

Expansibility and Army Special Operations Forces

Eric P. Shwedo

ABSTRACT: This article examines how Army Special Operations might prepare to expand in the event of a major war by resolving impediments to growth, improving recall procedures, and developing plans to expand training capacities.

Although the US Army Special Operations Command maintains education and training programs to ensure soldiers have the skills to be successful in any environment, it currently lacks the scale needed to fight a major war. Over the past 15 years, the US military has focused on counterinsurgency and stability operations. Accordingly, there has been less preparation and training for major combat operations against a peer or near-peer competitor. Even though the nature and intensity of a major war will determine how much risk can be assumed, recommendations for developing special operations capacities can be flexible and scalable so situations can be met with appropriate responses. Moreover, several factors preclude assuming the doubling of the Army, introduced in previous articles in this series, would equate to doubling Army special operations forces (SOF).

Even so, enlarging SOF in the face of a major war will require significant adjustments by each of its regiments. These forces may accept risk by reducing steady-state and shaping activities. Theaters' special operations commands can assess where the presence of special operations forces can be reduced and the risk associated with those decisions.

Although the rapid growth of the Army will proportionately expand the recruiting pool for SOF, maintaining the unique capability of this force requires little compromise in core skills or the SOF Truths. These truths provide a foundation for constructing the special operations force; without them, there is nothing unique about SOF. These values will help set proper parameters when planning to accelerate the training pipelines:

- Humans are more important than hardware.
- Quality is better than quantity.
- Special operations forces cannot be mass produced.
- Competent special operations forces cannot be created after emergencies occur.
- Most special operations require non-SOF assistance.

Maintaining the viability of these truths while increasing the size of special operations units in the face of an existential threat is a daunting task. Even so, some mitigating actions can ensure the SOF Truths guide the expansion process. If there is a major war, there will be two overarching concerns guiding changes to training: the Special

COL Eric P. Shwedo serves as the executive officer for the Deputy Under Secretary of the Army. Commissioned in 1992, Shwedo has served in the 3rd Special Forces Group, Special Operations Command-Central, US Special Operations Command, the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs (SOLIC), US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, and US Army Special Forces Command.

Operations capability actually required to defeat the threat and the risk associated with any changes.

The Key to Success

The concepts, growth patterns, and training proposals provided in this article, and previously expressed by several members of the US Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), are only ideas on which forecasting can begin. The emphasis going forward should be on planning. When discussing planning the Army's future, Chief of Staff General Mark A. Milley quoted British historian Michael Howard in saying "you don't have to get it right, you just have to be less wrong than your enemy."¹ Today's planning should increase the Army's chances of being "less wrong."

Special Forces

Selecting the right person for special operations has always been a trademark of the force. During World War II, William J. "Wild Bill" Donovan established the Office of Strategic Services, which was a precursor to today's Special Forces.² He took a novel approach to recruitment because he wanted only the best operators, regardless of their demographics. Because Donovan did not limit the recruiting pool, fully one-third of all Office of Strategic Services personnel came directly into the organization from the civilian world.³ During the 1950s, special forces heavily recruited eastern European immigrants to fill its ranks to train partisan fighters in the event of an invasion by the Soviet Union into western Europe.⁴ In a major war, the United States would likely call upon today's special forces to conduct similar types of operations.

Although Special Forces are proficient in several missions, their expertise in unconventional warfare will set them apart in a major war. With an area of operations that could extend from the Baltics to Vietnam, unconventional warfare will be a force multiplier that can "buy down risk" as the United States enlarges the conventional force.⁵ During this time, special forces will also need to be expanded quickly. Previous models for increasing the number of special forces operators will assist planners to some degree, but growth for a contemporary major war will be exceptional in many ways.

From 2008 to 2012, special forces grew by one battalion per year. The growth of the 4th Battalion was the first major increase in the force since 3rd Special Forces Group was reactivated in 1990.⁶ Today's active duty Special Forces group consists of three line battalions, one

1 GEN Mark A. Milley, "Changing Nature of War Won't Change Our Purpose," US Army, October 4, 2016, https://www.army.mil/article/175469/changing_nature_of_war_wont_change_our_purpose.

2 "Office of Strategic Services: The OSS Primer—The Beginning," US Army Special Operations Command, December 28, 2016, <http://www.soc.mil/OSS/the-beginning.html>.

3 Giles Raymond DeMourot, "A New Center for Global Engagement: A Revamped CVE Effort Engenders Skepticism," LinkedIn, January 8, 2016, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/new-center-global-engagement-revamped-cve-effort-raymond-demourot>.

4 "10th SFG (A) History," USASOC, December 16, 2016, <http://www.soc.mil/USASFC/Groups/10th/history.html>.

5 Robert Warburg (USASOC G9 office), interview by author, December 7, 2016.

6 "3rd SFG (A) History," USASOC, December 10, 2016, [www.soc.mil/USASFC/Groups/3rd/3rdSFG\(A\)History.html](http://www.soc.mil/USASFC/Groups/3rd/3rdSFG(A)History.html).

sensitive activities battalion, and one support battalion. A group in the National Guard consists of three line battalions and one support battalion.⁷ The Army Special Operations Command built this new force structure by increasing the number of students going through Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS) and the Special Forces Qualification Course.

Although an informative model, this process may not prepare enough operators to respond sufficiently in a major war. Although situational assessments would be continuous, a possibility that the majority of available active duty Special Forces would deploy in short order exists. Thus, as the National Guard groups are activated, they could deploy to the battlespace or replace active duty personnel conducting vital operations in other locations. And, a major war would likely necessitate a World War II deployment model where very few personnel would rotate back home.

Based on interviews with multiple staff officers at USASOC and the Special Warfare Center, this article will examine an initial expansion of two special forces groups, which would be difficult even if it occurred in a time of relative peace. Adding the potential for significant casualties, increasing this force becomes exponentially more complex. But Army Special Operations Command can take a series of steps to infuse personnel into the groups until the Special Warfare Center can ramp up production at SFAS and the qualification course.

The obvious first step is a Department of Defense-wide stop-loss. This action will halt approximately 540 special forces soldiers from leaving the Army each year.⁸ Next, the Army should recall eligible veterans who separated within the last five years. If one-third of those recalled are qualified to join a tactical formation, 900 personnel would be added quickly to the ranks. Those who may not be qualified physically could potentially fill other positions in training or headquarters.

The next step is to reintegrate most of the 630 special forces soldiers who work in billets external to the regiment.⁹ Special Forces Command already tracks these personnel and should assess which of their positions could be replaced with contractors and soldiers who require limited duty. Although not optimal for headquarters or the training pipeline, as many as 50 percent of the personnel in other billets could potentially be transferred to deployable units. This number discounts those on limited duty and those too senior to return to groups. These two steps could increase special forces by over 1,200 operators, which would be more than enough to fill three battalions. These steps, however, are only short-term solutions until recruitment, selection, and training can accelerate.

The Special Warfare Center selects the right candidates by ensuring they have all the Army SOF attributes: integrity, courage, perseverance, personal responsibility, adaptability, team player, and capability.¹⁰ All

⁷ LTC Larry Henry (USASOC National Guard office), email message to author, February 23, 2017.

⁸ LTC Joseph Long (commandant's office, special forces, US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School [SWCS]), interview by author, December 8, 2016.

⁹ USASOC, *Current Operations, Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) Worldwide by Command* (Fort Bragg, NC: USASOC, December 7, 2016).

¹⁰ LTG Charles T. Cleveland, *ARSOF Next: A Return to First Principles* (Fort Bragg, NC: ARSOF, [2015]), 35.

USASOC regiments emphasize risk should never be assumed during the assessment and selection process, which is the best indicator of a candidate's success and the least time-intensive part of the training pipeline.¹¹ Even if the quantity of personnel entering the Army during major war should, at a minimum, double, special forces recruitment should remain integrated across the force to maintain the needed quality and quantity of Army special operations forces. The growth should provide enough prospects to negate any temptation to change special forces's entrance standards. Increasing the mechanisms to conduct targeted recruiting will maintain high-quality candidates for the Special Operations Recruiting Battalion. Any SOF growth scenario will also require proportionate resourcing of the Special Operations Recruiting Battalion.

When evaluating the qualification course, understanding the capability needed on the imminent battlefield is important. The utmost skillset Green Berets bring to the fight is an unsurpassed expertise of unconventional warfare. This competence should not be depleted during preparations for a major war. Therefore, the Special Warfare Center may consider streamlining other portions of the course.

Ideally, nothing changes in the qualification course. Since that goal may not be feasible, several alternate approaches—such as limiting the language requirement to two members of each detachment, temporarily removing universal military freefall for all graduates, reducing the time between selection and the qualification course, or training during the few free weekends—could be considered. These implementations could be feasible, however, any training cuts should be thoughtful and based upon many situational factors, from the force requirement in theater to the casualty rates among special forces units.

Army Special Operations Command can begin preparing for a major-war by first evaluating the impact of training 500–1,000 additional students a year. Expanding the training capacity of the Special Warfare Center will take time. Key areas include training equipment sets, ranges, Robin Sage lanes, and critical portions of the qualification course. The center must also train a larger cadre that will include recalled personnel and contractors. Although none of these factors have a short-term fix, planning to overcome the limited resources should begin.

Second, the Army could assign a reserve component unit with a secondary duty to form the core of a new special forces group.¹² The Guard has 10 special operations detachments. These detachments are generally 30 personnel led by a special forces colonel that support organizations such as special operations commands in theater and NATO.¹³ Given some guidance, and a minimal amount of equipment, these units could expedite the formation of a new special forces group.

Finally, the Army could ensure an accelerated method is in place to process and evaluate personnel quickly. With a recall to active duty, assessing and optimizing the abilities of those recalled will be important.

11 COL Larry Niedringhaus (G-3 office, USASOC), email message to author, February 23, 2017.

12 COL Samuel Ashley (G-8, USASOC), interview by author, December 7, 2016.

13 Joseph Trevithick, "Maryland Now Has a Special Forces Unit Dedicated to Countering Russia," War is Boring, May 15, 2016, <https://warisboring.com/maryland-now-has-a-special-forces-unit-dedicated-to-countering-russia/>.

This task may seem small, but if USASOC has a plan, its staff can concentrate on more pressing issues.

US Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations

Psychological operations and, to a lesser degree, civil affairs share a common lineage with special forces. In 1952, Major General Robert A. McClure consolidated unconventional warfare into the Psychological Warfare Center at Fort Bragg.¹⁴ The 10th Special Forces Group, which was formed from the Special Operations Division of the same headquarters, was established as the first special forces unit at this time.¹⁵ In 1956, the Psychological Warfare Center became the US Army Special Warfare Center School.¹⁶

Civil affairs also has a long history of working with SOF. In 1955, the Army established the Civil Affairs/Military Government Branch. With the establishment of the US Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command, civil affairs became a member of USASOC in 1985.¹⁷ In 2006, the Army transferred the US Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command from USASOC to Forces Command. US Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command retained all reserve component civil affairs and psychological operations units. All active component psychological operations, which are now known as military information support operations, and the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade became subordinate to USASOC.

Addressing the deficiencies in civil affairs and psychological operations will be similar to the recommendations for special forces. A stop-loss, recall, efforts to return soldiers to tactical units, and accelerated recruiting are well suited to expanding psychological operations and civil affairs personnel; however, distinct manning issues reside in the reserve component. Even though these reserve units are not special operations forces, tracking their trends and issues is important for the Special Warfare Center because the center is responsible for all civil affairs and psychological operations training and doctrine.¹⁸ Notably, civil affairs and psychological operations personnel in the reserve component are not required to attend a selection process nor language training.

Civil Affairs

Clearly invaluable in the past 15 years of war, civil affairs personnel provide unique support to “the warfighter by engaging the civil component of the battlefield,” which will be crucial in a major war.¹⁹ Civil affairs specialists maintain expertise in all facets of governance

14 “Special Forces: The Early Years,” Special Forces Association, January 7, 2017, <http://www.specialforcesassociation.org/about/sf-history/>; and Headquarters, US Department of the Army (HQDA), *Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare*, Field Manual (FM) 3-05.130 (Washington, DC: HQDA, 2005), J-1.

15 “History of Special Forces,” National Guard, December 28, 2016, <https://www.nationalguard.com/special-forces-history>.

16 Cleveland, *ARSOF Next*, 24.

17 US Army, “Special Operations: John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School,” Military.com, December 19, 2016, <http://www.military.com/special-operations/john-f-kennedy-special-warfare-center-and-school.html>.

18 LTC Les Parks, *Civil Affairs* (Fort Bragg, NC: United States Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Center [CAPOC], Fort Bragg, February 15, 2017), briefing slides; and MG Eric P. Wendt, *USAJFKSWCS Academic Handbook Fiscal Year 2015* (Fort Bragg, NC: SWCS, 2015), 12.

19 HQDA, *Civil Affairs Operations*, FM 3-57 (Fort Bragg, NC: SWSC, 2011), 1-6.

that helps engage local populations in developing a “stable and viable civil administration.”²⁰ With the possibility of great urban decimation and displaced populations, civil affairs must grow at the same rate as the rest of the force.

In 2007, the 95th Civil Affairs Battalion was expanded into the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade due to increased demand for their capabilities.²¹ In 2011, another unit, the 85th Civil Affairs Brigade, was formed to provide rapid deployment of language, regional, and cultural support.²² Since the beginning of the Global War on Terror, civil affairs units have been among the most deployed in the US military. On the reserve component side, there are four civil affairs commands aligned to support regional combatant commands.²³

Despite a heavy deployment tempo, active duty civil affairs units are currently experiencing a decline. The 85th Civil Affairs Brigade and two of its battalions were deactivated in January 2018.²⁴ This decrease in personnel will put additional strain on the civil affairs force and their doctrinal requirement to provide one company for every brigade combat team and Joint special operations task force.²⁵

Units currently meet the requirements for active component Army Special Forces; however, the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade also supports all Joint special operations.²⁶ Therefore, in the event of a major war, the active component of civil affairs would have to be augmented to support all of the special operations components that would be deployed. Moreover, civil affairs would not have the capacity to cover the special operations of the National Guard, the US Navy and Marine Corps, numbered task forces, nor interagency operations.²⁷ This aspect means active duty civil affairs units will have to grow at a much faster rate than the units they will be required to support in a major war.

To alleviate some of these issues, USASOC may want to add SOF civil affairs capacity to the reserve components. Additionally, such personnel should be required to meet the same training and language requirements as active duty servicemembers in the same roles.

In the reserve component, the number of units are less of an issue than how the units are manned. Currently, civil affairs units are almost fully manned. Nevertheless, this statistic does not account for personnel who have not completed civil affairs training or whose rank or skill mismatches with staffing requirements.²⁸ These deficiencies are significant because they result in civil affairs units having many unqualified personnel despite being “fully manned.”

20 “What is Civil Affairs,” Special Operations Recruiting Battalion (SORB), December 18, 2016, http://www.sorbrecruiting.com/SORB_CA.html.

21 “95th Civil Affairs Brigade (Airborne),” US Army Special Operations Command, December 16, 2016, <http://www.soc.mil/95th/95thhomepage.html>.

22 “85th Civil Affairs Brigade,” GlobalSecurity.org, December 17, 2016, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/army/85ca-bde.htm>.

23 “What is Civil Affairs,” SORB.

24 Todd Pruden, “85th Civil Affairs Brigade Inactivated,” *Fort Hood Sentinel*, February 8, 2018.

25 COL Jonathan Mapley-Brittle, email message to author, February 27, 2017.

26 Mapley-Brittle, interview by author, February 26, 2017.

27 Mapley-Brittle, interview.

28 G-1, *Delta Report* (Fort Bragg, NC: CAPOC, December 31, 2016), spreadsheet; and Mapley-Brittle, interview.

Reserve civil affairs units are also substantially over strength in the ranks of E1–E4.²⁹ Likewise, readiness rate distortions occur because the ranks of E5 through O4 are more depleted than some numbers would convey. These two factors account for significant manning issues.

In addition to the previously mentioned solutions, allowing the Reserves to make civil affairs an accessions branch so soldiers could directly join may assist with manning issues.³⁰ Because any civil affairs soldier that transitions to active duty will need to pass selection and language requirements, the active component would not be affected by this change. If this recommendation is implemented, however, the Army may want to consider changing the active duty SOF civil affairs military occupational specialty code to track their unique capabilities.³¹

Military Information Support Operations

A fully integrated psychological operations force is essential in major combat operations. Active duty military information support and reserve component psychological operations units have the ability to “develop campaigns to move an audience from one behavior to another using culturally relevant steps and programs.”³² Psychological Operations was able to do just this during the Persian Gulf War. In a concerted effort of leaflets, radio broadcasts, and loudspeaker appeals for surrender, they helped convince 44 percent of the Iraqi military to surrender.³³ This outcome is one of many examples of how a correctly apportioned psychological operations force can enhance every operation.

Reserve psychological operations units face manning issues similar to those faced by their civil affairs brethren, but they also have unit shortages. In 2014 the Army approved new rules of allocation for psychological operations, which changed the support structure for such units.³⁴ For the reserve component, a psychological operations group supports a corps. Under this construct, the Army is short one group. A psychological operations battalion supports a division; however, there are currently eight battalions supporting 16 divisions. Finally, 32 tactical psychological operations companies support 56 brigade combat teams, not including the support provided to the US Marine Corps.³⁵

These numbers are surprising, but since not all brigades are deployed at once, the psychological operations groups have found ways to keep supporting warfighters. In a major war scenario, gaping holes will appear in this support. This environment means psychological operations has a wide divide between the current and projected force structure. This issue is complicated further by the attrition rate in the reserve component, which results in an annual loss of almost 18 percent of personnel to expired terms of service or to transfers to other units.³⁶

29 LTC Les Parks (G35, CAPOC), interview by author, February 24, 2017.

30 Parks, interview.

31 Mapley-Brittle, interview.

32 Cleveland, *ARSOF*, 27.

33 Ed Rouse, “The Gulf War,” *Psywarrior*, December 27, 2016, <http://www.psywarrior.com/gulfwar.html>.

34 David Farrington, email message to author, February 27, 2017.

35 David Farrington, *Psychological Operations Current Structure* (Fort Bragg, NC, SWSC, December 7, 2016), spreadsheet.

36 G-1, *Delta Report*.

The only positive side of the high attrition rate is the potential for an effective recall to active duty.

On the active duty side, the biggest gap in support is created with only one battalion dedicated to supporting every Joint Special Operations Task Force. Thus, psychological operations cannot support the current force structure. As with civil affairs, USASOC may want to add reserve psychological operations units to the special operations forces to make up for current shortages.

To increase the number of students in training, the qualification course leadership may find opportunities to improve efficiency. It is important to understand, however, that cultural awareness is a hallmark of Army special operations that is even more crucial in psychological operations. This characteristic means cuts to the training curriculum come with great difficulty. Nevertheless, some steps taken now can increase the likelihood of proper psychological operations support. First, consider more incentives to keep psychological operations soldiers in the force. Second, increase unit structure to levels that support the current force. Finally, if psychological operations manning is still lagging, USASOC may need to revert to the previous rules of allocation until additional personnel can be trained.

Ranger Regiment

Rangers have a long and heroic history. They have honed advanced infantry capability not found anywhere else in the world. To maintain their advantage, the Ranger regiment recruits from the rest of the Army to ensure it has the best infantry officers and noncommissioned officers available. Enlisted personnel come straight from advanced individual training or apply from other units and are required to pass a rigorous selection process.

The Ranger Assessment and Selection Program 1 (8 weeks) is for enlisted to junior noncommissioned officers, and Program 2 (5 weeks) is for noncommissioned officers, warrant officers, and officers.³⁷ Although the regiment would need to assign more assets for selecting soldiers, the time required for this process is not as burdensome as that required for the rest of the Army SOF community. Potentially, the Ranger regiment could match the growth rate of the rest of the Army and expand to six maneuver battalions in addition to achieving current efforts for the special troops and the military intelligence battalions.³⁸

Despite having the least amount of obstacles to expansion in Army SOF, issues still exist. First, USASOC must decide if the six maneuver battalions would be structured as one, or possibly two, O6 commands. Second, because all recruitment for officers and senior noncommissioned officers comes from in-service sources, the Ranger regiment may get resistance from units losing soldiers. Third, the expansion also has to account for the high potential of combat losses, which could slow growth significantly.

³⁷ MAJ Gregory Escobar (75th Ranger Regiment RS35), email message to author, February 27, 2017.

³⁸ COL Brandon Tegtmeier (commander, 75th Ranger Regiment), interview by author, January 16, 2017.

There are mitigating actions to help increase the size of the Ranger regiment until recruitment and selection can increase capacity. As with the rest of Army SOF, a stop-loss, recall to active duty, and adding contractors to be selection cadre could help. Rangers, however, have one advantage over the rest of Army SOF—most Rangers rotate into conventional infantry units and back again. The regiment loses approximately 200 infantry soldiers per year either to regular rotations to other units or to expiring terms of service. Assuming 50 percent attrition of recalled personnel, a five-year recall would allow the Army to fill about 500 infantry billets in the regiment quickly.³⁹ Many of the soldiers should be suitable for integrating into the maneuver battalions; however, physically limited soldiers could support selection billets or fill other noncombat roles. Because recruitment will need to be accelerated during a major war, one potential time-saving method for the Special Operations Recruiting Battalion would involve integrating psychological evaluations and other Ranger selection criteria into advanced individual training.⁴⁰

Special Operations Aviation Regiment

The Army special operations aviation force has been flying sensitive missions for the Army since Task Force 160 was formed in 1981, after the failed rescue attempt of US hostages in Iran. The unit, dubbed the Night Stalkers, provides a unique deep penetration, special operations capability and unparalleled skill during hours of darkness. The unit has been involved in every major US operation since Grenada. Beginning as a battalion-sized organization, it has experienced sizable growth since its inception. Today there are five battalions—four maneuver battalions and one training battalion—as well as one Gray Eagle unmanned aerial system company manned, trained, and equipped by the Army Special Operations Aviation Command.⁴¹

As the only rotary-wing unit that is allocated to not only Army SOF but all special operations forces, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) will need to expand significantly for major war.⁴² With two additional special forces groups, twice as many Rangers, and undetermined growth in the special operations forces of the US Navy and Marine Corps, ideally Night Stalkers would also double in size; however, there are three categories of huge challenges to growth: “iron [aircraft], personnel, and sustainment.”⁴³

Encountering similar recruiting and training issues as other regiments, the 160th has the greatest impediments to growth because they have the most unique equipment requirements of the five regiments. No other country can match the technological capability that resides in the 160th. They receive already advanced aircraft and improve them—for example, the Army buys a CH-47 Chinook helicopter for approximately

³⁹ Escobar, interview.

⁴⁰ MSG Kevin Nelson (noncommissioned officer in charge, force modernization, 75th Ranger Regiment), email message to author, February 15, 2017.

⁴¹ LTC William Garber, *Command Brief for Foreign Officers* (Fort Bragg, NC: US Army Special Operations Aviation Command [USASOAC], February 2, 2017), briefing slides.

⁴² LTC Mark Johnson, email message to author, February 21, 2017.

⁴³ LTC Hunter Marshall (G-8, USASOAC), interview by author, February 1, 2017; and LTC William Garber (G-3, USASOAC), interview by author, February 1, 2017.

\$14 million. The aviation command transforms that aircraft into a special operations version, MH-47, at the cost of an additional \$22 million.⁴⁴

Current orders to replace the unit's helicopters will be filled between 2017 and 2026.⁴⁵ Many issues associated with increasing current production will only extend the production timeline when competing against the rest of the Army.⁴⁶ As noted, there is no easy way to mitigate the lack of aircraft, and the possibility of significant combat losses further complicates increasing such capabilities.

To compensate for lack of aircraft, the Night Stalkers will need to scrutinize what missions truly need a SOF aviation capability. Forward deployed units have done this to some degree, but a rigorous process for allocating the specialized aviation assets is needed. Additionally, Special Operations Command needs to pursue greater aviation integration between special operations and conventional forces.⁴⁷ Potentially, USASOC could establish a reserve component force to support SOF aviation requirements that do not necessitate 160th expertise. Currently, there are Army Reserve units that perform similar functions, but there is no established relationship and these assets will likely not be available during a major war. These measures may alleviate some capacity issues, but manning will continue to be challenging.

From 2010 to 2016, the Army has underassessed the entire force by a total of 730 aviators, the equivalent of more than two brigades.⁴⁸ This lack of personnel has had a ripple effect in SOF aviation recruitment. Conventional units are now more reticent to allow their pilots to apply for the 160th. So, the first step in fixing the regiment's manpower issues is fixing such issues in Army aviation as a whole.

Unlike the Ranger regiment, most pilots do not leave the 160th for parts of their career. Although this practice retains experience within the unit, it may also be a fatal flaw. With the exception of a recall to active duty, there is no ready-made source of pilots. If a five-year recall to active duty were implemented, the 160th would garner up to 180 pilots, assuming a 33 percent acceptability rate.⁴⁹ This influx of personnel is a good start, but it is onetime.

Army Special Operations Aviation Command may want to consider the Ranger model allowing pilots to transition into, and out of, the 160th, which would have multiple benefits.⁵⁰ First, this policy allows the cross pollination of expertise into the conventional Army. Second, the policy provides a pool of personnel to draw from in the case a major war develops. Finally, units may be less apprehensive about allowing pilots to be selected for the 160th since their experience will create a positive long-term effect for the conventional force. Ultimately, if the 160th considers forcing pilots, crewmembers, and maintainers to serve in the conventional force, they will also have to increase the capacity of

44 Marshall, interview.

45 Ashley, interview.

46 LTC Robb C. Mitchell, "Rapid Expansion and the Army's Matériel: Is There Enough?" *Parameters* 47, no. 3 (Autumn 2017): 101–10.

47 Garber, interview.

48 Hunter, interview.

49 LTC Troy Worch (G-1, USASOAC G1), interview by author, February 1, 2017.

50 Hunter, interview.

the training battalion significantly. By investing appropriately now, any short-term issues caused by conventional service will be alleviated.

Much like manpower, unit sustainment cannot be overlooked. Unlike conventional combat aviation brigades, the 160th does not have an aviation support battalion. Battalion maintenance companies and the aviation maintenance support office, which is manned mostly by nondeployable contractors, provide much of this capability.⁵¹

Key aspects of the 160th's support package, such as the ability to overhaul aircraft away from its home station, are lacking. In the current fight, this deficiency is not a problem. But during extended deployments, the unit will need some expeditionary capability. Next, the unit depends on the supported SOF unit for bulk logistics requirements, which could not be maintained with current SOF sustainment assets. Thus, organizational change or planned augmentation to special operations sustainment battalions during complex operations, such as major war, may be needed.⁵² Finally, with the possibility of the Special Operation Aviation Regiment being pushed forward to remote locations, the unit will need a fuel testing capability it does not currently possess.

This section only identifies a few of the disparate topics affecting special operations aviation. Any detailed investigation on expanding the regiment will need to address the above topics as well as others—such as the Aviation Foreign Internal Defense program, training pipeline efficiencies, expanding the training battalion, and size requirements for the Gray Eagle fleet.

Conclusion

Longtime Army special operators may look at this article with skepticism, which is understandable since shortcuts run counter to everything they have learned. More important, any plan to get Army special operations to the battlefield quickly runs the risk of breaking the SOF Truths regarding mass production and creating special operations after emergencies occur. This article, however, makes these recommendations using the perspective of an existential threat to the United States.

With America facing greater military competition, as well as friction from Russia and China, an escalation of force from one of many situations is not unthinkable. Army Special Operations Command must ensure plans and mechanisms to address major war scenarios are in place. To quote *ARSOF Next*, Army special operations forces must be prepared when the nation once again asks them to “respond to strategic and operational change much faster than other military elements or government agencies by transforming.”⁵³

51 LTC Robert Patton (USASOAC G4), interview by author, February 1, 2017.

52 Johnson, email.

53 Cleveland, *ARSOF Next*, 27.

