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## SOF-MAGTF Capabilities Integrations Analysis and Operational Modeling (Continuation)

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Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School

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## NPS NRP Executive Summary

SOF-MAGTF Capabilities Integrations Analysis and Operational Modeling (Continuation)

Period of Performance: 10/24/2021 – 10/23/2022

Report Date: 10/13/2021 | Project Number: NPS-22-M337-A

Naval Postgraduate School, Defense Analysis (DA)



NAVAL RESEARCH PROGRAM

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

# SOF-MAGTF CAPABILITIES INTEGRATIONS ANALYSIS AND OPERATIONAL MODELING (CONTINUATION) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### Project Summary

This research, working in conjunction with ongoing NPS efforts examining Expeditionary Advance Base Operations (EABO), focuses on exploring, assessing and identify mechanisms that will allow United States Marine Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC) to better serve as a bridge for capabilities integration with SOF and deployed MAGTFs to fully maximize the complementary capabilities of each formation. Specifically, this effort examines MARSOC operating concepts with a focus on Strategic Shaping and Reconnaissance (SSR) and the tie-ins to the USMC Expeditionary Advanced Based Operations (EABO) concept for 21st Century warfighting in the contact, blunt, and surge layers of competition and conflict. This research examines SSR activities across the spectrum of cooperation, competition, and conflict to gain awareness of adversarial intentions and capabilities in order to deter, disrupt, deny or increase the adversary's risk.

The research leveraged the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) Warfare Innovation Continuum (WIC) and multiple Joint Campaign Analysis (JCA) and Wargaming Applications courses to develop its insights.

The primary focus of this effort was to explore how MARSOC can operationalize SSR to achieve effects in competition in a littoral environment. The effort was based on an exchange of ideas between MARSOC and NPS researchers to better understand SSR operational concepts and identified three critical MARSOC issues for exploration. The research identified a potential set of SSR supported platforms and multiple operational techniques for the employment of those platforms.

**Keywords:** *wargaming, campaign analysis, expeditionary advanced based operations, EABO, marine air ground task force, MAGTF, marine forces special operations command, MARSOC, strategic shaping and reconnaissance, SSR*

### Background

The Strategic Shaping and Reconnaissance (SSR) concept is the Marine Corps' special operations contribution to the national defense requirements for both strategic competition and, when required, conflict. SSR is an evolving MARSOC operating concept that ties into future special operations force (SOF) operations and the USMC Expeditionary Advanced Based Operations (EABO) concept for 21st Century warfighting in the contact, blunt, and surge layers of competition and conflict. SSR includes those activities conducted by special operations elements in cooperation, competition, and conflict to gain awareness of adversarial intentions and capabilities in order to deter, disrupt, deny or increase the adversary's risk. SSR encompasses a wide array of skills and equipment to provide shaping and influence effects. Effects are achieved through a hybrid approach utilizing selected SOF core activities and programs applied through special and intelligence operations, direct and indirect actions, and the persistent development of ally and partner relations.

Marine Special Operations Forces (MARSOF) conducting SSR possess the capability to operate in the competition continuum and transition to conflict if competition fails. MARSOF employs capabilities in the multi-domain environment that provide target analysis against networks in competition and conflict. Emphasis is placed upon strategic mobile targets, and critical infrastructure to determine intent, providing the supported commander current and detailed collections and, when required, Direct Action against a specific network, facility, or individual associated with threats against the nation's interests.



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The wargames utilized in this work familiarized participants and observers with SSR concepts and their potential employment in a South China Sea scenario. Under the NPS WIC construct, an NPS student team, in the JCA course, conducted a mini-study examining a set of potential critical issues in an operational environment. This mini-study was followed by an NPS faculty-advised student wargaming team in the Wargaming Applications course, that designed, developed, conducted, and analyzed a wargame leveraging the findings from the mini-study. The wargames modeled SOF utilization of the principles of SSR in a competition environment to best posture SOF to deter escalation of events.

The overarching objective of this effort was to explore how can MARSOC operationalize SSR to achieve effects across the continuum of cooperation, competition, and conflict in a littoral environment. This effort focused on gaining insights into the following three major issues:

1. What maritime platforms best support an SSR mission in a littoral environment?
2. What tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) should be used for littoral mobility in support of SSR missions?
3. How do external agencies, including the interagency, China, local media, and the special operations task force (SOTF) react to the SSR platforms and TTPs?

### Findings and Conclusions

This effort resulted in the following findings and conclusions.

**Issue 1:** This effort examined the potential for SSR missions both in an island-hopping and riverine scenario. For island-hopping and intra-island missions, planning teams tended to select a variant of a medium size vessel that can carry 10-15 personnel, multiple parasite boats to go to and from shore, and possess a reasonable cargo capacity for either transport or mission equipment. A medium-size, host nation owned patrol boat, or a locally sourced fishing trawler appeared to be the best performing platform. For riverine missions, planning teams focused on either military or civilian-styled zodiac-class boats. Planning teams favored these platforms specifically for their ability to navigate shallow waters under motor power or while rowed.

**Issue 2:** The overwhelming majority of teams utilized overt actions to create a clear narrative for their actions. Many teams conducted bilateral, partner force training in conjunction with their mission to support a positive narrative. Additionally, teams often conducted recreational or commercial fishing and diving operations to add additional narrative.

Most planning teams incorporated the host/parasite platform technique in their operations. Utilizing a larger vessel as the host and tactical operations center allowed teams to disperse their forces in smaller vessels for their team insert and maintain a smaller footprint. The parasite technique allowed access to shallower waters without sacrificing the benefits of a larger vessel.

Teams often utilized larger than expected force sizes in conducting their missions. Fifty percent of the mission sets allowed the planning teams to dictate the number of troops, and fifty percent provided a troop constraint (i.e., you must insert 10 personnel). A minimum force size was dictated as 4 personnel. When planning teams were able to dictate the number of troops, the average team size was 12 personnel.



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**Issue 3:** The SOTF viewed most missions that had a plausible innocent circumstance (i.e., partner training or recreational activity that fit into the scenario) as low risk. The SOTF was particularly concerned about the location of U.S. personnel and equipment, specifically when using a civilian-style boat.

**China.** As expected, China’s reaction to US actions with a partner nation force were overall negative. It should be expected that China will disapprove of US rapport building operations, especially with training operations being conducted to increase the operational effectiveness of the partner nation forces (PNF).

**Media.** The local media tended to favor any US relation building or training assistance actions that provided a positive and growing relationship with a PNF. As an example, assisting in training PNF on visit, board, search, and seizure techniques and other waterborne interdiction approaches to help fight illegal fishing was regarded very favorably in the eyes of the media.

**Interagency.** Building relationships with interagency partners is critical to operations. Overall, interagency organizations were concerned about the potential impact operations involving civilian craft and using “innocent” recreational activities might have on the goodwill narrative of US involvement. This concern highlights the importance of command teams building good rapport with embassy country teams.

### Recommendations for Further Research

Strategic shaping and reconnaissance is still a nascent concept that require further research to better understand how the Marine Special Operations Forces MARSOF community can use it to operate more effectively to establish a position of advantage, while preventing the escalation of violence. Essentially, these employment mechanisms will need to mature through continued programs of wargaming and campaign analysis research to best serve the joint intermediate force capabilities office and the Special Operations Forces community.

### Acronyms

EABO	Expeditionary Advanced Based Operations
JCA	Joint Campaign Analysis
MARSOC	United States Marine Forces Special Operations Command
MARSOF	Marine Special Operations Forces
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School
PNF	partner nation forces
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOTF	special operations task force
SSR	strategic shaping and reconnaissance
TTP	tactics, techniques and procedures
WIC	Warfare Innovation Continuum

