



Air Force special tactics operators assigned to 24th Special Operations Wing conduct hoist operations with Navy MH-60 Seahawk aircrew members assigned to Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron Nine, during Emerald Warrior 21.1, at Hurlburt Field, Florida, February 18, 2021 (U.S. Air Force/Edward Coddington)

Making the Case for a Joint Special Operations Profession

By Isaiah Wilson III and C. Anthony Pfaff

The year 2021 proved a period of strategic inflection, a moment of standout changes in the character of geopolitical competition. Arguably, the last similar period of such strategic inflection began with the terrorist

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attacks of 9/11, what scholars and practitioners comfortably regard as a historic watershed event in international relations. Those attacks gave rise to what became known as the war on terror. Just as there was a great deal of uncertainty in 2001 of how best to prosecute a war on terror, there is now a great deal of uncertainty regarding how best to compete against peer and near-peer competitors who pose challenges in the current inflection. How to strike an effective strategic rebalance

between those functional imperatives that have defined the war on terror and the imperatives of the coming era only further complicate the situation.

Moreover, the experience of two decades of counterterrorism (CT) and counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in Afghanistan and Iraq suggests that this uncertainty may be unresolvable. While both wars have nominally ended, the doctrinal debates they inspired rage on. These conflicts have now largely defined the context and character of

special operations forces (SOF) and perhaps too narrowly focused them on the three counterforce operations, activities, and investments of CT, counter-violent extremist organizations, and COIN. However, while special operations and SOF played a vanguard role in rediscovering and refining tactics, techniques, tradecraft, and incorporating new technology for waging the fights during the war on terror, their successful operations alone did not always translate into lasting strategic success.

As SOF transition operations to support competition with peer and near-peer competitors, there is persistent frustration over apparent U.S. failures. At the time of this writing, China continues to provoke its neighbors in its near abroad while expanding its influence in Africa and South America. Russia, prior and in addition to the invasion of Ukraine, has successfully prevented its neighbors from strengthening ties with the West as well as challenged the United States in Syria. Iran, for its part, has limited U.S. influence in Iraq, Yemen, and the Levant through its use of proxies and terror operations. In each of these cases, it can seem that there is little the United States—especially the U.S. military—can do to reverse these developments.

This frustration, of course, is not the fault of SOF. International competition is best accomplished through the coordinated efforts of a variety of Services and agencies. SOF, however, are in a unique position to participate. However, as described in the 2020 U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) *Comprehensive Review*, a high operating tempo (OPTEMPO), coupled with statutory and resource limitations regarding SOF assessment, recruiting, and professional education, currently limit SOF ability to expand their role.¹ To do so, SOF will have to establish the kind of institutional infrastructure that can transform them from highly skilled operators to a joint special operations forces (JSOF) profession where certified professionals exercise autonomy over a specific jurisdiction. Mature professions provide a public good over a jurisdiction, as in health care where certified professionals such

as doctors and nurses exercise autonomy regarding how to best to serve their clients. Providing that public good requires more than just skill at task execution; it requires robust institutions capable of building and maintaining client trust by certifying persons in those skills as well as governing how those skills are employed and holding professionals accountable for the service they provide. Currently, due largely to statutory limitations, SOF have no unique jurisdiction; they are limited in their ability to certify and govern the employment of SOF operators.

This article seeks to introduce for consideration and debate this question of whether there is now a need for a formal JSOF profession. University of Chicago sociologist Andrew Abbott argues that the purpose of a profession is to diagnose, infer, and treat problems that arise within its jurisdiction. How, when, and where a profession accomplishes those functions largely establish practitioners' identity, which is expressed as shared standards, norms, and laws that collectively place the professional in a better position to serve a social good than the nonprofessional. That positioning is what gives the non-professional client reasons to trust not the professional but the profession itself. That trust is then expressed in terms of the autonomy that society grants professionals to exercise their expert knowledge. In this context, the opportunity for SOF is clear: claiming a jurisdiction within the context of international competition will place SOF in a better position to build trust and assure autonomy. Doing so will require clarity on what counts as expert knowledge (as opposed to skills and tasks) and the necessary institutional development to certify SOF professionals in the application of this knowledge.

Rethinking Joint-Combined SOF from a Systems of Professions Point of View

Abbott's framework, drawn largely from his seminal work in sociology, has new relevance to the Armed Forces' professions in the 21st century, and we propose even more relevant application to the questions regarding the professional status of special operations

and SOF use and utility, particularly in the context of joint and combined integration.² By *integration*, we refer to the imperative of approaching complex, complicated, wicked, and compounded challenges through “whole of governments, whole of societies,” multilateral ways, means, and coordinated ends. The lack of jointness (that is, cross-Armed Forces' SOF component's interoperability) was a major finding of the Holloway Commission Report in the wake of the tragic Iranian hostage rescue mission, Operation *Eagle Claw*, more popularly referred to as *Desert One*.³ Today, under compound security conditions, similar operational needs-based arguments for greater integration (extended now well beyond joint) to full joint, interagency, intergovernmental, multinational, and commercial (JIIMC) dominate, defining the central logic of the 2022 U.S. national security, defense, and military strategies. Joint integration in the past and JIIMC integration now and into the future find SOF once again of central focus—JIIMC integration is the new functional imperative.

Abbott's model portrays professions locked in competition for jurisdiction over once solvable problems that have become relatively and suddenly more intractable.⁴ For example, in the bipolar, relatively unnetworked geostrategic environment of the 20th century, nuclear overmatch coupled with technologically advanced conventional forces seemed sufficient to deter/contain peer adversaries. In today's globalized, multipolar environment, weaker adversaries can exploit technology to bypass military strength to place the United States at strategic disadvantage and undermine U.S. interests.

In this context, Abbott's distinctive contribution to the discourse is to methodically define professions “wholly in terms of an elbows-out application of expertise; professions compete with each other for expertise-based jurisdiction over solvable problems.”⁵ According to Abbott's systems of professions theory, competition can arise when social or technical changes act to weaken an existing profession's jurisdiction or to create an entirely new niche, as with the proliferation



Air Force MC-130H Combat Talon II aircraft loadmaster assigned to U.S. Special Operations Command Central observes Marine Corps MV-22 Osprey aircraft assigned to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 164 Reinforced, 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, as it receives fuel during tiltrotor air-to-air refueling over undisclosed location, March 10, 2021 (U.S. Air Force/Trevor T. McBride)



of computers.⁶ The outcomes of competition may be that one profession seizes turf from another, or there may be one of several forms of negotiated symbiosis.

Central to Abbott's model is his definition of *profession* itself, wholly founded on this competitive process. To Abbott, an occupation is a profession if (and only if) it can abstract its knowledge not only to solve novel problems but also to adapt its practices to new niches.⁷ Abbott argues, "Many occupations fight for turf, but only professions expand

their cognitive domain by using abstract knowledge to annex new areas, to define them as their own proper work."⁸ An equally valuable contribution of Abbott's work to the questions central to this article is Abbott's invocation of a classic healthcare metaphor of *diagnosis* → *inference* → *treatment* as a model of all professional problem-solving.⁹ In this article, we apply this model (but present it nonlinearly) as a device to diagnose the potential needs of a JSOF profession and to infer a potential treatment therein.

Diagnosis: Fragmented Professional Development Complicated by a Dramatically Altered State of Global Security and Stability

Diagnosis, in this sense, metaphorically involves framing a problem in terms of the profession's known and reconsidered domain of expertise. Applied to the questions of this initial study, the inability to locate special operations clearly and definitively and SOF in a prior, clearly delineated jurisdiction



Navy SEALs conduct military freefall jump from C-2 Greyhound from Rawhides of Fleet Logistics Support Squadron 40 during training above Chesapeake Bay, Virginia Beach, July 7, 2020 (U.S. Navy/Scott Fenaroli)

may be an artifact and signal of a profession under the stressors of change in mission, orientation, applicability, or even identity, or the absence of a formal profession altogether.

As the USSOCOM *Comprehensive Review* candidly and publicly acknowledged, high OPTEMPO has resulted in a bias toward employment, often without a clear understanding for how such employment relates to achieving strategic ends.¹⁰ The result has been a stressed force focused on the immediate task but not the long-term objective. Another major contributing factor to the 20-year tendency toward fragmented SOF professional development has been the statutorily directed dependency of SOF on the conventional forces for most recruitment, assessment, certification, and professional development. These two factors are related. Given the high demand for employment and the limited relevancy of conventional professional military education, there is little incentive to take advantage of professional development opportunities that do exist and the limited means to create ones unique to special operations.

Other critical factors and areas of relative gapped leader focus, capabilities, and capacities resourcing revealed in the USSOCOM *Comprehensive Review* include a recognized emphasis on physical and tactical skill training at the expense of focus on broader education and professional development, arguably contributing to a general sense of entitlement growing with and within a limited joint governing ethic.¹¹ When combined with the dramatic changes in the character of global competition, it is not hard to see why applications of force prove more and more anemic—proving too little, applied too late to prevent, and applied not long enough and in the right ways to solve problems in sustainable ways.

Treatment: Joint Professionalization and a Joint-Combined SOF Profession

Abbott's metaphor of *treatment* draws from the available toolkit of a given profession. For special operations and SOF, this toolkit typically relates to 12

classic SOF core activities (also referred to as core tasks):

- military information support operations
- unconventional warfare
- civil affairs operations
- special reconnaissance
- security force assistance
- foreign internal defense
- hostage rescue and recovery
- counterterrorism
- counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction
- counterinsurgency
- direct action
- foreign humanitarian assistance.

Of course, these 12 activities do not comprehensively describe the abstract expert knowledge necessary to operate in hybrid contexts; however, they do represent a good start, the completion of which is one task SOF must fulfill to fully professionalize.

Moments of geostrategic change, transformation, transition, and threshold crossings herald new unknowns that challenge previously “known knowns.” Confidences in and questions over established jurisdiction regarding both diagnosis and treatment are susceptible to these changes; history shows these competitive challenges often, if not mostly, come in the form of new technologies or expertise claims from competing professions, often driven by dramatic changes in the demand-to-supply dynamics defining of that occupation's and/or organization's prior understandings of its value proposition and public service relevancy.

Today's rebalance toward a presumably new era of strategic competition, integrated deterrence, and active campaigning (cornerstone concepts underpinning the 2022 national defense and military strategies) is already giving an amplified and accelerative rise in competitions between and within the public service professions characterizing the national, global security, and defense establishment(s)—competitions of a character of change that inevitably incite fundamental reconsiderations of previous knowns regarding uses and utilities of

force and core versus peripheral identities (that is, the functional imperatives of the individual professional as well as the collective profession itself).

At times and under conditions of transformational disruptive change, foundations of the profession are questioned, at times even shaken, at their core four tenets: jurisdiction(s), expertise and expert knowledge, and culture (ethic and ethos), culminating in (re)defined functional imperative(s). The following are general (and generalizable across varied professions) term descriptions of these four tenets:

- **Jurisdiction:** A domain where diverse skills can integrate to achieve a social good, such as health, justice, or security.
- **Expert knowledge:** Technical, political, human development, and ethical knowledge that is abstract, legitimizes professional work, and establishes how the profession conducts research on, diagnoses, treats, and makes inferences regarding the problems its professionals are supposed to solve.
- **Autonomy:** The principle that professionals have authority (are licensed by the client, that is, society) to apply this expert knowledge over the jurisdiction and nonprofessionals do not.
- **Certification:** Institutional certification of not only skills but also professional knowledge at every level for which there is a problem the profession is supposed to solve.
- **Professional ethic:** Governing the profession to maintain trust of the client, which is informed by the profession's functional imperative, moral norms reflecting client values, and law.¹²

Professionalizing provides an *infrastructure* for rebalancing bureaucratic requirements with a professional ideal, for integrating other efforts to address psychological and physical conditions for ethical failure, and for attaining not only the knowledge but also the authority granted to professions versus their intended supporting bureaucracies (see table).¹³

Understanding the distinction between the characteristics of a profession

Table. Profession vs. Bureaucracy

Profession	Bureaucracy
Expert knowledge	Non-expert knowledge
Accepts lifelong learning	"You develop me"
New situations	Routine situations
"Practice" by humans	Work done by all
Unlimited personal liability	Little personal liability
Invests in humans first	Invests in SOPs, hardware
Measure = effectiveness	Measure = efficiency
Trust relationship with client	Public transactional relations
Granted some authority	Closely supervised
Develops worldview	No imposed viewpoint
Maintains ethos, self-policed	Externally imposed rules
Intrinsic motivations	Extrinsic motivations
A lifelong calling	A "job"

Source: Don M. Snider, "The Army Profession and Ethic," symposium presentation, Command and General Staff College Ethics Symposium, Center for the Army Profession and Ethic, December 4, 2012.

and those of a bureaucracy is important. There are times when the military should act as a bureaucracy—when it performs routine things, such as the annual budget process. Just as the medical profession should guard against arguing for doctors' parochial interests (instead of the interests of patients and overall health care) in the national healthcare debate, military officers must guard against wrongly using their specialized expertise merely to advance a bureaucratic agenda. Doing so could sacrifice the value of professional advice and relegate the military to being considered as just another interest group.¹⁴

As the United States grapples with the post-9/11 conditions of new enemies, new battlespaces, and new kinds of wars, military officers and perhaps especially the commissioned, noncommissioned, and warrant officers of the SOF community should avoid at least three traditional pitfalls typically associated with times of geostrategic ambiguity, budget stringency, and force reductions:

- becoming overcommitted to the latest technological trends at the expense of historical military challenges
- being tempted to rename, oversell, and fetishize new war concepts, especially in support of single-Service parochial interests

- overlaying the "hollow force" card, asserting that any reduction will irreparably degrade national security.

Instead, military effectiveness needs to be seen, understood, appreciated, and approached from a comprehensive, multi-Service perspective. Military professionals need to focus on maximizing national security while recognizing the fiscal impact that military spending has on overall national power.¹⁵ This is uniquely and peculiarly true for SOF professionals and a joint-combined special operations forces (J-CSOF) profession.

Inference: Professionalize J-CSOF

However, it is *inference*—the uncertain space between diagnosis and treatment that defines professional expertise—that also represents a great deal of vulnerability.¹⁶ When the needed inference is simple (that is, a narrow "say-do gap" to be traversed, mitigated, or outright eliminated), the new required work can be automated or claimed by subordinate occupational groups, such as clerks and technicians, with no demand for whole-cloth change of the occupation. An example of this simple inference would be the automation of critical and physically demanding tasks or functions permitting the change or elimination

of certain biophysical requirements as exclusionary in accession and selection talent management processes. Yet when the inference is complex, the result may herald the birth of a new profession and/or the death of others.

SOF undergo rigorous selection and training that sets them apart by a unique functional imperative and body of expertise and expert professional knowledge from their parent Service, creating a greater bond among special operators who often identify first as being part of special operations and second as having originally joined their specific Service. Those areas of expert professional knowledge include:

- achieving information advantage and strategic influence
- leveraging emergent technologies to develop strategic-operational intelligence
- promoting ethical leadership in ungoverned spaces
- supporting national resilience and resistance to authoritarian disruptors
- advancing national interests in compound security competition.¹⁷

Related to the last area of expert professional knowledge, the Syria problem is a perfect but tragic example. Syria was and remains not one single conflict but rather a four-in-one compound war. It is part insurgency against the Bashar al-Asad regime, part counter-Islamic State coalitional war, part Syrian civil war in the making, and a war of forced extra-territorial human migration. Despite the United States demonstrating a high degree of skill at working with indigenous forces, Syria remains a low-rent quagmire for the United States with no end in sight. Thus, the inference is figuring out where the responsibility lies for resolving the quagmire in the favor of the United States, which then indicates who should determine how best to solve not only *that* problem but also *other* problems of a similar character.

As noted, SOF are uniquely suited to operating in such complex, hybrid environments. But because SOF do not conceive of this environment as their unique jurisdiction, they have so far not

developed the expert knowledge necessary to fully realize U.S. interests in this space. Moreover, they lack the institutional depth to manage how this expert knowledge affects their functional imperative.

Unique Expertise and Expert Knowledge

Being and becoming more anticipatory is the new imperative leader attribute to attain the intellectual overmatch desired by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff⁸ to confront compound security threats that define the evolving character of global geopolitical competition.¹⁹ Equally imperative is building a “strategic mindedness” within the current and

future SOF leader-operator—equal and matching to that same operator’s operational acumen—and finding and making new ways and moments of building this in earlier, more consistently, and continually throughout the full life cycle of JSOF professional officership development, cradle to *SOF for Life*.²⁰

Expertise in the core competencies of hybrid warfare against state and nonstate adversaries, integration of information operations, cyber operations, foreign direct assistance, limited kinetic operations to achieve political objectives (that is, political warfare), and discrete, covert, and clandestine adversary denial operations, activities, and investments all

define the core of JSOF unique expertise and knowledge, along with SOF’s classic roles as escalation ladder “rheostat” and “sentinel” (that is, indication and warnings sensor-shooter capability), all while avoiding escalation to war.

It is important to recall that a key determinant (the distinction) between a general functionary and that of a unique profession lies in the matter of certification. For certification of JSOF as a joint profession, the SOF enterprise as an institution certifies not just or only along the lines of skills, activities, or tasks but also professional knowledge (core competencies) at every level for which there is a problem the profession is supposed to solve.



Army Green Beret assigned to 1st Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group, fires pistol during Army Marksmanship Unit sanctioned pistol competition, July 7, 2021 (U.S. Army/Thomas Mort)



Air Force special tactics officer communicates with AC-130J gunship during live-fire demonstration held for senior leaders of North Macedonian army and members of U.S. Embassy, May 11, 2021, during Trojan Footprint 21 (U.S. Navy/Rob Kunzig)

After 18 months of a rigorous and still running comprehensive, J-CSOF education, leader preparation, and development curriculum and training programs of instruction review and refit study, the Joint Special Operations University has identified—(re)discovered—five JSOF core competency knowledge arenas presently missing from (gapped) current Service SOF doctrine:

- Uses and utilities of JSOF in compound security competition (i.e., SOF in support of 21st- century irregular warfare)
 - SOF support to resilience and resistance operations
 - SOF support to economic statecraft
 - SOF support to strategic-operational shaping (“unconventional” deterrence)

- Informational advantage and strategic influence
- SOF as profession (SOF leadership and the SOF professional ethic)
- SOF and strategic-operational intelligence and emergent technology
- Design-based integrative campaigning and support to statecraft

SOF mission sets, in and of themselves, have not significantly changed. However, the environment in which they are conducted has continued to change significantly. Yet amid all this change, tomorrow’s fourth-age SOF leader-operator will always need to be comprehensively versed in the following core arenas—derivative from, as well as generating of—these five JSOF common core competencies: geostrategy and transnational affairs, strategic intelligence and integrative JIIMC operations, science and

technology and futures, and SOF leadership and the SOF professional ethic.

A Unique J-CSOF Functional Imperative

The compound security character of the global security environment is such that it demands a utility of SOF that is equally compounded (that is, a comprehensive combination of all the skills, techniques and technics, and operational methods of all three preceding ages of SOF, amplified by 21st-century technological advancements). This, in short, speaks to the imperative of revisiting competition and rediscovering SOF historic roles, missions, and identity.

This does not mean SOF will not have a warfighting function. Neither does it mean other Services will not play a role in competition. What it does

mean, in Abbott's terms, is that SOF will "elbow" their way into owning something no other Service currently fully embraces. Consequently, and from a professional viewpoint, SOF must grapple with and find answers to core questions that define the coming strategic competition era, such as:

- What are the new modes of competition already seen today as well as ones that adversaries are likely to initiate?
- How can the U.S. shift from merely reacting to these and instead become more opportunistic?
- What are the limits of what SOF can do and what help must they seek from others?

The key—the ultimate functional imperative—then, of a J-CSOF profession is to apply SOF for the Nation's power purposes in ways and at points along the continuum of competition that defend and deter against the adversaries' "disruptor's playbooks" (that is, asymmetrical and irregular competitive and warfare techniques) within the gray zone (below thresholds of armed conflict) through credible presence and preparedness of compelling force.

Relating to the autonomy granted to a JSOF profession, SOF and USSOCOM will be (come) lead organizations for hybrid operations, leading in the integration of Service/JIIMC capabilities to deter and compel adversaries below the threshold of war. Professional certification brings an imperative of aligning Service programs' training tactical skills with SOF professional needs and pointedly from the joint, allied, partnered SOF perspectives, establishing higher level training and education to certify professionals at operational and strategic levels. All this in combination will demand a professional ethic that establishes a JSOF professional ethic governing competition and hybrid operations with special focus below the contact layer of the threshold of conflict. As a joint-combined profession, we argue that SOF will need to play a leading role in these additional three critical areas.

Understanding and Redefining the Future Value of Alliances. All the

still-under-draft (at the time of this publication) 2022 U.S. national strategic documents—security, defense, and military—emphasize the importance of allies and partners to affect integrated deterrence through active campaigning. There can be no say-do gaps in this functional imperative; such gaps will manifest holes-in-government nonsolutions—the stuff of self-inflicted "Thucydides traps." If the U.S. continues to diminish its support for and its valuation of alliances, what would SOF look like without such alliances?

Redefining Information Operations. After decades of being out-hustled and out-messaged by far more agile adversaries and their disinformation campaigns, the United States needs to level, rethink, and then rebuild its approach and methods to messaging so that it can fight and win the battle of the narrative. SOF, in JIIMC configurations, must return to their classic global scouting and sentinel roles and functions and accept a leadership role in redefining SOF roles in strategic-operational influence and information advantage operations, activities, and investments.

Technological Development. Developments today in robotics, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and a wide variety of other areas may lead to astounding new capabilities that radically change human life and how humans interact with technology. As technological innovation and proliferation continue to accelerate rapidly, how can SOF adapt themselves to better leverage technology for their own use and better prepare for its use by adversaries?

Bedrock to the functional imperatives of a JSOF profession will be SOF's roles in the overdue revisitation of deterrence and SOF's classic roles therein. Since the ending of the Cold War, there has been a precipitous decline in practical experience with and knowledge of the theories, history, and practice of deterrence (simply defined as the action of discouraging an action or event through instilling doubt or fear of the consequences). If the change in the character of geopolitical competition does in fact find, among many factors and variables, a return to a

new 21st-century form of Great Power competition, then the recovery of our understandings of deterrence (and its relationship with compellence theory and praxis) and its differing types (including recognizing several important complexities of deterrence such as distinctions between specific and general deterrence, absolute and restrictive deterrence, and actual and perceived punishments²¹) is of vital importance.

How does the utility of SOF need to be relearned, reconceived, and recalibrated as a more effective instrument of strategic-operational escalation/deescalation management? This issue and the questions it raises is perhaps the most important (re)defining factor of SOF utility, purpose, and relevancy. It is perhaps the fundamental gray matter puzzle to be solved as J-CSOF campaign in the gray zones.

Conclusion: Epilogue as Prologue

Any move toward a J-CSOF profession will be a heavy lift, to say the least. (Re)defining JSOF profession jurisdiction will have necessary, imperative overlaps with the Services, requiring some consensus and cooperation; however, the autonomy that comes with being its own profession will permit greater focus on unique-to-SOF professional development requirements. Eventually, SOF will require deliberate guidance on whether and how to continue functioning as a "quasi-Service." Specifically, decisions will be required to address each of the following concerns:

- SOF-related skills are not additive.
- Integration at higher levels is critical.
- New professional military education infrastructures are likely required (especially for senior officers and noncommissioned officers).
- Paucity of law and ethics below the threshold of armed conflict requires research and advocacy.

It is appropriate to conclude by speaking to the importance of the professional officer commissioning oath. Returning to S.L.A. Marshall's classic work, *The Armed Forces Officer*, both Marshall and George C. Marshall, Secretary of Defense at the

time, emphasized the linkage of the officer corps with service to Nation: “Thereafter, [the officer] is given a paper which says that because the President as representative of the people of this country reposes ‘special trust and confidence’ in his [or her] ‘patriotism, valor, fidelity, and abilities,’ he [or she] is forthwith commissioned.”²²

S.L.A. Marshall went on to highlight one quality in particular: fidelity. *Fidelity* is commonly considered faithfulness to something to which one is bound by pledge or duty. In spite of all the formal rules and legal statutes obligating the commissioned and noncommissioned officer to the Constitution, and through it, to the American people, officer fidelity has proved to be the most enduring tie that binds officership and the profession of arms to the Nation. This bond has helped the Nation weather many storms, both foreign and domestic. The fidelity of the military professional has always found its strongest roots in the rich soils of American history. Examples set by leaders from General George Washington to Admiral William McRaven reinforce the principle of subordination of the military practitioner to civilian authority, and through that authority, to the defense of the Nation.

Special operations personnel address unique, specialized, and difficult military problems that require exceptionally trained, superbly equipped, and tremendously supported warfighters. While other Services can overwhelm enemies with massive combat power, special operations provide discreet, sometimes covert, precision military capabilities that have become increasingly relevant in modern warfare but have at the same time, over the past 20 years, come with its own gray area legal and ethical ambiguities and complications. The compound security dilemmas of today and tomorrow demand a restriking of that critical balance between SOF’s specialized warfighting and the Nation’s core values in a fourth-age, JSOF professional ethic. JFQ

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Notes

¹ U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), *Comprehensive Review* (Tampa, FL: USSOCOM, 2020), available at <<https://sof.news/pubs/USSOCOM-Comprehensive-Ethics-Review-Report-January-2020.pdf>>.

² Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).

³ *The Holloway Commission Report* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 1980), available at <<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB63/doc8.pdf>>.

⁴ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 2, 91–96.

⁵ Colin Furness, “The System of Professions,” *Education for Information* 35, no. 3 (August 2019), available at <<https://content.iospress.com/articles/education-for-information/efi190271>>.

⁶ Abbott, *The System of Professions*.

⁷ Furness, “The System of Professions.”

⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁹ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 40–52.

¹⁰ USSOCOM, *Comprehensive Review*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² For further reference, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (New York: Belknap Press, 1981), 8–10; James Burk, “Expertise, Jurisdiction, and Legitimacy of the Military Profession,” in *The Future of the Army Profession*, ed. Don M. Snider and Lloyd Matthews (Boston: McGraw-Hill Custom Publishing, 2005), 43–44; Magali S. Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 208.

¹³ Don M. Snider, “The Army Profession and Ethic,” symposium presentation, Command and General Staff College Ethics Symposium, Center for the Army Profession and Ethic, December 4, 2012, available at <<https://www.slideserve.com/esben/the-army-profession-and-ethic-the-center-for-the-army-profession-and-ethic-04-dec-12>>.

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¹⁵ Isaiah Wilson III and Scott Smitson, “Solving America’s Gray-Zone Puzzle,” *Parameters* 46, no. 4 (Winter 2016), 65.

¹⁶ Furness, “The System of Professions.”

¹⁷ Isaiah III Wilson, *Learning Pathways-in-Action*, White Paper No. 6 (Tampa, FL: Joint Special Operations University, 2021).

¹⁸ Lew Irwin, “JCS Vision and Guidance for PME & Talent Management and Optimizing Joint Leader Development” PowerPoint, October 23, 2019, available at <https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/MECC2019/mecc2019day1brief2jcs_vision_guidance_rev5.pdf?ver=2019-10-21-092954-007>.

¹⁹ Isaiah Wilson III and Scott A. Smitson, “The Compound Security Dilemma: Threats at the Nexus of War and Peace,” *Parameters* 50, no. 2 (Summer 2020), available at <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Parameters_50-2_Summer-2020-Wilson.pdf>; “Compound Security as a Theory of Next with Dr. Isaiah ‘Ike’ Wilson III (Part 1 of 4),” February 18, 2021, video, 10:33, available at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAqumzNrJtM&list=PLDdkXV7z6CqO2BysAi5sQyc4-W5LJlJ8>>.

²⁰ *SOF for life* is a common referent across the special operations communities connotating formal transition of the Active-duty special operations forces member (that is, on separation or retirement from Active service). And despite no longer being “licensed to practice” as a formal special operations professional, the member is still regarded as a lifelong part of the profession.

²¹ Kuang-Ming Kuo, Paul C. Talley, and Chi-Hsien Huang, “A Meta-Analysis of the Deterrence Theory in Security-Compliant and Security-Risk Behaviors,” *Computers & Security*, vol. 96 (September 2020), available at <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0167404820302042>>.

²² S.L.A. Marshall, *The Armed Forces Officer* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 1950), 6, available at <https://www.usna.edu/Ethics/_files/documents/SLA%20Marshall%20Armed%20Forces%20Officer.pdf>.