

**STRATEGY  
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**UNCONVENTIONAL AIRMEN:  
PRESENT AND FUTURE ROLES AND MISSIONS  
FOR 6<sup>TH</sup> SOS COMBAT AVIATION ADVISORS**

**BY**

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**Unconventional Airmen: Present and Future Roles and Missions for  
6<sup>th</sup> SOS Combat Aviation Advisors**

by

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## ABSTRACT

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Following the Viet Nam conflict, the USAF almost completely dismantled its once potent special operations capability, particularly the ability to conduct advisory operations with foreign air forces, resulting in an 'aviation void' across the special operations spectrum. Watershed legislation (Goldwaters-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 and the Cohen-Nunn Act) resulted in the rebuilding of all U.S. and specifically Air Force SOF (AFSOF). Since the earliest days of the resurrection of AFSOF, reconstruction architects directed rebuilding efforts almost exclusively to direct action, or the support of direct action missions (the insertion, resupply, and extraction of Army and Navy direct action forces (Special Forces, Rangers, SEALs)). Other missions previously in the USAF repertoire, such as aviation foreign internal defense (FID), were neglected. Early in the shakeout of service responsibility, the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) designated Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) the proponent for the aviation-FID mission. Aviation-FID received mostly academic attention until the mid-1990s, culminating in 1994 when AFSOC reflagged the 6<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron with a primary mission of aviation-FID. The inherent capability in 6<sup>th</sup> SOS aviation advisory teams enables them to execute various other missions across the spectrum of military operations. The 6<sup>th</sup> SOS more resembles Army Special Forces units in function and organization than traditional USAF line squadrons. Like other SOF, the 6<sup>th</sup> SOS combat aviation advisory teams may operate on high-risk, high-gain missions at the strategic, operational, and tactical level. This unit trains, organizes, and equips aviation advisory teams to facilitate the availability, reliability, safety, and interoperability of foreign air forces in support of U.S. objectives, sustaining unified combatant commander objectives across the full spectrum of operations, including peacetime engagement, military operations other than war (MOOTW), conflict, and finally, theater war. This paper examines the contributions of 6<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron combat aviation advisors to combatant commanders in present and future roles and missions.



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## **UNCONVENTIONAL AIRMEN: PRESENT AND FUTURE ROLES AND MISSIONS FOR 6<sup>TH</sup> SOS COMBAT AVIATION ADVISORS**

Through the 1960's and early 1970's, the U.S. Air Force (USAF) maintained a robust special operations air capability. Following the conclusion of the Viet Nam conflict, the USAF almost completely dismantled its once potent special operations capability, particularly the ability to conduct advisory operations with foreign air forces. The reduction of USAF special operations forces (SOF) gutted the USAF inventory of special operations airmen and machines capable and competent to address the employment of special operations aviation; an 'aviation void' resulted across the special operations spectrum. The failed Iranian rescue attempt proved one of the catalysts resulting in watershed legislation (Goldwaters-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 and the Cohen-Nunn Act) which resulted in the rebuilding of all U.S. and specifically Air Force SOF (AFSOF).

Since the earliest days of the resurrection of AFSOF, the reconstruction architects directed rebuilding efforts almost exclusively to direct action or to the support of direct action missions; for example, airborne firepower platforms (the AC-130 gunship), or the insertion, resupply, and extraction of Army and Navy direct action forces (Special Forces, Rangers, SEALs). Other mission areas, such as aviation foreign internal defense (FID), previously in the USAF repertoire, were neglected. Early in the shakeout of service responsibility, the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) designated the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) the proponent for the aviation-FID mission. Aviation-FID received mostly academic attention until the mid-1990s, culminating in 1994 when the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) reflagged the 6<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron (SOS) with a primary mission of aviation-foreign internal defense.

Although organized to meet the need for an AFSOF aviation-FID requirement, the inherent capability in 6<sup>th</sup> SOS aviation advisory teams enables them to execute various other missions across the spectrum of military operations, including, but not limited to coalition support and unconventional warfare efforts. The 6<sup>th</sup> SOS more resembles Army Special Forces units in function and organization than traditional USAF line squadrons. Like other SOF, the 6<sup>th</sup> SOS combat aviation advisory teams may operate on high-risk, high-gain missions at the strategic, operational, and tactical level. This unit trains, organizes, and equips aviation advisory teams to facilitate the availability, reliability, safety, and interoperability of foreign air forces in support of U.S. objectives, sustaining unified combatant commander objectives across the full spectrum of operations, including peacetime engagement, military operations other than war (MOOTW), conflict, and finally, theater war.

This paper examines the contributions of 6<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron combat aviation advisors to combatant commanders in present and future roles and missions.

### **THE AVIATION VOID**

Most individuals familiar with the history of U.S. Air Force special operations forces (AFSOF) would certainly agree it achieved its zenith, in force structure if not capability, in the six to eight year period of

the late 1960s to the early 1970s. Approximately 550 aircraft, mostly vintage World War II models, and 5500 personnel supported direct action missions, psychological and counterinsurgency operations, and a variety of other missions.<sup>1</sup> In the early 1960s, the Kennedy administration broadened the national security spotlight to include the lower end of the conflict spectrum. A 1962 statement by President John Kennedy articulated the perceived threat, which the administration had previously directed the services to address.

“There is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origin—war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins, war by ambush instead of by combat....it requires....where we must counter it...a whole new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of force and therefore a new and wholly different kind of military training.”<sup>2</sup>

The United States Air Force (USAF) began the buildup of a special operations capability consisting mostly of prop-driven and rotary-wing aircraft. In March, 1961, the USAF established the 4400<sup>th</sup> Combat Crew Training Squadron to meet the President's direction and provide the USAF with a counterinsurgency military assistance capability with emphasis on advising allies on how to fight, not necessarily doing the fighting.<sup>3</sup> The unit operated C-47 transports, A-26 light attack bombers, and T-28 fighters, all piston-engined, prop-driven aircraft supporting three specific flying missions: airlift, reconnaissance, and strike. Nevertheless, the principal mission of the unit was to train foreign air force personnel in counter-insurgency air operations. The program was best known by its unclassified moniker, “Jungle Jim.”<sup>4</sup> However wise the intent, by 1965, training and advising the Viet Nameese aircrews became a decreasing priority and AFSOF began to focus their efforts on direct action in support of U.S. conventional land operations as the effort in Southeast Asia increased.<sup>5</sup>

The post-Viet Nam drawdown affected all the services; special operations funding, in particular, was cut by 95 per cent in the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> The Air Force reduced its special operations forces to essentially a caretaker force, cutting active-duty aircraft by 90% and very nearly moving the remaining AFSOF active-duty units wholesale to the reserve component.<sup>7</sup> By 1986, the active AFSOF included only the 1<sup>st</sup> Special Operations Wing (SOW) operating four types of aircraft, MC-130E Combat Talons, AC-130H Spectre gunships, UH-1N and HH-53H Pave Low helicopters; two additional squadrons of MC-130Es operated overseas, in the Pacific and European theaters respectively.<sup>8</sup>

While the direct action and psychological operations missions were cut to the bone, the USAF demobilized all advisory forces. This lack of AFSOF capability, in general, and advisory capability, in particular, may justifiably be called the aviation void in special operations.<sup>9</sup>

## **RENAISSANCE**

Several key events occurred in the 1980s, reversing the downsizing trend and setting in motion the reconstruction of the nation's SOF capability. In one of the first, the Army in 1977 established a counterterrorism unit known as Delta Force, in response to President Jimmy Carter's request for assurances from his military leadership that the U.S. had a counterterrorism capacity.<sup>10</sup> Army Chief of

Staff General Edward C. Meyer followed with the consolidation of Army SOF under a single major command, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, in 1982, the first service to organize its SOF forces under a single major command.<sup>11</sup> The attempted rescue of 53 Americans held hostage by fanatical Iranian followers of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini proved to be the most visible in this series of catalysts. Legislation had been brewing since the early 1980s and in October 1986, Congress directed the reorganization of the Armed Forces with passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act (PL 99-433). This legislation also directed the Department of Defense (DoD) to consider the "creation of a unified combatant command for the special operations mission which would combine the special operations missions, responsibilities, and forces of the Armed Forces."<sup>12</sup> In October 1986, President Reagan signed the National Defense Authorization Act of 1987, directing the establishment of a unified combatant command responsible for special operations (specific action added in the Cohen-Nunn amendment to the Act.)<sup>13</sup> This was the first time since the organization of the Department of Defense in 1947 that Congress directed the formation of a unified combatant command.<sup>14</sup>

On 16 April 1987, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) was formally established as a unified combatant command at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, commanded by a four-star general officer. All SOF based in the United States were eventually placed under the combatant command of Commander-in-Chief, Special Operations Command (USCINCSOC).<sup>15</sup> The watershed legislation specified certain responsibilities to the new command; 1) readiness of assigned forces and monitoring the readiness of overseas SOF; 2) monitoring the professional development of all SOF personnel; 3) developing joint SOF tactics, techniques, and procedures; 4) conducting specialized courses of instruction; 5) training assigned forces; 6) executing its own program and budget (funding directly from Congress, not the Services); and 7) conducting research, development, and acquisition of special operations-peculiar items.<sup>16</sup> Congress intentionally legislated principal special operations missions to focus and prevent the misdirection of SOF forces. The principal SOF missions designated in the original document have expanded incrementally by subsequent legislation and USSOCOM directive. As of this writing, the principal special operations missions include direct action, special reconnaissance, foreign internal defense (FID), unconventional warfare, combatting terrorism, psychological operations, civil affairs, counterproliferation, and information operations.<sup>17</sup> Special operations forces are trained, equipped, and organized to perform these nine principal missions. Additionally, SOF forces frequently conduct the following seven collateral activities: coalition support, combat search and rescue, counterdrug activities, countermine activities, foreign humanitarian assistance, security assistance, and special activities. SOF conduct collateral activities using the inherent capabilities gained by training, equipping, and organizing for the primary missions. While exceptionally capable of conducting collateral activities, SOF are not trained, equipped, or manned to conduct these missions.<sup>18</sup>

In May of 1990, the USAF followed the trend by giving its SOF Major Command status, organizing them under the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) headquartered at Hurlburt Field,

Florida. AFSOC became responsible for all active and reserve USAF SOF while functioning as the Air Force component to USSOCOM.

With Desert One seared in the collective mind of the SOF community, AFSOC vigorously pursued the refurbishment of a potent direct action capability by acquiring two new highly specialized special operations aircraft, the glass-cockpitted MC-130H Talon II long-range infiltration and resupply aircraft (augmenting the still-operational Viet Nam era MC-130E Talon I) and the AC-130U gunship (augmenting the mature active-duty AC-130H and replacing the Viet Nam era AC-130A which was retired from the reserve component.) Vertical-lift capability likewise increased. The Air Force converted its entire fleet of H-53 helicopters to the sole purpose of supporting the SOF mission. Forty-one of the high-tech, newly designed MH-53J air-refuelable, long-range helicopters were assigned to two overseas squadrons and two in the continental U.S. (CONUS), (a training unit in New Mexico and an operational unit in Florida.) The yet unproven V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft became AFSOC's top acquisition priority. A sound airborne psychological operations (psyop) capability was maintained (EC-130) and improved upon. Yet, attention to the aviation aspect of the FID mission (aviation-FID) languished.

Soon after the standup of AFSOC, a group of aviation-FID zealots continued efforts to establish "an organization of foreign-language trained, area-oriented, and culturally and politically astute aviation experts to provide advisory and training support to foreign aviation forces supporting the host-government's IDAD strategy".<sup>19</sup> Although USSOCOM designated AFSOC as the "proponent" for the aviation-FID mission, funding to establish the unit did not follow until much later.<sup>20</sup> Eager to stand up a capability in spite of the funding dearth, AFSOC by 1992 had financed the first 20 personnel 'out-of-hide'. In 1993, USSOCOM subsequently approved funding for growth to squadron strength. On 1 October 1994, the 6<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron raised its flag as the first and only Air Force squadron with FID as a core mission.<sup>21</sup>

## REQUIREMENT

The post-Cold War environment of multiple regional hotspots and a smaller military with less overseas presence compelled the United States to place a premium on projecting influence to maintain national security. Guidance from the highest levels set the tone. The most recent National Security Strategy (October 1998) declares in order to protect our security at home, we "must lead abroad."<sup>22</sup> A significant piece of this effort involves 'shaping' the international environment by engaging with friends and allies to build "durable relationships."<sup>23</sup> The U.S. military is a key part of this engagement effort.

"The U.S. military plays an essential role in building coalitions and shaping the international environment in ways that protect and promote U.S. interests. Through overseas presence and peacetime engagement activities such as defense cooperation, security assistance, and training and exercises with allies and friend, our armed forces help to deter aggression and coercion, promote regional stability, prevent and reduce conflicts an threats, and serve as a role model for militaries in emerging democracies."<sup>24</sup>

Military engagement with key countries promotes regional security by strengthening alliances and friendship. This engagement strategy requires close coordination of diplomatic, military, and other foreign policy tools, to ensure unity of effort; the military instrument must not operate alone or at odds with other instruments of power.

Limited resources, both force structure and finances, necessarily restrict engagement actions to a selective front, either with key friends and allies or influential nations which may favorably affect U.S. regional interests.<sup>25</sup> Since a smaller defense budget restricts the number of large-scale overseas joint/combined exercises, SOF become increasingly important simply because of the relatively small investment and high return.

Foreign internal defense (FID) fits hand-in-glove with the National Security Strategy by providing the National Command Authorities (NCA) and theater CINCs means other than conventional force projection (although conventional forces may be involved) of leveraging U.S. influence. FID falls under the rubric of a military operation other than war (MOOTW) in the spectrum of military operations.<sup>26</sup> 'Foreign internal defense' supplanted the term 'counter-insurgency' (COIN), which became out-of-fashion following the Viet Nam war. FID is, by definition, "participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency."<sup>27</sup>

An important piece of U.S. foreign policy, FID is the United States' contribution to the internal defense and development (IDAD) strategy of the recipient nation. A nation's IDAD strategy is "the full range of measures taken by a nation to promote its growth and to protect itself from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency. The strategy focuses on building viable political, economic, military, and social institutions that respond to the needs of society. Its fundamental goal is to prevent an insurgency or other forms of lawlessness or subversion by forestalling and defeating the threat and by working to correct conditions that promote violence."<sup>28</sup> FID efforts compliment a nation's IDAD program. In fact, they cannot be successful if the host nation does not execute a viable IDAD program. The military contribution of the FID effort is only a part of the whole. All four instruments of national power must be brought to bear to assist nations receiving FID assistance to bring about desired results. In addition to the military instrument, diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments of power all figure prominently in any FID effort.<sup>29</sup>

SOF are particularly attractive for use in FID efforts for several reasons. Because of their training, experience, and organization, SOF provide unique capabilities not found in other areas of the U.S. armed forces.<sup>30</sup> As previously noted, USSOCOM is the only military command which has FID as a legislated mission. Due to their small footprint and ability to 'blend in', as it were, SOF do not carry the same degree of political liability when sent into other nations as U.S. conventional forces. The risk of escalation in potentially volatile situations is reduced for the same reason.<sup>31</sup>

How then, do forces trained, equipped and organized to perform the aviation-FID mission fit, both doctrinally and practically? The previous paragraphs laid out the argument of the viability of military forces generally, and particularly SOF, in executing the FID mission. The military instrument of power is an important part of a FID effort. Military power can be further sub-categorized into land, air, and sea capabilities. While not the intent of this writing to argue the viability, nor even necessity of air power, suffice it to say, sea and land forces are hindered at best, and vulnerable at worst, if air power is improperly employed or not employed at all in their support. A high expectation of success of a given FID effort cannot be maintained if the military portion of that effort is conducted in isolation of the other three elements of power. Likewise, on the modern battlefield, even nations which maintain minimal sea and land forces cannot expect successful military operations without properly employing their own air forces and countering the opponent's air forces (if extant).

"Until recently, US Air Force aviation foreign internal defense (AFID) and advisory assistance had not been readily available to foreign air forces. Often, lack of preparation and training by host-nation (HN) air forces resulted in a dependency on US air support. In limited-conflict scenarios, US air assets may not be permitted to participate and, even if allowed, sufficient US airpower may not be available to satisfy mission requirements. Lacking the force-multiplier capability of friendly foreign air forces to support surface operations, the response options available to both U.S. and host-nation military and civilian leadership are greatly reduced. This aviation void was identified during a 1991 US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Joint Mission Analysis study and resulted in the recognition of the need for a combat aviation advisory capability."<sup>32</sup>

Thence, the requirement for *aviation*-FID forces, the last plank in filling the aviation void. While the United States maintained capable Navy and Army forces trained, equipped, and organized to execute the FID mission, only as of 1994 has a USAF squadron existed which likewise trains airmen to execute this important mission area.

In Air Force doctrine aviation-FID falls under the general category of MOOTW and more specifically nation assistance.<sup>33</sup> While almost any Air force unit could be involved in an aviation-FID operation, the responsibility for training, equipping, and organizing forces for that mission area lies with AF special operations forces.<sup>34</sup>

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of recent literature will be beneficial in giving the reader an understanding of the intellectual and practical evolution, organization, and finally employment of the 6<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron (SOS), the USAF's only unit trained, organized, and equipped to accomplish aviation-FID. Prior to and following the standup of AFSOC in 1990, several publications and papers addressed AFSOF capabilities generally and aviation-FID particularly. Several themes seem to emerge from these publications. 1) Many articles, while addressing AFSOF, almost without exception exclude the mention of forces trained, equipped, and organized to accomplish the aviation-FID (A-FID) mission, even though in many cases the author addresses the need for the USAF or USAF special operations forces to be able to execute A-FID. If mentioned at all, A-FID is most likely referenced in a cursory, passing manner, or the

suggestion is made to attempt execution in some ad hoc manner using available AFSOF. 2) Some discussions of the standup of an aviation-FID organization are aircraft-centric. In other words, the publication stresses the type of aircraft that should be procured to service the A-FID mission rather than how the unit should be employed and/or organized, trained, and equipped to accomplish the mission (although the hardware is important, people are more important than hardware in this mission.) 3) Some writings emphasize structure, organization, and training to the exclusion of employment.

Even in the halcyon days in Southeast Asia, with AFSOF at its zenith, advisory capability took a secondary role in operations. As noted previously, from then through reconstruction of AFSOF capability the direct action (DA) mission received the lion's share of attention and resources. With the resurgence of AFSOF in the 1980s, the ability to execute A-FID remained a paper capability, discussed in staffs and intellectual circles. Kenneth M. Page, writing in 1987 about future AF special operations forces, emphasized force structure concentrating on the high-tech platforms which directly or indirectly supported the DA mission. Notably absent is any mention of aviation advisory force structure. He emphasizes the peacetime application of A-FID preparing for low-intensity conflict (LIC) operations and suggests assigning AFSOF personnel to military assistance advisory groups (MAAGs) or mobile training teams (MTTs).<sup>35</sup> Likewise, Jistel writes at some length about DA and other AFSOF capabilities while addressing the role of AFSOF in LIC, but only mentions FID in a passing manner with no expansion on capabilities or likely missions of A-FID forces in a LIC environment.<sup>36</sup> Hill notes FID as a principal AFSOF mission, but addresses it in the broadest manner; specifics on employment are notably absent.<sup>37</sup> Surprisingly, in some articles published well after the 6<sup>th</sup> SOS standup, A-FID is not listed as an AFSOC capability.<sup>38</sup>

In his treatise of AFSOF in FID operations, Koster's aircraft-centric thesis is a variation on the theme. He argues that since FID centers on the needs of the host nation, the aircraft assigned to AFSOC to execute the FID mission should reflect the abilities of the host nation and not those of AFSOC as the trainer/advisor, since AFSOC aircraft are too large or too complex to serve as appropriate A-FID platforms.<sup>39</sup> While doing a thorough examination of aircraft appropriate for nations with limited resources, Koster, like other authors of this genre, does not emphasize training or employment.<sup>40</sup> The type of aircraft assigned to the A-FID unit, while important, constitute a secondary issue to training, equipping (much more than simply aircraft), and organizing personnel to perform the A-FID mission and employment of personnel so equipped, trained, and organized. The aircraft assigned to the 6<sup>th</sup> SOS are tools which prepare unit combat aviation advisors to execute their assigned mission by enabling them to maintain basic and tactical mission qualification and currency in events such as alternate insertion/extraction, aerial resupply, formation, and other tactical events. While employed, 6<sup>th</sup> SOS combat aviation advisors operate as aircrew members in the host nation's own aircraft. This is not unlike Special Forces who, when acting as advisors, train the host-nation soldiers on equipment they use on a day-to-day basis, not on SF unique equipment.

In two seminal pieces, Newton and Moulton stress structure and organizational/training aspects respectively. Newton proposes the establishment of an AFSOF wing, explicitly trained, equipped, and



organized to accomplish A-FID, specifically to fill the counter-insurgency aerial warfare role and includes proposed organizational structure. His is a grand concept harkening back to the Special Air Warfare Center of the 1960s, organized for just such activities.<sup>41</sup> He implies the unit will employ with organic aircraft.<sup>42</sup> Moulton, although not addressing force structure specifically, touches on many of the same issues as Newton. He underscores organization and capabilities related specifically to executing the A-FID mission.<sup>43</sup> Implicit in his writing is the need for an AFSOC organization trained, equipped, and organized to execute A-FID.

The thoroughness and perspective of two pieces in particular stand out. In a comprehensive writing, Johnson lays out the recent history of the 6<sup>th</sup> SOS and makes a strong case for the unit having organic aircraft. He also touches on some capabilities the unit developed in addition to A-FID. Nevertheless, there is little in the way of straightforward examples to give combatant commanders the notion of exactly what the unit can do for them in their theaters of operation.<sup>44</sup> Jannarone and Stratton make a compelling case for the establishment of a USAF aviation-FID unit. While focusing on FID they do allude to the broad capabilities and impact such a unit would have in the internal defense and development of foreign nations in the mission areas of counterinsurgency, counter-narcotics, counter-terrorism, military civic action, humanitarian assistance, etc.<sup>45</sup>

With few exceptions these articles, while important think pieces, do not address the practical application of an A-FID organization in employment. If application across the operational spectrum is addressed at all, information on exploitation of the aviation advisory capability is sparse. One key limitation has been the identification the 6<sup>th</sup> SOS as an 'A-FID' unit. As the succeeding text will demonstrate that designation is simply too restrictive, too limiting. A more accurate term because it is more encompassing of mission and capabilities, and one that will be used from this point forward is combat aviation advisory (CAVAD) squadron. How does one convey to a combatant commander the value of a unit like the 6<sup>th</sup> SOS? In other words, what can such a unit do for the combatant commander? What are the applications across the full spectrum of operations?

## **CAPABILITY**

"The 6<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron (6<sup>th</sup> SOS) is a combat aviation advisory unit specifically organized, trained, and equipped to advise and train foreign aviation forces to employ and sustain their own assets and, when necessary, to integrate those assets into joint, multi-national operations."<sup>46</sup>

This short mission statement captures the essence of 6<sup>th</sup> SOS capabilities. The small unit (104 authorized billets) is organized along the lines of and with much of the same philosophy as U.S. Army Special Forces (SF).<sup>47</sup> The link with SF is not accidental. Combat aviation advisors (CAVAD) will most likely find themselves conducting operations side-by-side with Special Forces. While the SF trains and advises HN land forces, the CAVAD train and advise HN air forces to support the HN land forces with which the SF is working. Feedback following early setbacks in the process of establishing the aviation

advisory capability showed that key decision-makers grasped and supported the idea of an Air Force unit along the lines of Army SF, both in organization and the ability to conduct the advisory mission, albeit with an aviation slant.<sup>48</sup>

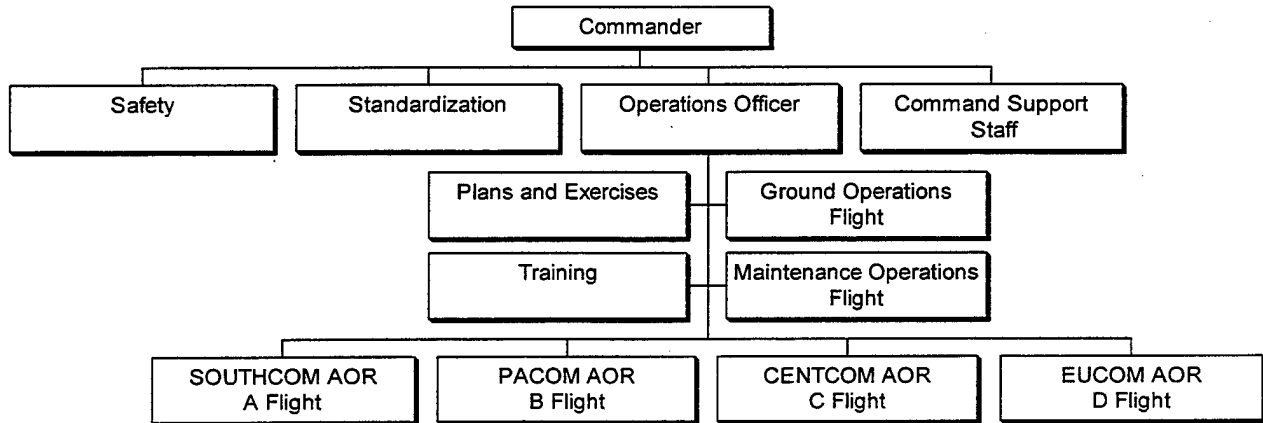


FIGURE 1. 6TH SOS IN-GARRISON ORGANIZATION

The squadron in-garrison organization appears rather unremarkable (Fig. 1), similar to other Air Force operational flying units, until more closely examined. While certain staff (safety, standardization) and functional cells (plans, exercises, training) do exist, the tactical flights stand out as the difference. These flights are not organized along functional lines. Rather, the tactical flights are regionally oriented, serving as focal points for their respective areas of responsibility (AOR). Each flight commander oversees the training and preparation for employment of flight members, representing a cross-section of disciplines, on CAVAD missions. Serving as the focal point for a particular area of operation, the flight commander plans and executes the squadron's deployment plan for the flight's AOR.

When employed in CAVAD operations, rather than maintaining a functional orientation like most Air Force operational units (for example, organizing by crew position), the 6<sup>th</sup> SOS organizes around Operational Aviation Detachments (OADs), analogous to Special Forces Operational Detachments. OAD-A teams, or 'A-teams', conduct the lion's share of CAVAD operations. A-team members are multi-disciplined, language-qualified, and culturally adept. Multi-disciplined since they represent various key skills; fixed- and rotary-wing aircrew members (pilots, navigators, flight engineers, aerial gunners), maintenance officers and technicians, security forces, pararescuemen, AF special tactics members, survival, evasion, resistance, and escape (SERE) personnel. Language qualified since assigned members either have demonstrated language capability (standardized tests) or have received language training en route, and undergo continuation training while assigned to the unit. Culturally adept since all squadron members receive academic and in-country interpersonal, nonverbal, and area and cultural orientation training. All this training produces *airmen*, experts in their respective technical fields, able to

train and advise host-nation forces on the employment of *airpower*, while able to overcome the cultural and language barriers that may exist.



FIGURE 2. OPERATIONAL AVIATION DETACHMENT TEAM SKILLS

One strength of the A-team concept is the ability to tailor the team to meet specific mission requirements; like the SF Operational Detachment-A (SFOD-A), the OAD-A affords great flexibility and the ability to pack a broad range of expertise in a small package (Fig.2). One notable difference between 6th SOS OAD-As and SFOD-As is while SFOD-As generally consist of specific specialties common to all teams, OAD-As are task oriented and tailored to the requirement. If the required expertise is not organic to the unit, it is augmented and augmentees receive appropriate training prior to employing on CAVAD operations. This language-capable, multi-disciplined team concept has its roots in the earliest formation of special operations with lessons learned coming right out of World War II operations.<sup>49</sup>

CAVAD are force multipliers. They teach foreign air assets to conduct joint operations in support of the host-nation's land and maritime forces (which in turn might be advised by U.S. SF and SEALs, Fig. 3) They enable foreign air assets, which may not have previously been used due to inadequate maintenance, logistics, operator, or command and control capability of the host nation, to support U.S. and host-nation land and maritime forces.<sup>50</sup> They facilitate the availability, reliability, safety, and interoperability of host-nation air assets supporting joint and combined surface or maritime operations.<sup>51</sup> U.S. Air Force CAVAD are not limited to working solely with the host-nation Air Force but are able to work with the full spectrum of host-nation air assets, Army, Navy, Air Force, National Police, National Defense Force, or others.

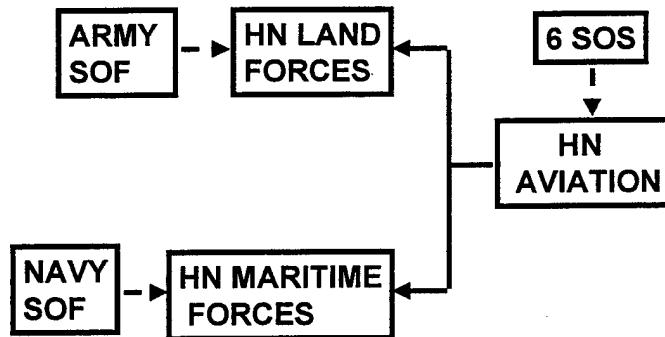


FIGURE 3. ADVISORY RELATIONSHIPS

These special air operators engage in a comprehensive training and advisory program with the host-nation air force that covers the whole gamut of operations including flying operations, logistics, maintenance, air base defense, command and control (air-to-ground lashup), aircrew life support, aircrew training for survival, evasion, resistance, and escape (S.E.R.E), and safety (ground and flying). Aircrew members (rotary- and fixed-wing pilots, navigators, rotary- and fixed-wing flight engineers, and aerial gunners) aid host-nation counterparts to improve all aspects of flying operations, including tactics, mission planning, crew coordination, flight discipline, aircrew training, and other areas. Although the obvious beginning, concentrating solely on aircrew training would be woefully shortsighted if sustained, effective sortie production is the goal. CAVAD logistics experts assist host-nation counterparts to improve infrastructure support; aircraft are complicated machines with a long logistics tail prone to inefficiencies, leading to decreased sortie production. The 6<sup>th</sup> SOS maintenance specialists shadow host-nation maintainers, teaching and advising on how to improve sortie rates, lay out maintenance shops, schedule short and long term maintenance. Air base security forces aid host-nation counterparts in devising sound security schemes not only for the aircraft and support functions, but for the air base; the best maintenance or logistics won't prevent an aircraft from being destroyed on the ground. Combat controllers work the air-to-ground lashup with the host-nation airmen. Pararescuemen and S.E.R.E specialists train and advise host-nation airmen in search and rescue.

Like the SF, another CAVAD strength is the ability to augment the OAD-A with those required skills not organic to the unit. Since the 6<sup>th</sup> SOS does not maintain an organic aircraft battle damage repair advisory capability, and if, for example, aircraft battle damage repair advisory operations were to be conducted, on such a mission the 6<sup>th</sup> SOS would augment with appropriate qualified maintenance personnel, preparing the augmentees before mission execution with critical aspects of the advisory

mission. The augmentees would find themselves surrounded with CAVAD experts since the bulk of the OAD-A would be 6<sup>th</sup> SOS personnel.

Aviation advisors provide three distinct products: 1) aviation training, 2) aviation advisory assistance, and 3) aviation assessments. Aviation training is the instruction of host-nation aviation units in a variety of tactics, techniques, and procedures, in the whole spectrum of air operations, including flying operations, maintenance, command and control, etc. However, it is not time or situation specific. Aviation advisory assistance may be provided to foreign air forces on the use of airpower, tactical employment, mission planning, and other issues and to U.S. combatant commanders on the use, disposition, and integration of foreign air forces in combined/joint operations. It differs from training in that it is time, situation, and context specific. Aviation assessments center on the host-nation aviation capabilities, including aircraft airworthiness, aircrew and maintenance proficiency, ground and flying safety, and resource sustainability.<sup>52</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> SOS conducts such aviation assessments on a continual basis for various customers, itself being one. Before conducting flying training or advisory operations with a foreign aviation unit, an aviation assessment of the participating foreign air unit is conducted. At the request of U.S. Special Forces units and others, the squadron conducts aviation assessments of foreign aviation units providing air service to the SF unit for air mobility and/or airborne operations.<sup>53</sup>

What can such a unit do and how does it help meet warfighter's requirements? An example of each 'CAVAD product' follows.

Aviation Training. A mission to the Amazon jungle exemplifies this mission type. The 6<sup>th</sup> SOS trained elements of a South American air force in survival, evasion, resistance, escape (SERE), pararescue, helicopter hoist, and vectoring at the host-nation jungle survival school; the desired end state being to provide the host nation a search and rescue capability in support of U.S. counterdrug policy in the theater.<sup>54</sup>

Aviation Advisory Assistance. Conducted under the Title 10 'SOF exception' clause,<sup>55</sup> the 6<sup>th</sup> SOS executed a mission for unit self-training to a country in the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) area of responsibility (AOR). The objectives of this mission were to enhance the ability of U.S and host-nation (HN) forces to conduct joint/ combined operations, to improve the security and defense capabilities of both nations, to enable U.S forces to deploy, train, employ, sustain, and operate in a joint/combined environment.<sup>56</sup> The on-scene Army SF commander concluded the 6<sup>th</sup> SOS was a "catalyst" for the successful joint/combined air operations during the exercise.<sup>57</sup>

Aviation Assessments. In 1996, the U.S. Department of State (DOS) requested the 6<sup>th</sup> SOS to provide an air assessment of the Red Devil Task Force in Bolivia. The purpose of the assessment was to determine whether the Bolivian Air Force (Fuerza Aerea Boliviana, FAB) could sustain operations without U.S.-provided contractor support; a "Bolivianization" of the operation. The RED Devil Task Force is a U.S.-funded, FAB helicopter unit that supports counter-narcotic operations, primarily through air mobility support to land (Green Devil Task Force) and maritime (Blue Devil Task Force) Bolivian forces. The RDTF operates UH-1H helicopters which are maintained both by U.S.-provided contractors and Bolivian

Air Force technicians. Using a strategy-to-task approach, this comprehensive assessment provided candid advice to key decision makers in the DOS.<sup>58</sup>

## **FUTURE EMPLOYMENT SCENARIOS**

While some coalition support missions have been executed, CAVAD employment both in academic circles and operationally has focused almost exclusively on aviation-FID, a subset of nation assistance/support to counterinsurgency under the rubric of military operations other than war (MOOTW).<sup>59</sup> As previously mentioned, as a consequence the 6<sup>th</sup> SOS has become known in SOF circles as the 'FID' squadron. The problem with this limited approach is that it is too restrictive a description and use of the CAVAD capability. CAVAD can execute missions across the peace/war spectrum. While aviation-FID was a good starting point for the creation of this capability, and continues to be a principal mission focus, it by no means describes the full CAVAD capability nor the contribution it can make to combatant commanders. Training, equipping, and organizing for aviation-FID prepares CAVAD to operate in almost any scenario which requires training or advising foreign air assets regarding the employment of airpower; from the nuts and bolts of aircraft maintenance, air base security, and aircrew tactics to command, control and integration of host-nation air assets in a joint/combined operation.

More towards the peace end of the peace/conflict spectrum, MOOTW addresses the employment of military forces in operations short of war. The primary emphasis of MOOTW is fourfold; 1) deterring war, 2) resolving conflict, 3) promoting peace, and 4) supporting civil authorities in response to domestic crises.<sup>60</sup> In addition to FID, CAVAD may employ to execute many MOOTW mission types. The following discussion will demonstrate the contribution CAVAD may make to regional combatant commanders in several different MOOTW scenarios. In all these scenarios, the bottom line CAVAD brings to the warfighter is the ability to engage foreign airpower to support national and theater objectives, especially when U.S. air assets may not be available. Each of the following types of MOOTW is listed in Joint Publication 3-07, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other than War, 16 Jun 1995.

Counterdrug Operations. A prime mission type for employing CAVAD. Operations may be divided into two main thrusts. First, operations designed to improve the support host-nation air assets provide to host-nation land and maritime forces and corollary U.S. forces (SF and SEALs), primarily through mobility, surveillance, reconnaissance, and close air support in support of counterdrug operations. These missions include all three CAVAD products, aviation training, aviation advisory assistance, and aviation assessments.

Second, operations designed primarily to support host-nation air units. Such missions would focus on improving organic host-nation air asset capabilities; for example, search and rescue operations, surveillance, reconnaissance, maintenance, air base defense, logistics support.

Humanitarian Assistance. Hurricane Mitch struck Central America like a hammer-blow in 1998, rendering most afflicted nations incapable of responding adequately to the depth of the emergency. The international community raced to provide such assistance as it was able.

In such a case, CAVAD could facilitate the employment of host-nation air assets in moving the incoming relief supplies to areas most needing assistance. While CAVAD should be on-scene early in the process, their greatest contribution would likely be the later stages, after international relief efforts have slowed and more weight is placed on the host-nation infrastructure to administer relief supplies. CAVAD would work with host-nation air assets to identify equipment, maintenance, and logistics shortfalls, to bring the shortfalls to the attention of the international community with the intent of provision, and ensure the host nation properly uses such supplies once received. Command, control and scheduling of aircraft would be prime areas where CAVAD would make needed input, ensuring the optimal use of this limited asset. In short, CAVAD would provide returns far beyond their minimal investment. These missions would include aviation advisory assistance and aviation assessments, with a possibility of aviation training.

Nation assistance/support to counterinsurgency. This is the classic FID mission for which CAVAD were originally trained, organized, and equipped. Operations would be inclusive, every aspect of air operations, and would include aviation training, aviation advisory assistance, and aviation assessments. The focus would be on working with corollary U.S. land and maritime forces to provide mobility to like host-nation forces in support of the military portion of the FID effort. These missions include all three CAVAD products, aviation training, aviation advisory assistance, and aviation assessments.

Peace operations. While not readily apparent how CAVAD would assist in the execution of peace operations, there are scenarios in which they would provide needed assistance. The most likely would be to facilitate the air assets of a bordering nation (or nations) to provide required air support for peace operations. Such facilitation would relieve U.S. and allied air assets for other missions, and would engage regional allies in the peace operation effort. This mission would include aviation advisory assistance and aviation assessments, with a possibility of aviation training.

Recovery operations. In Southeast Asia, U.S. forces are engaged in the recovery of remains of U.S. servicemen. CAVAD would provide aviation assessments of host-nation air assets and liaison with these units to provide and facilitate host-nation air assets in support of these recovery efforts. Many, if not most, sites containing remains are remote and accessible only by air. This mission would include aviation advisory assistance and aviation assessments, with a possibility of aviation training.

Support to insurgency. While not able to operate behind the lines in the same sense as Army SF, CAVAD would nevertheless be able to make significant contributions in this mission type by supporting insurgency operations from a third-party nation. CAVAD efforts would facilitate the air support of insurgency forces from a third-party nation (or nations) by providing mobility, aerial resupply, surveillance and reconnaissance. The most obvious advantage of CAVAD would be the small footprint and leveraging of non-U.S. airpower in support of U.S. objectives.

Security Assistance. The 6<sup>th</sup> SOS has successfully executed security assistance missions. Perhaps the mission most demonstrative of this capability is the assistance of the delivery to Morocco of surplus U.S. H-3 helicopters and the qualification of Moroccan aircrew initial cadre.

Towards the other end of the conflict spectrum, CAVAD forces can be highly effective in coalition support efforts. If the CAVAD capability had existed during the Gulf War, likely employment would have included liaison operations with the displaced Kuwaiti Air Force, acting in advisory capacity, ensuring combat capability and facilitating their air assets (primarily air mobility) to support the coalition effort. Likewise, operations would have been feasible, even desirable, with several theater allies, (Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates) to facilitate their air assets (primarily air mobility) into the coalition effort. Perhaps the most important task would be to insure the inclusion of host-nation air assets on the air tasking order (ATO). OAD-A teams operating with the host-nation air units would have been able to forward such information to an CAVAD counterpart assigned to the special operations liaison element (SOLE) of the Air Operations Center (AOC). These OAD-A teams would have acted much as the Special Forces, which sent SFOD-A teams to coalition Arab units to act as liaison through land channels ensuring better communication and proper employment of forces.

While not intended to be all-inclusive, these examples do demonstrate the significant contributions CAVAD can make to the combatant commander's efforts.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY**

Aviation advisory forces constitute a force multiplier and leverage for regional combatant commanders, especially in the contemporary setting of a reduced U.S. military, particularly the Air Force, and the inability of these forces to support all operations, for the following reasons:

1. Like other SOF, CAVAD demonstrate U.S. commitment.
2. Like other SOF, CAVAD operate at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.
3. CAVAD has a small footprint.
4. CAVAD facilitates foreign air assets to support U.S. objectives. CAVAD provides host-nation air in locations where USAF assets may not be able to operate, due to political constraints, physical constraints, or simply the USAF inability to support.
5. In MOOTW, air mobility for land and maritime forces is very important. CAVAD facilitates foreign air assets to support U.S. and foreign counterparts in MOOTW.
6. CAVAD comprise a nucleus of multi-disciplined, language-qualified, and culturally adept airmen well versed and trained in all aspects of advisory operations that can be augmented by conventional forces for large operations. No other USAF squadron trains, equips, and organizes to that capability.

Two niches particularly suited for CAVAD forces are first, operations in the host nation which require the support of host-nation air assets because no other or insufficient USAF assets are available, and second, operations in which the host nation is developing a special operations capability for its air forces.



In summary, while CAVAD forces are trained, equipped, and organized to execute aviation-FID, coalition support, and unconventional warfare missions, their capabilities enable them to employ successfully in support of many other mission types. These unconventional airmen truly are the multi-purpose airpower tool in the CINC's toolkit.

WORD COUNT = 6904

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>2</sup>Allan R. Scholin, "Air Commandos—USAF's Contribution to Counterinsurgency," Air Force and Space Digest, XXXV (August 1962): 40; quoted in James L. Cole, Jr., "USAF Special Operations Forces: Past, Present, and Future," Aerospace Historian, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Winter/December 1980): 223.

<sup>3</sup>James L. Cole, Jr., "USAF Special Operations Forces: Past, Present, and Future," Aerospace Historian, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Winter/December 1980): 223.

<sup>4</sup>Wray R. Johnson, "Whither Aviation Foreign Internal Defense?," Airpower Journal, Vol. 11, No.1, (Spring 1997): 70.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>6</sup>William G. Boykin, Special Operations and Low-intensity Conflict Legislation: Why Was It Passed And Have The Voids Been Filled? (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1991), 6.

<sup>7</sup>John A. Hill, AFSOF: A Unique Application of Aerospace Power, (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, April 1993), 1.

<sup>8</sup>Dean, 101.

<sup>9</sup>Johnson, 69.

<sup>10</sup>Boykin, 4.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>13</sup>National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1987, Conference Report 99-1001, 14 October 1986, 177; referenced in Wray R. Johnson, "Whither Aviation Foreign Internal Defense?," Airpower Journal, Vol. 11, No.1, (Spring 1997): 68. For a detailed reading of the background of enacted SOF legislation, see Boykin.

<sup>14</sup>Henry L. T. Koren, "Congress Wades Into Special Operations," Parameters, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, (December 1988): 62.

<sup>15</sup>Special Operations Command, Special Operations in Peace and War, USSOCOM Publication 1, (MacDill AFB, FL: U.S. Special Operations Command, 25 January 1996), 2-19.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 2-19.

<sup>17</sup>Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Joint Special Operations, Joint Publication 3-05, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 17 April 1998), II-2.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., II-11.

<sup>19</sup>Johnson, 75.

<sup>20</sup>Special Operations Command, Organization and Functions: Terms of Reference for Component Commanders, USSOCOM Directive 10-1, (MacDill AFB, FL: U.S. Special Operations Command, 7 May 1993); cited in Wray R. Johnson, "Whither Aviation Foreign Internal Defense?" Airpower Journal, Vol. 11, No.1, (Spring 1997): 68.

<sup>21</sup>Johnson, 80.

<sup>22</sup>William J. Clinton, A National Security Strategy for a New Century (Washington, D.C.: The White House, October 1998), 1.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>26</sup>Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Joint Operations, Joint Publication 3-0, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1 February 1995), 1-3.

<sup>27</sup>Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Foreign Internal Defense (FID), Joint Publication 3-07.1, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 26 June 1996), GL-5.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., C-1

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., I-3

<sup>30</sup>USSOCOM Publication 1, iii.

<sup>31</sup>Joint Publication 3-05, I-1.

<sup>32</sup>Jeff Blalock and Jerome Klingaman, "6<sup>th</sup> Special Ops Squadron Combat Aviation Advisors," FOCUS, AFSOC Commando Safety Journal, (Fall 1998): 4

<sup>33</sup>Department of the Air Force, Air Force Basic Doctrine, Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Air Force, September 1997), 8.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>35</sup>Kenneth M. Page, "U.S. Air Force Special Operations: Charting a Course for the Future," Airpower Journal, Vol. 1, No. 2, (Fall 1987): 63.

<sup>36</sup>Arthur A. Jistel, The Role of Air Force Special Operations Forces in the Low Intensity Conflict Environment (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1991), 10.

<sup>37</sup>Hill, 6.

<sup>38</sup>Leslie L. Fuller, Role of United States Special Operations Forces in Peace Operations (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1991), 25.

<sup>39</sup>Michael C. Koster, Foreign Internal Defense: Does Air Force Special Operations Have What It Takes? (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, December 1993), 8.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>41</sup>Richard D. Newton, Reinventing the Wheel: Structuring Air Forces for Foreign Internal Defense (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, Report No. AU-ARI-CPSS-91-1, August 1991), 17.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>43</sup>John R. Moulton II, Role of Air Force Operations in Foreign Internal Defense (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, Report No. AU-ARI-CPSS-91-3, September 1991), 16.

<sup>44</sup>Johnson, 72.

<sup>45</sup>August G. Jannarone and Ray E. Stratton, "Building a Practical United States Air Force Capability for Foreign Internal Defense (FID)", The DISAM Journal, Vol. 13, No. 4, (Summer 1991): 85.

<sup>46</sup>6<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron, Concepts and Capabilities, (Hurlburt Field, FL: 6<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron, 1 September 1998), 1.

<sup>47</sup>16<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Wing, Point Paper: Evolution of AFSOC Aviation Foreign Internal Defense Organization, History of the 16<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Wing, 1 July – 31 December 1994, Vol. II, Supporting Documents, (Hurlburt Field, FL: 16<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Wing, 31 December 1994), 75.

<sup>48</sup>Johnson, 78.

<sup>49</sup>Aaron Bank, From OSS to Green Berets (New York City, NY: Pocket Books, 1986), 177.

<sup>50</sup>Glenn W. Goodman, Jr., "Combat Aviation Advisors, A Singular Air Force Special Operations Squadron Carves Out An Important Niche", Armed Forces Journal International, (December 1998): 53.

<sup>51</sup>6<sup>th</sup> SOS Concepts and Capabilities, 1.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>53</sup>For example, the unit conducted aviation assessments of the host-nation's participating forces for requesting SF units in exercises in Venezuela, Indonesia, Paraguay and others; author's own experience as 6<sup>th</sup> SOS commander.

<sup>54</sup>Bill Lemenager, "It's a Jungle Out There!", FOCUS, AFSOC Commando Safety Journal, (Fall 1998): 9.

<sup>55</sup>Johnson, 78.

<sup>56</sup>Blalock & Klingaman, 7.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>58</sup>6<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron, Airpower Assessment of the Red Devil Task Force (CN 6084), (Hurlburt Field, FL: 6<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron, 11 September 1996), 1.

<sup>59</sup>Joint Publication 3-07, III-9.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., I-1.

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