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SUPeR Feature Article:

The Impact of Global Threats on Funding for US Special Operations

By: Megan Cantwell

Abstract

This paper examines whether funding for special operations reflects the global threats that are faced by the United States. Organized special operations units first began to appear in the US military during WWII, but it was not until Vietnam that they were fully organized and integrated as part of the strategic plan, and the role of SOF expanded as the conflict continued. However, following Vietnam, the SOF programs that had developed were essentially gutted, due to the unpopular nature of SOF units among conventional military leaders. This research examines whether funding for SOF operations aligns with the threats faced by the United States, or if the political nature of the allocations process has more of an impact on the levels of funding for SOF programs. By examining shifts in threat since the development of the Special Operations command in 1987, and defining those shifting threats (as defined by strategy documents such as the National Security Strategy and Quadrennial Defense Review) as either a conventional or special operations threat, I studied

whether funding for SOF programs aligned with the threat. After examining six shifts in threat between 1987 and 2020, it was found that funding for SOCOM tended to respond to shifting threats.

Introduction:

In recent American memory, Special Operations Forces (SOF) has entered the forefront of popular culture. Following the terror attacks on 9/11/2001, the US began significant counter-insurgency operations that necessitated the use of SOF for the last 18 years—leading to significant increases in the size of the forces available, along with resources. During this time of expansion, countless movies, TV shows, books, and work-out regimens capitalized on the fervor and secrecy surrounding Special Operations, especially the Navy SEALs following the assassination of Osama bin Laden. But with all the media and popular attention now caught on ‘the silent professionals’ it is hard to remember that following the conflict in Vietnam, the US wanted to forget about unconventional tactics, and focus strategic efforts on conventional war.

Special operations are described as “Small, elite, military units with special training and equipment that can infiltrate into hostile territory through land, sea or air to conduct a variety of operations, many of them classified” (Feikert). Conventional warfare, however, is generally two or

more clear actors meeting on a battlefield, in a more winner-take-all style—for example WWI and WWII.

As the US has increased its SOF capacity, there is the potential need to re-focus on conventional forces. Discussion has started around if the US were to have to enter a traditional land war with a near-peer competitor, how well will Congress and the branches would respond to a need to reallocate resources. This is not simple speculation, with the rise of China and their military buildup in the South China Sea and Russian aggression in Ukraine, there is a real potential that the US could have to enter another ‘great power war’. If that is the case, will resources move with the risks that the country faces? Or will administrative inertia take over? To explore the question of resources moving with need, I will be examining whether the size of SOF has reflected current threats or if there are other factors influencing the funding process.

History:

Beginning in WWII, small, elite units began to pop up with distinctive missions that took different forms from the conventional operations and fighting styles taught to the majority of the troops: the Office of Strategic Services, air commandos, Scouts and Raiders, and the 1st Special Service Force (SOF Before USSOCOM). After successful operations during WWII, however, the Army Special Forces

that had developed, along with the OSS, were shut down as the US shifted focus to the growing threat of the Soviet Union. It was believed that war with the Soviet Union would not require irregular warfare, but would be a full conventional conflict, and therefore there was no need for a force dedicated to a style of conflict that was viewed as “outdated and inappropriate” by military leaders (Marquis 1997, 11).

When the conflict in Korea began, outside of a few Ranger units, SOF was not particularly utilized, and following the conflict SOF was cut again. Vietnam was the first conflict where SOF was a significant actor whose role was expanded as the conflict continued (Paul, et al.). The likelihood increased that the US would become more heavily involved in the region, President John F. Kennedy became more interested in the use of SOF in the conflict, particularly following the failure at the Bay of Pigs. Kennedy authorized a major expansion of SOF and repeatedly worked towards its further development as he saw that the US may need to become involved in unconventional wars that it currently had no effective way of fighting.

However, among the conventional military leaders, there was no enthusiasm for these new ‘cowboy’ units. Following Vietnam, the military had learned some hard lessons and vowed never again. During the military backlash following Vietnam, cuts were made across the military. SOF capabilities

were depleted as the military never wanted to fight another irregular conflict again. However, in the 1980s there was a move by key individuals within Congress and the military leadership to again develop a SOF capability. Following a period of general decline in the 1970s, several members of the Senate Armed Services Committee in 1983 began to push for change and improvement within SOF. Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) had been created in 1980 but it was not sufficient for the growing needs. Reform bills were introduced in 1986, and eventually US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM or SOCOM) was created. President Reagan approved the establishment of the combatant command on April 13th, 1987, which marked the beginning of real improvement to SOF capabilities (USSOCOM History, 9).

Throughout the next few years, SOF and SOCOM began to run and support conventional operations, including Desert Shield/Desert Storm, peace-keeping operations in Bosnia, and non-combatant evacuations, developing and acquiring SOF specific equipment, and continuing to push for an increased role in American national security.

The biggest change to SOF came following the terror attacks on 9/11. The US was forced to reevaluate its needs, and SOCOM was at the forefront of that evaluation. Afghanistan has significant SOF involvement. Beginning in late 2001, CENTCOM Commander General Tommy

Franks gave the lead in combating the Taliban to US SOF, to conduct unconventional warfare operations to remove the power of the Taliban within Afghanistan- to a fair amount of success through operations in Tora Bora, the securing of Kabul, and countless operations behind enemy lines (USSOCOM History, 86-109). SOF forces were some of the first on the ground and heavily involved in the removal of Saddam Hussein. Operation: Iraqi Freedom led to the “largest SOF deployment since the Vietnam War” (USSOCOM History, 11). However, the success that has been found has also led to extended involvement in the region to maintain stability involving both SOF and conventional forces, and US SOF still helps to train regional forces, particularly as groups such as ISIS began to rise within Iraq in the 2010s. The US also remains involved in other counter-terrorism operations around the world.

Literature Review:

The literature that exists surrounding the growth of SOF, particularly following the terror attacks on September 11th, notes that SOF, JSOC, and SOCOM have become very good at a specialized skill set- counter-terrorism, finding and containing weapons of mass destruction, and irregular warfare (Morrison). As the US began to be involved in both Iraq and Afghanistan, there was a significant increase

in the role of SOF, as evidenced by “the Bush Administration’s 2004 decision, through the Unified Command Plan, to assign USSOCOM the primary responsibility for prosecuting the Global War on Terrorism” (Spearin 2006). This move was sparked by the “the need for anti-terrorism and counterinsurgency expertise and the asymmetric nature of many current threats” that General Peter Schoomaker described as a ‘logical military response’ (Spearin 2006). Beyond simply looking at decision making power, evidence of SOF expansion can be seen even in recent years. In 2017, Owen West, the assistant defense secretary for special operations, made a request to increase the number of SOF operators to more than 71,000; to put this in context, prior to the attacks on 9/11, there were only around 33,000 SOF operators (South, 2018).

As the probability of conventional war with a near-peer competitor, the different specialties of SOF and conventional forces become important. Special Operations can be defined as “Unconventional actions against enemy vulnerabilities in a sustained campaign, undertaken by specially designed units, to enable conventional operations and or resolve economically politico-military problems at the operation or strategic level that are difficult or impossible to accomplish with conventional forces alone” (Spulak). SOF forces have an entirely different set of training and skill set from conventional forces, and therefore, while they can

certainly be complementary to conventional forces in a conventional conflict, SOF is not designed for large scale, long term conventional war. Rather, special operations should be used as a response to the varying needs of a war that are suited to SOF capabilities (Spulak). Specifically, capabilities of SOF include: conducting operations with ally nations including training other international forces, rapid deployment and response times, assessing specific local situations, gaining access to hostile territory, and conducting operations in unfriendly environments with limited support and low profile (Joint Publication 3-05).

Congress does not seem to be inclined to currently make major changes to the size of SOF, as described in a Congressional Research Service report by Richard Grimmett, Congress has in the past used its power of the budget to respond to public opinion and what they feel should be the goals of US foreign policy to limit military action. In the CRS report, Richard Grimmett notes the situations, such as Vietnam, Somalia, and Rwanda, where Congress has pushed back against the military objectives of the President. Examples include not allowing supplemental budget money to go to the conflict in Vietnam, and starting court cases about the War Powers Act due to the US involvement in Kosovo. This indicates that Congress will use its powers to make it harder, or stop entirely, the execution of foreign policy and national security goals that it may

not be behind or wants to prevent happening in the future.

The process of deciding on defense funding is long and complicated. In theory, a national security strategy ranking of threats is developed by the executive and military leaders. This will be the framework that service branches will use to see what is needed to adequately address the threats laid out in the strategy- this stage being the planning stage. Then, in the programming phase, the services receive their guidance and look at how they plan to meet the strategy on a broad level. Next is the budgeting phase, which determines the final costs of programs and sends in the estimate of what their budget will be to the Secretary of Defense. Once this stage is complete, the budget is sent into the Office of Management and Budget for the White House, which then incorporates the proposed budget into the President's overall budget (Hays, Vallance and Tassel).

However, there are clear examples of individual interests of members of Congress impacting the process, such as projects that are set to be shut down and are re-opened, and areas that are requesting more funds not receiving those funds. In some cases, it is the political realities of a member's district. A prime example of this is when military bases are set to be scrapped. Bases can be a huge positive economic impact on a community, as they bring in jobs. A member of Congress could step in to

prevent a base closure in their constituency, even if that base is recommended for closure by the military (Schnaubelt 2017).

Outside of individual interests, there is even further complication to the allocations process, with near-constant pressure to cut back spending competing with the need to maintain the strategic edge above peers. The cost of weapons development, as well as the costs associated with maintaining a large, active-duty force, is not to be ignored (O'Hanlon 1997). The debates over how much defense is actually enough, and what kind of defense we should have, along with a level of risk that can be accepted play heavily into the decisions (Guillot 2014). Factors that tend to increase defense spending include war, economic growth, unemployment, and partisanship (Heo and Bohte 2012). Defense spending is particularly difficult, as Domke (1984) notes in "Waste, Weapons, and Resolve: Defense Posture and Politics in the Defense Budget" that defense spending is volatile, bouncing between exponential growth and austerity measures faster and more frequently than almost any other budget area. It is also a particularly political process, as defense spending can be the backbone of a political campaign, whether it is to rapidly increase or significantly decrease the spending. Domke found that domestic policies play an important role in the budgeting process, and that ultimately "political change is related to changing patterns of allocation

in the defense budget” (Domke 1984, 388). The situation especially includes the politics of military and civilian leaders within the Pentagon, along with the politics of the current administration (Domke 1984).

Outside of the political complications of the allocations process, there are other factors at play. Anthony Cordesman performed a deep dive into the proposal side of the procurement process and came across several failures on the military’s side when deciding what to fund. “There is no doubt that the US is capable of conceptual thinking about national security. What is far less clear is that the US is capable of efficiently translating such concepts into practice: the need to effectively manage defense programs and budgets, and deal with immediate and near-term needs” (Cordesman 2010). Some of the problems facing the procurement system come from increasing costs of personnel, maintaining readiness, and general budgeting issues facing the country as a whole--all of which have to be considered when looking at the DoD budget. Cordesman recognizes spending control issues within the military, particularly once a ‘status quo’ has been established. Once a program or system is in place, it is often very difficult to get rid of those projects. The movement away from annual planning has also been problematic, and mismatching between the Quadrennial Defense Review and Strategic goals in the budgeting process are further unhelpful. There is

also the ultimate issue of each service wanting to acquire resources and influence for itself, which will do nothing but further potential incongruities in the budgeting process. Because of the self-serving nature that the military branches and leadership can have in their role, blind spots in strategy can emerge, creating a mismatch between what is being funded, and what the concerns facing the nation and our allies are (Breitenbauch and Jakobsson, 2018).

In 2018, as interstate competition becomes more of an issue, it is likely that defense spending will continue to increase, as it is more expensive to compete with constantly improving near-peer states. Technological innovation will be key, along with force modernization and general increases to defense capacity (Grieco 2018). There are arguments that the most effective use of US defense resources would be to actually make the US military less active. “Used sparingly, American economic and military power should not be squandered in futile attempts at remaking the internal affairs of other countries by the point of a spear” (Grieco 2018). If this argument were to prevail, and the US was to refocus to prepare for a great power conflict, there should be a decrease in SOF operations (as those are frequently ‘remaking the internal affairs of other countries) and therefore a decrease in the funding for SOF, while also likely an increase in conventional forces.

Theory:

In theory, if the development of SOF forces has adapted based on the threats that the US is facing, then the resources being allocated to the development of SOF forces, relative to the amount being allocated to all defense resources, should align with times when the US is facing more unconventional threats, but decline during times when there is a focus on more conventional dangers. However, that may not necessarily be the case due to the nature of the allocation process. Congress and the American people, following the events of Vietnam, swore to never fight another conflict like it again, and leaders who were more comfortable with conventional warfare cut back SOF resources in the 1970s. But by the 1980s there was already movement towards the reform and expansion of SOF. It is possible that aside from the initial cuts following the conflict in Vietnam, Congress, along with the military leadership, made changes to SOF resources not based on need and national security goals, but rather based on what they wanted to fund. In more current times, there may be a question on whether the budget process is motivated by threat, or what the most politically feasible program is.

Hypothesis: Funding for SOF will not reflect the national security challenges.

IV: Whether the threats faced by the United States would be best addressed by resources aligned with

conventional warfare or irregular warfare. Irregular warfare threats include terrorism, instability due to the weakening of states, risk of insurgency, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Conventional warfare is a traditional conflict between two states. While assessing QDRs, NSSs, and other documents, I decided based off the language of the documents themselves what the more significant threat was, and then classified those threats based on earlier definitions of SOF in my literature review (ie Spulak and the Joint Publication). Conventional was slightly harder to define, but I considered conventional threats those against a defined, recognized state that would involve defined battles. For example, war with Russia would be a conventional threat as Russia is a recognized state, with resources that more closely match the US, that would most likely be engaged in a traditional battle to battle sense, whereas a terror-organization does not have defined borders, and tend to engage in ‘guerilla-style’ tactics that cannot be as well addressed by conventional forces.

DV: Funding for SOF, relative to the size of funding for major force programs based on the total obligation authority from Congress that was presented in the FY 2020 Greenbook.

Methods:

Due to the nature of SOF, there is a limited amount of data that is available to be analyzed. In order to explore the size of SOF related to the threats at the time, I examined times where there has been a major shift in the threat since the development of SOCOM, and looked at the funding for SOF immediately prior and then immediately following, to see if there was a change.

For the shift in threat, I analyzed National Security Strategies and Quadrennial Defense Reviews for their overarching goals and threats for each period of time. Both of these publications are only published every few years and tend to focus on the big picture. While there is a political tint to the publications as they represent the goals of a specific administration, they also outline clearly what they believe the threats to be, and therefore indicate what programs should receive more funding.

After achieving a holistic look at each period of time, I identified times when the threats facing the United States shifted in a significant way from the previous period. For this paper, I examined 1987 as it was immediately after the founding of SOCOM, 1993 as it was after the end of the Cold War, 1998 as the US moved away from peacekeeping operations and began to focus on new emerging threats, 2002 following the terror attacks on 9/11 and US involvement in Iraq, 2010 as the US is deeply

involved in the war on terror, and 2017 as the risk of war with a near-peer competitor begins to increase.

Once the shifts are established, I will classify if the threats during that time are more SOF oriented threats, or rather more along the lines of conventional operations. Counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency, and counter-WMDs are examples of areas that are aligned with SOF capabilities; while the threat of conventional war from a near-peer competitor aligns with the development of conventional forces. After classifying the threats as either conventional or SOF, I examined the funding. For funding, I compared what percentage of funding SOF receives, compared to the DoD budget for major force programs in a given year, in order to avoid any issues of inflation.

Research:

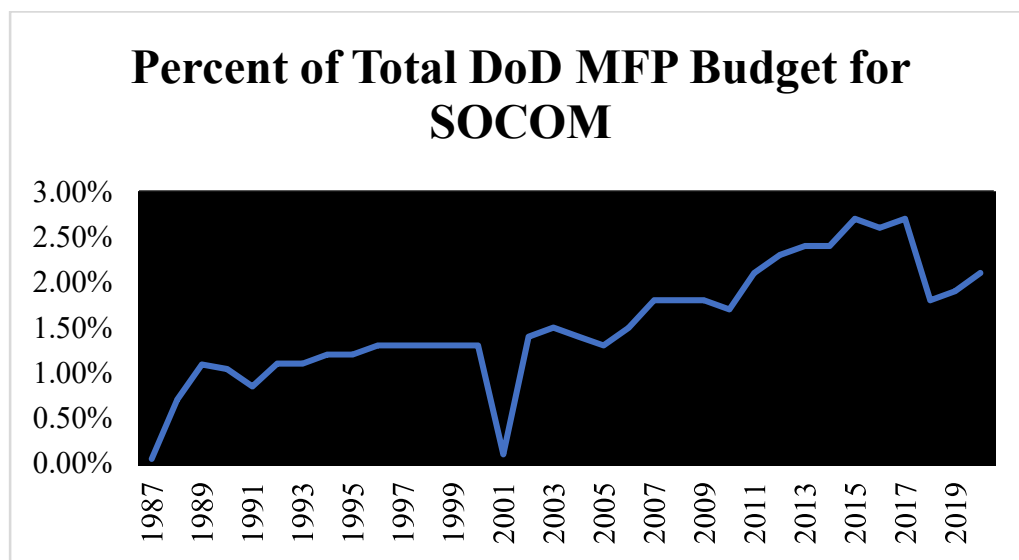


Figure One: Percent of Total DoD MFP Budget for SOCOM

From the time that SOCOM was established in 1989, funding has had periods of fluctuation, but the trend over time has been increasing. Figure one tracks the percentage of funding that SOCOM received as part of the total MFP budget since 1987. Outside of the founding of SOCOM and 2001, funding has remained above 0.5% of total funding for major force programs, as demonstrated in figure one. 2001 is an outlier, as that year, following the attacks on September 11th, there was a significant request for emergency funding by President Bush, which interfered with the percentages at that time. During the 1990s, funding tended to hold steady between 1.3 and 1.5 percent, and it was not until around 2010 that there was a major jump in funding, followed by a significant decrease between 2017 and 2018, with the 2020 FY increasing the trend again. The year with the highest percentage was a tie between 2015 and 2017, at 2.7%, with the lowest years being 1987 and 2001, although both of those years have specific reasons. Excluding 2001, the only year after 1987 that funding dropped below 1% was 1991. The average percent spending across all years was 1.5%.

1987:

The National Security Strategy in 1987 identified the Soviet Union as the biggest threat to the security of the United States as the Cold War was still happening, and at the time did not seem like it would be ending any time soon. The US was focused

on deterring hostile attacks (ever aware of the threat of a great power war), strengthening alliances, and the increasing prevalence of international terrorism. The threat of the Soviet Union consumed most of the National Security Strategies of 1987 and 1988, and although terrorism is listed as one of the threats, most of the strategies pushed by the government are in response to the communist threat. The first principle goal listed in the 1987 National Security Strategy document is “To deter hostile attack of the United States, its citizens, military forces, or allies and to defeat attack if deterrence fails” (NSS 1987).

While there are some roles where SOF may be helpful in combating the spread of communism such as in El Salvador, the overarching threat of a great-power war is more geared towards nuclear deterrence and conventional forces, as demonstrated by the large number of ground-troop forces that were deployed to Europe. The policy of containment was one main area where SOF could assist with combating the threat of the Soviet Union, however, the design for containment that was laid out in the National Security Strategy of 1987 pointed to more of a conventional means of containment, such as keeping many military installations in Europe (as well as around the rest of the world) with large numbers of conventional ground forces.

Statements from political leaders at this time matched up with the threats assessed by the NSS. President Reagan spoke, tried, and pointed out

attempts in his 1987 State of the Union address about maintaining resolve against the threat of the Soviet Union, and tried to rally support for his defense budget by calling on data about the defense spending of the Soviet Union, and attempts around the world to maintain freedom from communism, which illustrates the split nature of the threat during this period as both conventional and irregular.

In 1987, when SOCOM was founded, SOF operations were allocated .05% of the total defense budget for major force programs of \$282 billion. The following year, SOF was allocated 0.7% of the major force program budget of \$287 billion, rising to 1.09% of \$291 billion in 1989. This shows an increase in funding, with a split in threats leaning much more heavily towards conventional.

1993:

By 1993, the Cold War had fully finished, and American defense spending and strategy statements had begun to shift to reflect a new global order with the US as the sole hegemon. President Clinton's administration outlined the goals of global stability, open and democratic governments around the world, and open international trade; while acknowledging the need to participate in peacekeeping and counter-proliferation efforts to achieve the goals of an open and democratic world. This is a major shift from the previous period of the

Cold War, when the US was focused on defeating an existential threat to its existence.

“Our great nation stands at a crossroads in history. We have entered a world radically transformed in the last four years...our former nemesis, the Soviet Union, so long an enemy bristling with tanks pointed at Western Europe and nuclear weapons aimed at us, is gone...” (NSS 1993, i).

There was also very limited interest in peace-keeping efforts around the world during the Cold War (unless they had to do with preventing communism), but as the US entered the role of hegemon more fully, there was a desire to spread stable, democratic systems around the world.

“We must seize opportunities, both for the benefits that will accrue to us, and to further the prospects for peace, stability and property that can and should be shared by others around the globe. We must lead because we cannot otherwise hope to achieve a more democratic and peaceful future in a world still rife with turmoil and conflict” (NSS 1993,2).

After years of the world seemingly holding its breath, waiting for the other shoe to drop, there was a strong desire for stability in the global system, without risk of a great war- “For the first time in more than forty

years, we are no longer faced with the constant threat of World War III (NSS 1993, 2).

The 1993 goals are more aligned with SOF capabilities than with conventional. Peacekeeping, anti-insurgency and the stabilization of governments are more similar to the mission of SOF- and the goals of this period. The threats these goals were designed to address were regional instability and weapons proliferation. Regional instability and the need for counter-insurgency operations was a SOF aligned goal, as was the proliferation of WMDs. During this time, peacekeeping operations designed to help with regional instability were more of a conventional mission. There was much less risk of a great powers war, or even conventional war between the US and another power, during this period of time, due to the US status as the global hegemon.

In 1991, total funding for major force programs was \$310 billion, with SOCOM making up 0.85%. By 1994, major force programs were reduced to \$251 billion, and SOCOM made up 1.2%. This indicates that as the threats were more SOF oriented (counter-insurgency and WMDs), funding for SOF increased.

1998:

By the late 90s, there was another shift in the tone of national security strategy documents. The

increasing prevalence of globalization, and the risks associated with it, came to the forefront. In the 1997 NSS, globalization was the first challenge discussed under the ‘Challenges and Opportunities heading’. Associated with globalization are the risks of ‘outlaw states and ethnic conflicts threatening regional security, along with WMDs, and terrorism. As the world becomes more globalized, threats that used to mainly impact small portions of the world become much more significant to the US national interests and therefore more serious threats. “In short, our citizens have a direct stake in the prosperity and stability of other nations, in their support for international norms and human rights, in their ability to combat international crime, in their open markets, and in their efforts to protect the environment” (NSS 1997,1).

The first Quadrennial Defense Review, published in 1997, outlined risks that the US would be facing in the 21st century as “...the threat of coercion and large-scale cross-border aggression against US allies and friends in key regions by hostile states with significant military power” (1993 QDR, 3).

An example of the threat of WMDs is North Korea, who while also posing a military threat to the US ally South Korea, is also during this time continuing to actively pursue the development of nuclear weapons. The spread of WMDs is mostly a SOF oriented threat, while cross border aggression is

harder to define, the cases discussed in the QDR include states such as Iraq and Iran interfering with the flow of goods in the region, and the continuing threat of North Korea as more conventional, defining this period as a time of split threats.

In 1996, \$255 billion was dedicated to major force programs, with 1.3% dedicated to SOCOM. In 1993, \$269 billion was allocated for major force programs, with SOCOM staying approximately the same at 1.1%, and then 1.2% in 1994 when funding for major force programs was \$251 billion. For this period, the threats were split between conventional and SOF, and there was no significant change in funding, as it stayed within a range of 0.3%.

2002:

Following the terror attacks on 9/11, the national security strategy of the US experienced a major shift. The US was now focused on the war on terror. Following the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, there was real focus put on going after the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces. The Afghan government quickly fell in 2001, and while negotiations began to establish a new government, US forces continued significant counter-terror operations. Osama bin Laden was a major target, as the orchestrator of the 9/11 attacks, but the entire al-Qaeda organization, along with the Taliban, were the subject of numerous operations. This shift also marked the beginning of a period of war for the US,

and the extended US involvement in the region as a whole.

The 2002 National Security Strategy acknowledged that global terrorism was now the leading risk, and the complications faced due to it not being a threat best met by conventional means. “The United States of America is fighting a war against terrorists of global reach. The enemy is not a single political regime or person or religion or ideology...it will be fought on many fronts against a particularly elusive enemy over an extended period of time” (NSS 2002, 5). Regional conflicts also remain a leading risk in this strategy document, as it is recognized that failing states are incubators for terrorism. Finally, WMDs are considered a significant risk, as the rise of ‘rogue states and terrorists’ makes the weapons much less secure than they had been previously. The Quadrennial Defense Review from this period in 2001 also recognizes these threats, recommends that the US will need to be able to deploy to critical areas of the world more regularly, and notes the key role that SOF forces will need to play to combat these threats.

The goals and risks of this period align neatly with the use of SOF: counter-terror, counter-insurgency, and counter-WMDs.

“Our nation will be steadfast, and patient and persistent in the pursuit of two great objectives. First, we will shut down terrorist

camps, disrupt terrorist plans and bring terrorists to justice. And second, we must prevent the terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological or nuclear weapons from threatening the United States and the world” (Bush, 2002).

Unlike many previous State of the Union addresses, the 2002 speech by President Bush puts a clear focus on what the US military has accomplished early on in his address, and highlights that the war on terror is significant and “may not be finished on our watch” (Bush 2002).

In 2000, SOF made up 1.3% of the major force program budget of \$286 billion. In 2002 however, following the 9/11 attacks and the invasion of Afghanistan, SOF increased to 1.4% of the \$355 billion budget and then 1.5% of the \$433 billion budget in 2003. During this time, the threats were particularly SOF oriented, but there was no significant change in funding for SOF operations during this time.

2010:

In 2010, following extended involvement in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Middle East region as a whole, the goals and threats had shifted some. While counter-terrorism remained a major focus, the proliferation of WMDs, particularly the development of nuclear weapons in places such as North Korea and Iran, was listed as one of the top threats facing

the US. Economic security is also a problem, following the crash of the housing market and the development of economic security was a major goal of the 2010 strategy.

During this period of time, there was a significant increase in counter-terror and counter-WMD operations, and therefore also a significant increase in the number of SOF operations. “Above all, the United States and its allies and partners remain engaged in a broader war- a multifaceted political, military and moral struggle- against Al Qaeda and its allies around the world” (QDR 2010, iii). Both the war against terror and the proliferation of WMDs are SOF oriented threats, and there was a marked increase in SOF activity during this time.

In 2009, total major force program funding was \$665 billion, with SOCOM holding 1.8% of that funding. By 2010, MFP was up to \$691 billion, with SOCOM at 1.7% of that funding, and then rising to 2.1% of the \$689 billion in 2011. This is a significant increase in SOF funding during a time with SOF oriented threats.

Current:

In the most recent National Security Strategy from 2017, the leading threat is the rise of near-peer competitors, including China and Russia. Counter-terrorism and WMDs remain as risks, but the general tone of the document is to promote American

development to compete with rising peers, as well as focusing on internal problems.

The rising risk of near-peer competitors is discussed in the NSS of 2017 as a significant threat. “The United States will respond to the growing political, economic and military competitions we face around the world. China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity.” In the case of China, the threat of another ‘great power’ war is more of a conventional threat and would be best addressed with an increase in conventional forces. This may not hold as true with Russia, who engages in more hybrid forms of war but would likely still call for an increase in conventional forces to be more on par with the current SOF-orientation. However, the unconventional threats from previous years are still present, including the risks of terrorism and the increasing proliferation of WMDs.

Beginning in 2017, 2.7% of the \$609 billion dedicated to major force programs was for SOCOM. In 2019, SOCOM was allocated 1.9% of the \$689 billion for MFPs and in 2020 it is set to be allocated 2.1% of \$718 M. This shows a decrease in funding over time, with a split in threats that leans to the development of conventional forces.

Conclusion:

Year	Funding	Threat
1987	Increase	Conventional
1993	Increase	SOF
1998	No change	Split/lean conventional
2002	No change	SOF
2010	Increase	SOF
2017	Reduce	Split/lean conventional

Figure 2: Findings Analysis

As demonstrated in figure two, following the examination of six periods of shift, four of those shifting threats had a correct response with funding, making my hypothesis that funding would not follow threat incorrect, as the funding did indeed tend to follow threat. Despite the concerns of the political nature of the allocations process, these findings seem to indicate that serious changes or increases in threat will lead to a responding change in capacity. However, I believe that SOF may be somewhat different from the military as a whole, given it is a fairly small portion of the budget that is not as likely to have direct political impacts for members of Congress. The political impact for military leaders has also shifted since the Vietnam era, as there has been demonstrated successes associated with SOF

capability, and, if anything, leaders seem to be more likely to potentially over-rely on SOF.

Further looking into the data since 1987, there have been an increasing number of threats that are SOF oriented. Therefore, it makes sense that in most of the shifts analyzed, there was an increase in SOF funding. It could also be argued that reduction of SOF funding in the most recent years can be attributed to a potential over-reliance on SOF during the late 2010s, and the budgeting processes and systems responding to that significance.

Moving forward, it will be interesting to examine whether funding for SOF will fully respond to the rising threat of war with a near-peer competitor, or if the increased reliance on SOF that marked the 2010s will hold true. The cut in funding, as mentioned earlier, seems to indicate that the process recognizes and adjusts for threats, however, the funding still sits at a significantly higher percentage than the average over the 33-year time span of this study, and seemed to be on the uptick again in 2020.

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