of the TSOC and supports the execution of the other two missions. To prepare for combat operations in Afghanistan, the most relevant training Special Forces Soldiers can conduct is through the execution of JCETs and theater campaign plan events. Working with and through soldiers from various host nations and training both the Special Forces element and our host-nation partnered force to a standard provides lessons that cannot be replicated anywhere else but overseas. Working through the diverse set of cultures and languages provides a unique insight that translates directly to conducting

unconventional warfare and foreign internal defense.³ These skills also enhance the ability of the AOBs and ODAs to conduct combat operations in Afghanistan. In turn, conducting combat operations in Afghanistan provides the AOBs and ODAs with current TTPs to be used in training with host-nation forces during JCETs, TCP events as well as working with senior Philippine officials as they conduct counterinsurgency operations in the southern Philippines.

At the core of UW is the ability to build rapport with any indigenous population in order to influence them to support U.S. objectives. In PACOM, 1st SFG(A) Special Forces Soldiers operate in 36 nations encompassing more than half of the world's population where 3,000 different languages are spoken.⁴ As teams move from one country to the next in the course of their operations, Special Forces teams and individuals must quickly identify and adapt to the different cultures, languages, social mores and politics of the region in which they are operating. The diversity of geopolitical and social dynamics in PACOM provides an apt environment for the development of skills required for UW. The units of 1st SFG(A) currently conduct their seven doctrinal missions while supporting three major types of operations: Operation Enduring Freedom–Afghanistan, OEF-P and various operations in support of the PACOM theater campaign plan. In OEF-A, AOBs and ODAs primarily conduct foreign internal defense while living amongst the population in village stability platforms and partnering with the

As teams from 1st SFG(A) cycle from combat in Afghanistan to TCP events, the latest TTPs are incorporated into training events and are shared with partnered nations' forces. The TTPs of enemy forces are not exclusive to the area in which they operate. As the most effective enemy TTPs cross transnational borders and battlespaces, the experience of a 1st SFG(A) AOB and ODA is extremely valuable to the host-nation partners they train with during TCP events. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have accelerated the development of improvised explosive devices; Special Forces Soldiers, fresh from the combat theaters, are able to import the latest information on the TTPs to partnered countries during TCP events. The latest TTPs from Helmand, Afghanistan can be taught and discussed in Ipoh, Malaysia where the Malaysian Pasukan Gerakan Khas trains to conduct counterterrorism operations to secure their homeland. In February 2013, eastern Sabah was invaded by hundreds of armed Filipino insurgents. Members of the PGK unit that responded had just completed a JCET in late 2012 with a 1st SFG(A) ODA that trained them on small-unit tactics and planning for crisis operations. This training provided the PGK with an increased capability to effectively respond to this threat and restore order to eastern Sabah.⁵ In the southern Philippines, the most significant threat to the Philippine Security Forces and to the Philippine population is the threat of IEDs.⁶ The AOBs and ODAs from 1st SFG(A) that deploy to the southern Philippines import their

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Afghan Special Operations Kandak forces to develop counterterrorism capability. In OEF-P, AOBs and ODAs partner with the Philippine Armed Forces at the senior command and staff levels to advise in counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism in the southern Philippines. During TCP events, AOBs and ODAs train and develop their capabilities alongside the special operations forces of other nations of the PACOM area of responsibility. In each type of operation, the skills and lessons learned in one mutually supports the conduct of the other two.

Combat Operations in Afghanistan

In support of Operation Enduring Freedom–Afghanistan, 1st SFG(A) AOBs and ODAs conduct foreign internal defense through stability operations at the village, district and provincial levels, as well as train and develop the Afghan Army's special operations units. The teams live amongst the population in village and district stability platforms where they develop relationships with the local population to increase stability and promote the legitimacy of the Government of Afghanistan in areas where an established shadow government exists. Teams that are partnered with Afghan SOK units are conducting combat foreign internal defense by training, planning and executing combat operations against insurgents. Both mission sets directly feed into and contribute to the success of follow on missions to OEF-P or TCP events in the PACOM AOR. Two critical aspects of OEF-A operations, threat tactics, techniques and procedures and combat experience, export extremely well to locations in PACOM.

The AOBs and ODAs of 1st SFG(A) deploying to combat in Afghanistan obtain first-hand experience in the latest threats that adversaries in Afghanistan are employing to achieve effects against the U.S. military and the TTPs that effectively counter those threats.

knowledge of the latest in counter-IED TTPs from their experiences in Afghanistan to train the Philippine Armed Forces and increase their level of readiness to the IED threat.

The ability to gain and build rapport with the soldiers of other countries is critical to the mission of the 1st SFG(A). There is no better way to build rapport and gain credibility and legitimacy than to demonstrate capability and competence. Soldiers everywhere understand the realities and value of boots on the ground and when Special Forces AOBs and ODAs deal with host-nation forces that are currently engaged in combat, practical experience — not academic experience is what matters. For 1st SFG(A), the venue where the AOBs and ODAs gain that combat experience is in Afghanistan. The “on-the-ground” tactical-level operations that teams execute in Afghanistan translate well into staff-level operations in the Philippines where Special Forces Soldiers can knowledgeably guide their partnered forces while conducting FID. During TCP events, combat experience gained in Afghanistan translates into legitimacy and a more realistic and applicable program of instruction for the host-nation force and for the Special Forces Soldiers.⁷

Experience in tactical-level combat and counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan is critical to the Special Forces primary mission of unconventional warfare. Although tactical combat situations are replicated to be as realistic as possible in training exercises, there is no substitute for the experience garnered from actual combat — in the eyes of battle-tested host nation forces, this experience equates to legitimacy. As U.S. involvement in Afghanistan declines in the near future, that combat experience gained by the officers and noncommissioned officers of 1st SFG(A) will remain and will be used in future TCP events and contingency operations.



AFGHANISTAN Afghan National Police, Afghan National Army Special Forces and U.S. Special Forces members speak to elders during a presence patrol in Baghlan Province, Afghanistan. *U.S. Army photo by Spc. Robin Davis.*



MALAYSIA A Special Forces engineer sergeant conducts airborne operations with Malaysian commandos in Ipoh, Malaysia. *U.S. Army photo.*



PHILIPPINES A Special Forces Soldier participates in an ambush training exercise at the Philippine Army Special Forces School. *U.S. Army photo.*

Foreign Internal Defense in the Southern Philippines

Deployments to the Philippines in support of OEF-P provides the AOBs and ODAs of 1st SFG(A) with a distinct flavor of executing FID. The units are prohibited from directly participating in combat because of provisions written into the Philippine Constitution. FID is executed by Special Forces Soldiers by training with their Philippine counterparts and assisting and advising the Philippine Security Forces at the staff levels, primarily at the battalion level and higher. Special Forces ODAs are partnered with battalions, brigades, divisions, and in some cases, regional commands where the level of influence is not tactical, but operational and strategic. 1st SFG(A) Soldiers develop skill sets that allow them to influence sovereign leaders of a sovereign country and master the ability to work with and through other government agencies and host-nation counterparts.

The Joint Special Operations Task Force–Philippines operates at the behest of the sovereign government of the Philippines. This is a fundamental difference from Afghanistan where the U.S. is still essentially an occupying force in a nation that has an inconsistent history of sustainable national-level government. To operate in the Philippines and achieve the objectives of the TSOC, units from 1st SFG(A) must truly operate through and with their Filipino counterparts; there are no unilateral operations by U.S. forces in the southern Philippines. As the mission to Afghanistan reduces in size and security responsibility is transferred over to the government of Afghanistan, a reduced amount of Special Forces units will be required to operate at higher levels, just as in the Philippines. The experiences and expertise that the AOBs and ODAs acquired in the Philippines operating at an operational and strategic level will be used as the focus in Afghanistan shifts from tactical to operational and strategic. All PACOM TCP events occur in sovereign countries, each with distinct laws governing how visiting military forces are allowed to operate within their borders. In the Philippines, Special Forces operators must be aware of the standing Visiting Forces Agreements that have been put in place by the Republic of the Philippines and the United States. During TCP events, the AOBs and ODAs research and ensure that they are aware of the laws of the sovereign nation in which they are operating.

While executing their mission in support of OEF-P, AOBs and ODAs work extensively through other agencies of the U.S. government, as well as those of the Philippine Government. The U.S. Embassy and the U.S. Department of State are heavily involved in the political aspects of the OEF-P mission and frequently visit with AOBs and ODAs within the joint operating environment in the southern Philippines as well as in Manila. Involving other government agencies provides the units of 1st SFG(A) with a level of expertise in the workings of Philippines from foreign service officers and members of other agencies that have years of experience in the Philippines, as well as access to funding that provides another tool to meet the objectives of JSOTF-P. The skills developed by the Soldiers of 1st SFG(A) towards interagency cooperation translates well to the Afghanistan theater of operations where many of the same agencies exist. The planning and execution of TCP events within PACOM cannot occur without a level of cooperation between the executing 1st SFG(A) AOB or ODA and the U.S. Embassy of the host nation. Cooperation with the U.S. Embassy and ensuring their involvement in the TCP event is critical to the success of the event and ensuring future persistent engagements with the right units.

Although the United States Army Special Operations Command is the proponent for conducting unconventional warfare in the U.S. military, unconventional warfare is an interagency affair. It is critical that Special Forces Soldiers understand and are able to navigate through the

interagency environment and understand how to operate in sovereign countries. The ODAs have extensively expanded their skill-set of interacting with other government agencies and host-nation governments through their deployments in support of OEF-P. This expertise cannot be replicated in a training environment in the continental U.S.

ODAs Building Strategic Partnerships

The AOBs and ODAs of 1st SFG(A) conduct various TCP events throughout all of Asia, to include Joint Combined Exchange Training events, Joint Chiefs of Staff exercises, counternarcoterrorism events and subject-matter expert exchanges. These exercises are entirely planned and executed by the executing unit from the initiating directive to the final after action report. Often times, these missions occur in countries where the executing AOB or ODA is the only U.S. military presence. The Special Forces ODAs build personal and professional relationships with their counterparts in the militaries of foreign countries to further strengthen the ties and interdependency between the U.S. government and foreign governments.

The nature of TCP events allows for the AOBs and ODAs of 1st SFG(A) to operate independently, far from a higher headquarters and develop their FID skills in, what is often, an austere environment. The AOBs and ODAs conduct all planning and execution of their TCP events unilaterally. TCP events provide an ideal venue for teams to develop the fundamental and critical skills to conduct a FID mission. When operating far from an American support structure, teams are forced to rely on their counterparts and the local environment for support. These events primarily occur in more forgivable environments where the development of these skills can occur with lesser consequences from a misstep. The skills developed by AOBs and ODAs operating independently during TCP events are useful in Afghanistan when presence is needed in districts or provinces that have had little American presence. Teams are able to apply those skills to developing an understanding of the local social, geographic, economic and political landscape in those remote areas of Afghanistan to sustain themselves and accomplish their objectives. The skills developed during TCP events allow for the AOBs and ODAs to effectively conduct FID in the Philippines in remote areas and austere environments with their Philippine Security Force counterparts.

The units of 1st SFG(A) are the face for military-to-military relations for the United States within PACOM. With a continuous and persistent presence throughout PACOM, ODAs are able to maintain relationships through the execution of multiple TCP events over the course of years. This persistent presence by AOBs and ODAs amounts to a strategic relationship between the U.S. military and the militaries of the partnered nations. Special Forces Soldiers continue these relationships as they and their host-nation counterparts rise through the ranks and hold positions of greater responsibility and authority in the U.S. and in those partnered countries. Today's AOB and ODA commanders are tomorrow's battalion and group commanders while today's host-nation brigade and corps commanders are tomorrow's policy makers. The rapport built by the teams, over time, turns into a strategic asset for the U.S. Special Forces paired with host-nation forces at the tactical level pays dividends at the strategic level over time. In Afghanistan, 1st SFG(A) AOBs and ODAs have been able to use the same strategy in building relationships with their Afghan counterparts thereby creating the potential for future strategic engagements between the U.S. and those counterparts. In the Philippines, those relationships have already paid dividends and continue to be advantageous as the decision makers at JSOTF-P have conducted TCP events years ago and

developed relationships with their Filipino officer counterparts as part of an AOB or ODA. Those Filipino officers are now colonels and generals with influence which greatly eases the frictions of interoperability between U.S. forces and the Philippine Armed Forces.

TCP events are the method in which SOCPAC is able to maintain awareness on the countries of Asia and increase interoperability of forces. The FID skills and interagency skills developed during TCP events are the same skills that are critical in the execution of a UW operation. The continuous execution of TCP events in the diverse geopolitical landscape of the Asia Pacific region ensures that the AOBs and ODAs of 1st SFG(A) are prepared to conduct their primary mission of unconventional warfare.

The 1st SFG(A) has had the unique opportunity to continuously participate in OIF, OEF-A, OEF-P and TCP events throughout the PACOM AOR and use those experiences to develop and hone their skills in conducting UW. With the war in Afghanistan drawing to a close, the workload for the Soldiers will not diminish. With rapidly growing economies, including two of the three largest economies, and several of the largest militaries, the attention of the U.S. government has shifted to Asia.⁶ The Soldiers of 1st SFG(A) will continue to be called upon to conduct operations and maintain awareness on the political and social stability throughout Asia by leveraging relationships and exporting TTPs from one mission to the next. The 1st SFG(A) cycle has produced a special breed of Green Beret who is especially well suited for conducting UW. **SW**

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Notes

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5. *Malaysia invaded: The sultan's Sabah swing* | *The Economist*, 2013
6. Tritten, 2009
7. The 1st SFG(A) also gained combat experience while deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom from 2006-2010.
8. USPACOM Facts | *United States Pacific Command* | USPACOM, 2013