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**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOL**

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**PERCEPTION IS REALITY: SPECIAL OPERATIONS
FORCES IN THE GRAY ZONE**

by

Sean R. Coffman
Rob J. Shumaker
Jeff M. Givens

June 2016

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ABSTRACT

As conflicts increasingly fall within the Gray Zone—that is, outside the traditional peace-or-war construct—the U.S. military must understand how to succeed in this ambiguous environment and counter its threats. A key challenge is understanding how to employ the tools available in the Gray Zone—the primary tool being Special Operation Forces (SOF). This research finds that policymakers and others outside of SOF have often misapplied this tool, due to limited understanding of SOF roles and competencies. This limited understanding or misperception of SOF may have a detrimental effect on the ability of the United States to reach its foreign policy goals. This research analyzes U.S. SOF employment in the Gray Zone, breaking down constituent components and identifying those of greater importance. Characteristics of the Gray Zone and irregular warfare are considered, and a holistic approach to the use of irregular warfare in the Gray Zone is proposed. Graham Allison and Morton Halperin’s bureaucratic politics model is used to discern the factors that shape the perception of SOF. Two historical cases are viewed through the lens of the bureaucratic politics model to show how SOF capabilities must be well understood and properly employed to achieve desired U.S. policy goals.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

1 st SFG(A)	1 st Special Forces Group (Airborne)
AFP	armed forces of the Philippines
ARSOF 2022	Army SOF plan outlining the future of the organization
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
CENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
CIA	U.S. Central Intelligence Agency
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
CODEL	Congressional Delegation
CT	counterterrorism
DOD	U.S. Department of Defense
DOS	U.S. Department of State
IW	irregular warfare
JCET	Joint Combined Exchange Training
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JI	Jama Islamia
JSOTF-P	Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines
JTF	joint task force
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
ODA	Operational Detachment Alpha, also referred to as an SF team
OEF-P	Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines
PACOM	Pacific Command
PDD	Presidential decision-directive
SECDEF	Secretary of Defense
SF	Army Special Forces, often referred to as Green Berets
SFG(A)	Special Forces Group (Airborne)
SOC PAC	Special Operations Command Pacific
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOLA	Special Operations Legislative Affairs
SOLIC	Special Operations low-intensity conflict
STAFFDEL	Staff-Delegate visit
TCAV	terrorist coordination and assistance visit
TW	traditional warfare
UNOSOM II	United Nations Operations Somalia II
USSOCOM/SOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command

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I. INTRODUCTION

Our success in this environment [the Gray Zone] will be determined by our ability to adequately navigate conflicts that fall outside of the traditional peace-or-war construct. In this “Gray Zone,” we are confronted with ambiguity on the nature of the conflict, the parties involved, and the validity of the legal and political claims at stake. These conflicts defy our traditional views of war and require us to invest time and effort in ensuring we prepare ourselves with the proper capabilities, capacities, and authorities to safeguard U.S. interests.

—General Joseph Votel, 2015¹

As conflicts increasingly fall outside the traditional peace-or-war construct, a key challenge facing the U.S. military is understanding how to best employ tools in the Gray Zone. This research finds that policymakers and others have often misapplied the primary resource available—Special Operation Forces (SOF)—due to limited understanding of its roles and competencies. This limited understanding or misperception of SOF may have a detrimental impact on the ability of the United States to reach its foreign policy goals.

This research analyzes U.S. SOF employment in the Gray Zone, breaking down constituent components and identifying those of greater importance. Characteristics of the Gray Zone and irregular warfare are considered, and a holistic approach to the use of IW in the Gray Zone is proposed. Graham Allison and Morton Halperin’s bureaucratic politics model is used to discern the factors that shape the perception of SOF, and two historical cases are viewed through the lens of the bureaucratic politics model to show how SOF capabilities must be well understood and properly employed to achieve desired U.S. policy goals.²

¹ *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016: Special Operations Forces in Uncertain Threat Environment, Hearing Before the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives*, 114th Cong., 2 (2015) (statement of Joseph L. Votel, Commander of United States Special Operations Command), https://fas.org/irp/congress/2015_hr/031815votel.pdf.

² Graham T. Allison and Morton H. Halperin, “Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications,” *World Politics* 24, no. S1 (1972): 40–79; Morton H. Halperin, Priscilla Clapp, and Arnold Kanter, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2006).

A. THE GRAY ZONE

General Joseph Votel, commander of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) introduced the term “Gray Zone” on March 18, 2015, in a statement to the House Armed Service Committed Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities.³ In September 2015, under the direction of General Votel, USSOCOM released a white paper, “The Gray Zone,” in which the zone is defined as “competitive interactions among and within state and non-state actors that fall between the traditional war and peace duality.”⁴ This definition informs the Gray Zone discussions now underway in related academic and policymaking circles, with analysis centering on the following points:

While acknowledgment of the complex interactions that are neither war nor peace is not new, policymakers and strategists have grown increasingly interested in this neglected aspect of international competition as they realize that most U.S. force employment now falls beyond the traditional concepts of war.⁵ Military operations after World War II happened primarily in the Gray Zone, including almost all Cold War activities.⁶ George Kennan expressed his concern about the misapprehensions surrounding Gray Zone political warfare during a policy meeting with the National Security Council in 1948:

We [Americans] have been handicapped however by a popular attachment to the concept of a basic difference between peace and war, by a tendency to view war as a sort of sporting context outside of all political context, by a national tendency to seek for a political cure-all, and by a reluctance to recognize the realities of international relations--the perpetual rhythm of struggle, in and out of war.⁷

³ *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016*.

⁴ Philip Kapusta. “The Gray Zone,” *Special Warfare* 28, no. 4 (October 2015): 20.

⁵ Kapusta, “The Gray Zone.”

⁶ Joseph L. Votel, Charles T. Cleveland, Charles T. Connett, and Will Irwin, “Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 80 (2016): 101–109
http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-80/jfq-80_101-109_Votel-et-al.pdf.

⁷ George Kennan, “269. Policy Planning Staff Memorandum: The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare,” National Security Council Records. May 4, 1948.
<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/history/johnson/65ciafounding3.htm>.

Kennan’s 20th century description of perpetual struggle, both within and short of war, applies equally today. The major difference is that while Cold War conflicts were played in the Gray Zone to forestall nuclear war, today, with nuclear war unlikely, Gray Zone competition is pursued as an end *in se*.

Adam Elkus is among critics who argue that the Gray Zone concept is a “flash in the pan” that does little to further discussion of the strategic space between war and peace and adds confusion to well-recognized phenomena identified in political science and strategic-studies research.⁸ Nevertheless, the current focus on Gray Zone realities has precipitated a much-needed reappraisal of the environment and required policymakers, senior military leaders, and national-security scholars to review historical cases of gray war involvement to ascertain what the future may hold and to guide policy. The debate has also forced those in the debate to review what tools are needed in this environment.

The USSOCOM white paper notes that actors “seek to secure their objective while minimizing the scope and scale of actual fighting”—a critical point in the Gray Zone discussion.⁹ Of the military tools available, SOF, with its robust breadth of capabilities, is generally best able to deliver results in the environment; yet it is applied preponderantly in counterterrorism (CT) and direct action. This research explores why SOF is used so narrowly, given its broad capabilities.

B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary questions considered in this research are as follows:

1. What perceptions do policymakers have regarding the utility of Special Operations Forces?
2. What impact do these perceptions have on the application of SOF in Gray Zone environments?

To narrow these questions, the following inquiries are made:

⁸ Adam Elkus, “Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Enter Here: You Cannot Save the Gray Zone Concept,” War on the Rocks, December 30, 2015, <http://warontherocks.com/2015/12/abandon-all-hope-ye-who-enter-here-you-cannot-save-the-gray-zone-concept/>; Adam Elkus, “50 Shades of Gray: Why the Gray Wars Concept Lacks Strategic Sense,” War on the Rocks, December 15, 2015, <http://warontherocks.com/2015/12/50-shades-of-gray-why-the-gray-wars-concept-lacks-strategic-sense/>.

⁹ *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016*.

- From the American perspective, what is the difference between war and peace?
- Who has historically operated in the environment between war and peace?
- What method of warfare works best in the Gray Zone?
- What factors influence how SOF is perceived by policymakers?
- Who influences whether and when force is applied in the Gray Zone?
- What model, if any, can elucidate the process by which policymakers decide whether to apply force?

This research provides qualitative analysis of two cases of U.S. involvement in Gray Zone conflicts. To understand the decisions and actions of policymakers in these cases, Allison and Halperin's bureaucratic politics model is used. This model allows parsing of the players involved as to shared images (perceptions) and interests. The model uses a layered approach to look at the three "games" that drive the formation of U.S. foreign policy: the action, decision, and policy games.¹⁰ In the action game, organizations within SOF communicate their utility upstream to those responsible for decisions and policy. Together, the decision and policy games illuminate how a decision to apply SOF is made. The employment of SOF tends to be shaped by perception and the presumed arena of the possible, which changes slowly unless shocked by a major event such as the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

C. ORGANIZATION

Chapter II addresses the space between war and peace and how the Gray Zone in more detail. The Gray Zone concept is analyzed with a discussion of which methods works best in the zone and description of the characteristics a force requires to conduct these methods. All of these elements are examined independently to understand their unique characteristics and demonstrate their intricate interdependencies. Chapter II also looks at irregular warfare as a method of force application within the Gray Zone and how SOF has evolved into an irregular warfare tool. Chapter III presents the approach used in reviewing the case studies, discusses perceptions of SOF, and introduces the use of the

¹⁰ Allison and Halperin, "Bureaucratic Politics."

BMP for insight into decision making and the employment of SOF in the Gray Zone. Chapter IV reviews two cases of U.S. intervention: in Somalia from 1992–1993 and the Philippines from 2001–2014. In both cases, the players and games, and the perceptions that influenced SOF employment are discussed. Chapter V summarizes conclusions, identifies factors that may influence the future perception of SOF, and suggests follow-up research. This research finds that if SOF is given clear and concise policy objectives and the time to assess, plan, and execute a thorough irregular warfare campaign, it is likely to achieve policy objectives in the ambiguous environment between war and peace.

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II. THE GRAY ZONE: DEFINITION AND APPROACH

The authors build upon SOCOM’s definition of the Gray Zone by proposing that it is the system of environments between war and peace, relative to the actor (whether state or non-state), in which lethal actions and peaceful exchanges ebb and flow, pushing the limits of internationally accepted norms. This elaboration adds depth by accommodating the extremes of war and peace while retaining the notion of subjective experience on the part of the actors involved. Figure 1 depicts the Gray Zone continuum.

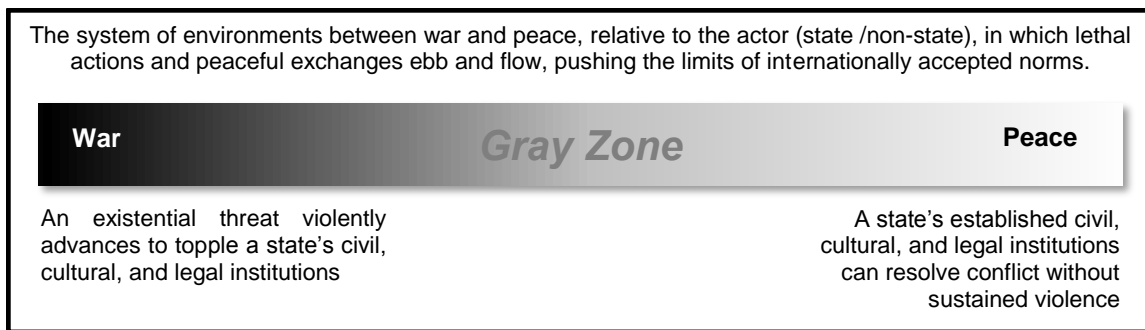


Figure 1. The Gray Zone Within the Spectrum of Conflict

This definition is not intended to resolve the larger debates regarding the Gray Zone but allows the analysis in this thesis to be structured in a transparent manner. Expanding on this provisional definition, the Gray Zone is a collection of environments that may or may not be similar in nature, but are intertwined within a specific problem, conflict, or challenge. A given Gray Zone is defined by specific actors. For example, the Ukrainian government is likely to view its current crisis as an existential threat, while Russia would not (and any involvement of the United States will be further away from the left side of Figure 1).¹¹ In other words, a given conflict may slide closer to war or peace depending on the situation and perspective of the actor involved. Within the Gray Zone, both lethal military action and peaceful diplomatic exchanges may occur and these exchanges may push the limits of internationally accepted norms—a point of concern in

¹¹ Kapusta, “The Gray Zone,” 22.

the modern world. As Michael Mazarr notes, common interests tie most states, but this does not translate to everyone's approving the status quo, and this dissatisfaction may become an engine for Gray Zone conflict.¹² To add complexity, it is not only violent extremist organizations that may demonstrate their dissatisfaction but also major states. This poses difficulties for the United States, which increasingly has found that traditional deterrents or sanctions may not work as solutions to problems with non-state actors. Russia, for example, is conducting aggressive territorial incursions, and China is expanding into the East and South China Seas, despite disapproval from the United States and others. Strategies within the Gray Zone employed today must counter both state and non-state actors. This chapter looks at the current debate over the Gray Zone, breaks down the concept of irregular warfare and its utility, and examines how special operations forces are designed to operate within the Gray Zone. By delineating the unique aspects of Gray Zone conflict, this research seeks to help makers and executors of policy grasp the complexity of these problems.

A. THE GRAY ZONE DEBATE

For the idea of the Gray Zone to be useful, it must be disentangled from other concepts. In the current debate, critics generally place the Gray Zone into one of three mental bins, as a strategy, conflict, or condition.¹³

Considered as a strategy, the Gray Zone is taken to mean the analytical framework that military operations must follow to achieve desired objectives. Considered, alternatively, as a conflict, the Gray Zone emerges from a collation of the interrelated events that distinguish an overall situation and which cumulatively depart from the "steady state" of affairs. Understanding the Gray Zone as a condition helps leaders and analysts tease out the nuances of a given situation and identify those elements that require special attention in planning and executing operations.

¹² Michael Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict," Strategic Studies Institute, December 2015, 10, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/PUB1303.pdf>.

¹³ Allison Astorino-Courtois, "Conceptualizing Grey Deterrence" (PowerPoint presentation provided to authors, Tampa, FL, February 26, 2016).

All three classifications are relevant but in different ways. Strategies are critical when focusing the effects of military operations; conflict labeling establishes a definitive starting and ending points for a situation, and conditions help identify specific strategies or techniques that military forces may consider in a particular conflict. For this research, the authors find that the Gray Zone is most usefully considered a condition, or more specifically, as a general environmental condition.

1. The Gray Zone as a Condition

A vast literature exists on strategy and conflict, and the admixing of the Gray Zone into the discussion can add more confusion than value. Concepts like political, traditional, irregular, and asymmetric warfare simplify strategies and have a substantial literature and military doctrine backing their usefulness. Frank Hoffman argues that the Gray Zone is the initial phase of an adversary's strategy,¹⁴ while Mazarr vaguely describes the Gray Zone as a spectrum of operations that would collectively create a campaign plan.¹⁵ These arguments for the Gray Zone as a strategy add too little value to help in structuring a military or political action amid a situation. Likewise, while small wars, low-intensity conflicts, and military operations other than war have been used to describe the complexities of a conflict that falls short of war in the public estimation, labeling the Gray Zone as a kind of conflict does little to further understanding of how the United States should contend with the modern threat environment.¹⁶ Considering the Gray Zone as an environmental condition may be only modestly profitable, but it contributes insight that strategic institutions may use to view the environment in which they operate.

Over the past century, U.S. conflicts have fallen by nearly a 12:1 ratio into the Gray Zone, as defined by multiple environments, actor relativity, and fluid violence.¹⁷ The major variable historically has been how international norms influence what

¹⁴ Frank Hoffman, "Countering Contemporary Threats: Full Spectrum Conflict in the 21st Century" (PowerPoint presentation provided to the authors, Washington, DC, November 18, 2015).

¹⁵ Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone," 25.

¹⁶ Kapusta, "The Gray Zone."

¹⁷ Kapusta, "The Gray Zone," 21.

acceptable actions or reactions are conceivable. For the military, these norms include acceptable collateral damage, troop-number commitments, and resourcing. It is important to consider these nuances and particulars in understanding Gray Zone conditions.

2. The Gray Zone and Institutional Relations

To grasp conditions in the Gray Zone, it is necessary to understand who or what entities must contend with its complexities, as both state institutions and non-state actors may have an extreme influence on the military's ability to achieve goals. Except insofar as it pertains to the bureaucratic politics model, organizational design and bureaucratic functioning are beyond the scope of this research. Ideally, governmental organizations function in the most effective and efficient way possible. For those within the leviathan that is the U.S. government, that idealistic assumption is far from reality, as suggested in Figure 2.

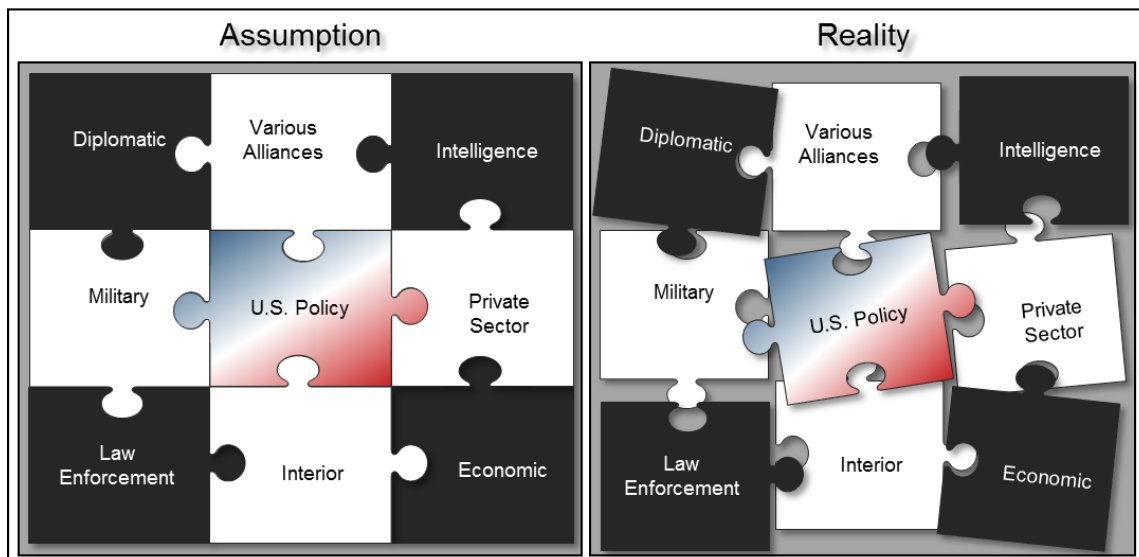


Figure 2. The Unity of Effort within U.S. Bureaucracy

At the macro level, it is safe to assume that most taxpayers would like to see government agencies interlock like the puzzle pieces at the left of Figure 2—specialists in each field working efficiently together, first within their puzzle piece, then connecting tightly with one another, with no gaps to create problems. Unfortunately, the right side of

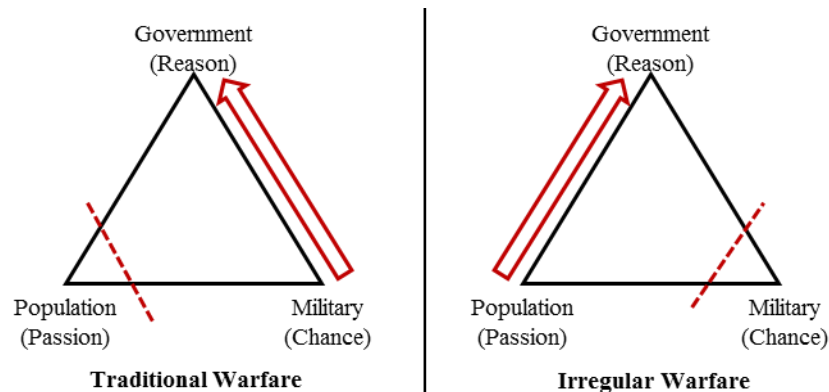
the figure is more representative of reality. Policies and responsibilities do not line up neatly with requirements and capabilities and, at the macro level, agencies frequently fail to communicate or share resources. This disconnection exposes the rough seams between agencies, and the misaligned interfaces represent exploitable vulnerabilities within the system. The individual gaps among organizations may not pose a serious threat at any given time to the overall functioning of the system; but as more entities become involved in a Gray Zone situation, these vulnerabilities become troubling, because success within the Gray Zone often requires action from multiple agencies. America's adversaries, knowingly or not, have begun to exploit these gaps by working below the threshold of violence that demands military retaliation in response, or shrouding their actions in enough doubt to discourage action to be taken at all. With the difficulties of the status quo in mind, this research presents a method of warfare appropriate to the Gray Zone.

B. IRREGULAR WARFARE IN THE GRAY ZONE

Traditional methods of warfare may be imprudent or inefficacious in the Gray Zone. If, for example, an insurgency were heavily active in areas where enemies and civilians mingled, the United States would not be able to utilize large armored formations or widespread bombing to realize its desired end state of enemy death and civilian safety. Where traditional warfare is not the solution, irregular warfare, which differs radically from traditional warfare, may succeed.

Carl von Clausewitz, widely regarded as the greatest Western military theorist, proposed a “paradoxical trinity” as a useful tool to simplify the actors required to achieve victory. Clausewitz identified three significant players in war, presented graphically as a triangle. At the base corners of the triangle are the military (chance) and the people (passion), with the government (reason) at the apex, as shown in Figure 3.¹⁸

¹⁸ Clausewitz, Carl von, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard, and Peter Paret, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 89.



The arrow indicates the intended direction of the effects while the dashed line represents an attempt to avoid or minimize that side's relevance.

Figure 3. The Paradoxical Trinity¹⁹

In Figure 3, both the military and the people support the government; and if the military or people waiver or are defeated, the government is made vulnerable. In its purest form, that is, if the political purpose of war is not connected to the actual conflict, war is an act of violence that means to force the enemy to one's will;²⁰ the goal is to influence, coerce, or compel a government or political authority to conform to an alternative way of thinking, typically about territory, resources, or ideology. Irregular warfare is associated with influence over the people, where traditional warfare is enemy centric. Traditional warfare is

warfare between the regulated militaries of states, or alliances of states, in which the objective is to defeat an adversary's armed forces, destroy an adversary's war-making capacity, or seize or retain territory in order to force a change in an adversary's government or policies.²¹

¹⁹ Figure 3 is an adaptation from the Irregular Warfare Division, Joint Staff: J-7, "Traditional Warfare versus Irregular Warfare." (pamphlet provided to the authors, Washington, DC, November 17, 2015). The authors understand that there is an ongoing debate on the interpretation and/or extension of the Paradoxical Trinity. However, this research bases the Trinity on the interpretation and/or extension within the DOD, specifically the J-7, the Joint Staff section responsible for joint doctrine and joint concepts, among other responsibilities. See also Christopher, Bassford and Edward J. Villacres. "Reclaiming the Clausewitzian Trinity," *Parameters* 25, no. 3 (1995): 9–19.

²⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, 90.

²¹ Deputy Secretary of Defense, *Irregular Warfare (IW)*, DOD Directive 3000.07, August 28, 2014.

Whereas irregular warfare concentrates lethal or nonlethal effects on a population to gain or erode support for the adversary's government while rendering its military power irrelevant (whether lethal or nonlethal).²² Traditional warfare concentrates lethal effects on the adversary's military power to defeat or neutralize it, to allow access to his government—all the while isolating the population (a non-lethal effect) from the conflict as best as possible, as in Figure 3. How then, do traditional and irregular warfare differ, and how does the United States define and perceive irregular warfare?

The U.S. military has always had a complicated relationship with the concept of irregular warfare, defined as “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s).”²³ The prevailing American attitude has usually been lack of interest, adherence to a traditional hierarchy of warfare precedence, or a belief that being effective at traditional warfare guarantees one is effective at them all.²⁴ The concept of irregular warfare remains contested within the U.S. military; but since June 2010, top brass have been required to take a serious look at the applicability and the special demands of irregular warfare.²⁵ Irregular warfare is regarded in this research as the method best suited for Gray Zone conflicts.

1. The Components of Irregular Warfare

In addition to the official DOD definition of irregular warfare, the subsets of irregular warfare merit discussion. What actually constitutes irregular warfare is a matter of doubt. The Office of the Secretary of Defense Policy, letter 3000.07, explains that

irregular warfare can include any relevant DOD activity and operation such as counterterrorism; unconventional warfare; foreign internal defense; counterinsurgency; and stability operations that, in the context of irregular warfare, involve establishing or re-establishing order in a fragile state or territory.²⁶

²² “Traditional Warfare versus Irregular Warfare.” (pamphlet provided to the authors, Washington, DC, November 17, 2015).

²³ Deputy Secretary of Defense, *Irregular Warfare (IW)*.

²⁴ Edward Luttwak, “Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare,” *Parameters* XIII, no. 4 (October 8, 1983), 12.

²⁵ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Irregular Warfare*, CJCS Instruction 3210.06, 10 June 2010.

²⁶ Deputy Secretary of Defense, *Irregular Warfare (IW)*.

To conduct an effective irregular warfare campaign may require the employment of each type of operational technique listed. Surveying the relevant activities within irregular warfare, it is clear that they focus primarily on affecting a population. As outlined in the cases studied of this thesis, strategies that leverage a greater range of irregular warfare operational techniques have a greater chance of achieving long-term objectives over the course of a campaign. Limiting operations to the employment of only one or two of these techniques fails to account for the thick interdependencies of Gray Zone problems—an oversight that, in Somalia, led to mission failure. It is critical to grasp the overall concept of irregular warfare when devising a strategy in the Gray Zone, and not to narrow the focus to a particular technique.

a. Counterterrorism

Counterterrorism can be a critical aspect of an irregular warfare campaign. Joint Publication 3–26, *Counterterrorism*, states, “CT activities and operations are taken to neutralize terrorists, their organizations, and networks in order to render them incapable of using violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals.”²⁷ As the primary purpose of CT, neutralizing organizations is typically accomplished through lethal strikes.

ARSOF 2022 describes strike operations as “not always intended to be an isolated activity; they are executed to shape the operational environment or influence selected target audiences in support of larger strategic interests.”²⁸ This qualification is echoed in JP 3–26, which says that CT must be a part of a holistic, interagency approach.²⁹ CT provides the time and space needed for activities that are focused on the population and may be critical in a campaign that has reached a peak of violence, as it allows elements that are poorly suited to a hostile environment, such as Civil Affairs of Military Information Support Operations, room to maneuver. The tool used to conduct irregular warfare is generally SOF.

²⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Counterterrorism* (JP 3-26) (Washington, DC, 2014), I-5.

²⁸ US Army Special Operations Command, “ARSOF 2022,” *Special Warfare* Special Edition (April 2013), 14.

²⁹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Counterterrorism* (JP 3-26) (Washington, DC, 2014), viii.

2. Special Operations Forces

The Gray Zone environment and methods of irregular warfare are exceedingly complex in their own ways and would not be well suited to the eighteen-year-old riflemen straight out of high school, with little life experience. These multifaceted and demanding situations require an individual who is a warrior and diplomat, interchangeable as needed. This layered identity is the true virtue of Special Operations Forces.

JP 1-02 defines SOF as “those Active and Reserve Component forces of the Services designated by the Secretary of Defense and specifically organized, trained, and equipped to conduct and support special operations”³⁰ and goes on to define special operations as

Operations requiring unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment and training often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments and characterized by one or more of the following: time sensitive, clandestine, low visibility, conducted with and/or through indigenous forces, requiring regional expertise, and/or a high degree of risk.³¹

In layman’s terms, SOF conducts operations that are beyond the capability of general-purpose forces. SOF is authorized to conduct ten codified activities, as follows:

- direct action
- strategic reconnaissance
- unconventional warfare
- foreign internal defense
- civil affairs
- military information-support operations
- counterterrorism
- humanitarian assistance
- theater search and rescue

³⁰ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (JP 1-02) (Washington DC 2010), 226.

³¹ *Ibid*, 226.

- such other activities as may be specified by the President or Secretary of Defense³²

SOF is often most capable when the emphasis is centered on a population, not only an enemy force.

3. The Evolution of SOF

American SOF's existence lies within centuries of military history. Modern Army SOF, specifically Special Forces (SF), draw their lineage from the Office of Strategic Studies, which conducted special operations behind enemy lines during World War II. Naval Special Warfare, specifically Sea/Air/Land (SEAL) forces, began with underwater demolition teams that conducted surreptitious operations before many of the beach landings of World War II. Leaders from these early units felt that the functionality they provided should become a permanent asset within the U.S. military; but what these units needed was a patron of the highest echelon, which both SF and SEALs found that in President John F. Kennedy.

Kennedy's speech to the 1962 graduating class of West Point spoke of "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..."³³ The President put a premium on this type of warfare, especially as regarded Vietnam, though this was unpopular with many senior civilian and military leaders. With the death of Kennedy, the push in Vietnam shifted to a conventional approach and moved away from the combined military-political spheres. SOF was pushed to the periphery and eventually out of Vietnam completely in 1971. This was a time of turmoil for SOF, and to be a member of these units was viewed as a dead-end career.³⁴ Though marginalized, SOF continued to operate in the shadows, and meanwhile, some new potential benefactors anticipated a

³² Unified Combatant Command for Special Operations Forces 10 U.S. Code § 167.

³³ John F. Kennedy, "Remarks at West Point to the Graduating Class of the U.S. Military Academy," *The American Presidency Project*, June 6, 1962, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8695>.

³⁴ Richard K. Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises* (New York: McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 1991), 128–134.

change on the horizon in the threats the United States would face and believed SOF would be needed to combat them.

In 1986, the Goldwater–Nichols Defense Reorganization Act was passed, essentially dictating through law that, from then on, the services within the Department of Defense would work in a joint environment. Some policymakers on Capitol Hill still felt this bill did not go far enough and that SOF needed its own command, designated branches for special operations within the services, and an undersecretary to the Secretary of Defense charged with special operations and low-intensity conflict. As a result of the Nunn–Cohen amendment to the National Defense Authorization of 1987, SOF was given a four-star command, with all the perquisites reserved for the different services, such as budgetary control, training, equipping, and specific authorities codified in Title 10 of the U.S. Code.³⁵ Nevertheless, it still had problems within the system until the perception of SOF was changed by the attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11), which were planned and executed not by a nation-state, by the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda.

National leadership needed a quick response using “fewer troops, fewer casualties, and thus lower political capital at risk.”³⁶ While senior military leaders estimated it would take four to six months to mobilize conventional forces in Afghanistan with all required elements,³⁷ within weeks, elements of SOF were on the ground, partnering with local resistance groups, calling in precision air strikes, and destroying elements of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in pursuit of the perpetrators of 9/11. By December, the Taliban was ready to come to the peace table and Al-Qaeda was decimated and forced into deep hiding.³⁸ This SOF success in Afghanistan served as the catalyst for using Special Operations Forces as “man hunters” in the global war on terrorism. As Iraq became a focus in this campaign, SOF continued to hone its newly

³⁵ “Top Secret America: Special Operations Command,” *Washington Post*, July 18, 2010, <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/top-secret-america/gov-orgs/socom>.

³⁶ Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009), 296.

³⁷ “Bush’s War,” PBS Frontline, March 24, 2008. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/bushswar/>

³⁸ Eric Blehm, *The Only Thing Worth Dying for: How Eleven Green Berets Fought for a New Afghanistan* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011).

bestowed mission set. However, Afghanistan and Iraq were spiraling into something the U.S. military had not dealt with since Vietnam—insurgency.

In Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. military was thrust into a type of conflict outside its conventional doctrine, and was thus unequipped to pursue, other than through SOF. While the overall military underwent a forced relearning, the SOF itself, especially SF, experienced an identity crisis as its mission narrowed almost completely to man hunting operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, as opposed to the full complement of SOF core activities. Reverting to its roots would prove difficult, as General David Petraeus and other senior leaders felt that conventional forces were already well versed in counterinsurgency and more than capable of achieving the desired end state for the Iraq campaign. The surge of 2007 and use of counterinsurgency tactics by most U.S. forces in Iraq did achieve some positive results, though they proved short-lived as Iraq and the United States failed to reach a status-of-forces agreement. As SOF and other U.S. forces left Iraq at the end of 2011, a power vacuum was formed, exacerbated by unresolved problems in Iraq and civil war in neighboring Syria. This provided a perfect environment for the emergence of the world's next wicked problem-set: the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

C. SUMMARY

Special Operations Forces, irregular warfare, and the Gray Zone are tightly related. SOF was designed as a tool for situations in which balance must be achieved among population-centric and enemy-centric interactions. The arena in which SOF's capabilities are used to greatest advantage is irregular warfare, where there is a balance in dealings with the population and enemy that must be adhered to in achieving desired outcomes, whether standalone or part of a strategic objective. In the Gray Zone, where lethal and non-lethal requirements ebb and flow, there is no clear delineation of which focus takes priority, whether the enemy or the people. Comprehension of the sensitive and powerful relationships in play is paramount when designing campaigns with a high probability of enhancing policy and national interests.

Chapter III examines the bureaucratic politics model, breaking down the way policymakers arrive at policies, decisions, and actions to lay a foundation for the case studies in this thesis. The chapter also discusses perception and its relation to SOF, dilating on how policymakers develop their perceptions to allow better analysis within the general bureaucratic politics approach.

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III. THE BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS MODEL AND PERCEPTION

The policy arena is rarely altered unless by a tremendous event such as the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001. In the current arena, certain components of irregular warfare that SOF is capable of conducting, CT and direct action, fall within customary bounds and expectations, while others, such as unconventional warfare, fall outside. What determines where a component is assigned within the policy arena, and where barriers exist, how may they be identified and overcome? This chapter frames the inquiry by examining what influences policymaker perceptions and how leaders arrive at military decisions in pursuit of foreign-policy objectives. The bureaucratic-politics model is applied to issues within the Gray Zone to provide empirical analysis.

As the bureaucratic politics model shows, there are conventional mechanisms that policymakers use to create policy and take action, and input from professionals with specialized information is an important mechanism that shapes these processes. Perception is a loose term that may be applied in a myriad of fashions—tightening the concept to clarify how perception shapes SOF employment, this research combines perception with the bureaucratic politics model to discover how policymaker decisions are affected by their standing categorizations of a capability. Perception may be used detrimentally as a cognitive shortcut that allows policymakers to bypass inputs from the action channel, based on preconceptions.

This chapter highlights what perception is—how it is formed and what its implications may be—and lays out the bureaucratic politics model as a tool for analysis. It shows how perceptions of SOF utility are formed, how the bureaucratic politics model plays out, and how, combined, these two factors affect the application of SOF.

A. THE BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS MODEL

To grasp how decision makers set policy and determine actions, and how this relates to the employment of SOF, this thesis applies the bureaucratic politics model of foreign-policy scholars Graham Allison and Morton Halperin. The bureaucratic politics model clarifies the governmental process by which a policy, decision or outcome pertaining to foreign policy is derived, by casting the interaction in terms of players and games.³⁹

1. Bureaucratic Politics Model Players and Games

The bureaucratic politics model divides “players” into two categories, senior and junior. The senior players, who vary depending on the event or issue, are predominantly principals within the government e.g., the President and members of the National Security Council, cabinet, and Congress.⁴⁰ The President leads the senior players, and it is understood that his preeminent position sets him apart.⁴¹ The junior players are deputies, senior staffers, lobbyists, members of the press, and other influential individuals.⁴² Because the world of politics, policy, bureaucracy, and military action is complex, for simplicity this research assumes all players are rational actors who will maximize their value in the environment, as discussed in John Steinbruner’s *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision*, which demonstrates that the fundamental characteristics of the rational actor may be applied to policymakers.⁴³

³⁹ Allison and Halperin, “Bureaucratic Politics,” 40–79.

⁴⁰ Allison and Halperin, “Bureaucratic Politics,” 47–48.

⁴¹ Allison and Halperin, “Bureaucratic Politics,” 47; Halperin et al, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 16.

⁴² Allison and Halperin, “Bureaucratic Politics,” 47; Halperin et al, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 18.

⁴³ Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision*, 8–9.

Figure 4 depicts the three games of the bureaucratic politics model. The games within the bureaucratic politics model are policy, decision, and action. Policy games result in a policy; decision games result in decisions; and the activities that occur as result of policy and decision games are action games.⁴⁴ Senior players participate in policy and decision games, while juniors mainly play action games.⁴⁵ Decision games are triggered by an event or deadline and follow fixed rules.

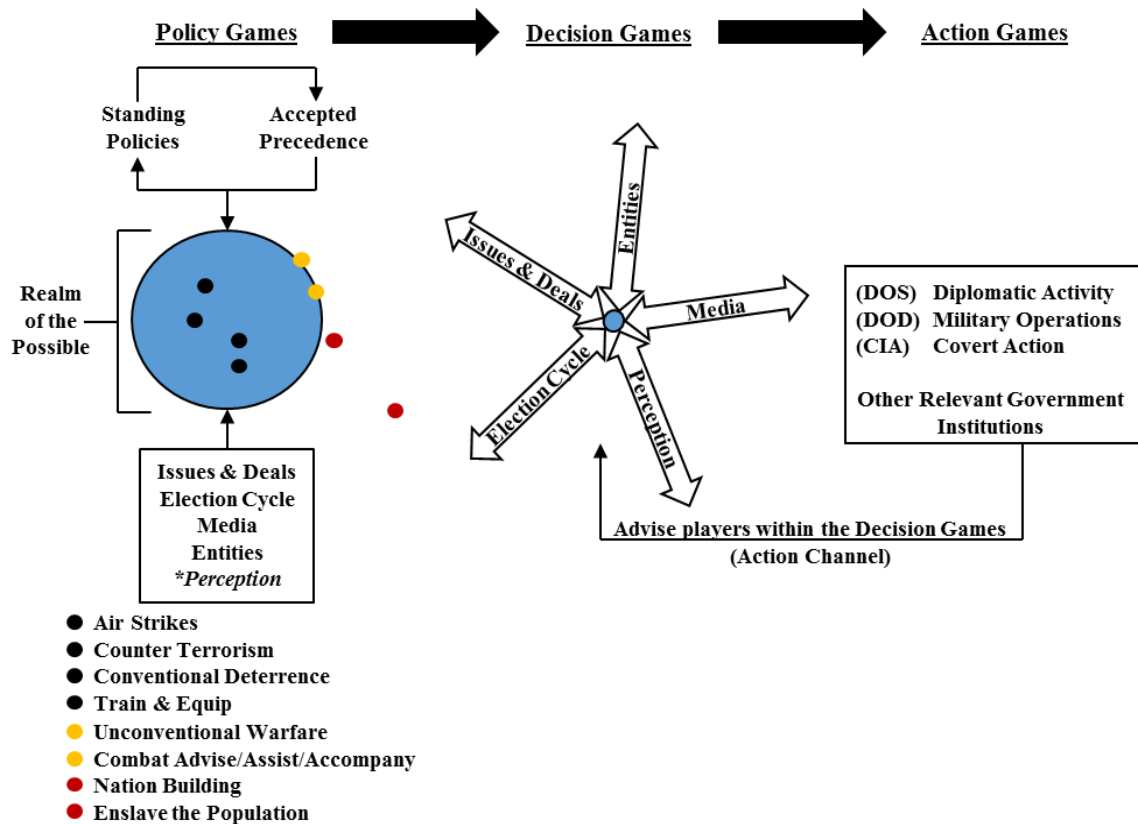


Figure 4. Visualization of the Bureaucratic Politics Model⁴⁶

Action games are played as the result of a decision game in which a decision to perform an action has been placed in the action channel most likely to produce the

⁴⁴ Allison and Halperin, "Bureaucratic Politics," 46.

⁴⁵ Allison and Halperin, "Bureaucratic Politics," 47–48.

⁴⁶ Figure 4 is the authors' interpretation of Allison and Halperin's bureaucratic politics model with perception added to the model, Allison and Halperin, "Bureaucratic Politics."

desired outcome.⁴⁷ The results of a decision game are used in determining what actions a government will take in international politics.⁴⁸

The figure also depicts what factors bound and influence the games. In the policy game, the “realm of the possible” is bounded by standing policies and precedents, and influenced by extraneous things such as issues and deals, election cycles, the media, third parties, and perception. The scope of this thesis includes the role perception plays, as discussed in detail in this chapter. In the decision game, all these influences play a role in “pulling and hauling,” the process that leads to a decision as to what actions will be taken. Before the action game is even initiated, players from relevant government institutions provide expert advice through the action channel to facilitate a conclusion.⁴⁹ Once an action game is initiated, the action channel remains open to provide further refinement to the actions taken.

2. Shared Images

Shared images are the basic values and facts that most players take for granted. They provide the foundation of bureaucratic decision-making and help determine the stand a player may take on a particular issue.⁵⁰ Shared images are often expressed as axioms; for example,

- The preeminent feature of international politics today has become the conflict between international terrorists and rogue states and the democratic world.
- The United States has an obligation to aid any nation fighting international terrorism.
- Concessions made under pressure constitute appeasement, which only whets the appetite of aggressors.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Allison and Halperin, “Bureaucratic Politics,” 50–52.

⁴⁸ Allison and Halperin, “Bureaucratic Politics,” 43.

⁴⁹ Allison and Halperin, “Bureaucratic Politics,” 45.

⁵⁰ Allison and Halperin, “Bureaucratic Politics,” 56; Halperin et al, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 9.

⁵¹ Halperin et al, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 9.

Shared images tend to shift as circumstances evolve. When events of great magnitude occur, policies and decisions tend to change in response.⁵² As previously discussed, events such as the Pearl Harbor, the collapse of the Berlin Wall or the terrorist attacks of 9/11 are of the magnitude with the ability to shift shared images. The mood of the general public also possesses the ability to shift shared images, but the time it takes for policy to shift in response is quite substantial.⁵³ With the understanding that shared images are susceptible to change, the perceived image that SOF is primarily a CT force, can and should be shifted. In order to achieve this shift a clear and concise narrative of SOF's utility is required. A firm understanding of this narrative is in the interests of all pertinent parties.

3. Interests

Interests play a significant role in determining the stand taken by players on a given issue or event. Interests in the bureaucratic politics model are classified as organizational, domestic, and personal.⁵⁴ Organizational interests predominate in game playing, because representatives typically see their organization as vital to the national interest and thus invest substantial effort to ensure it is represented in every game. Domestic interests, though important, are typically not considered independently, but are factored into the national-security equation by senior players. Personal interests are generally aligned with individual self-preservation and tied closely with organizational interests; it is assumed that if organizational interests are maintained, personal interests will be protected as well.⁵⁵ Together, these factors determine the stakes of the games and determine the stand the players will take.⁵⁶

Taking organizational interests further, organizational essence must also be considered. Halperin et al. define the organization's essence as "the view held by the

⁵² Halperin et al, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 12–14.

⁵³ Halperin et al, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 12–14.

⁵⁴ Allison and Halperin, "Bureaucratic Politics," 43, 48,

⁵⁵ Allison and Halperin, "Bureaucratic Politics," 48.

⁵⁶ Allison and Halperin, "Bureaucratic Politics," 49; Halperin et al, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 15–16.

dominant group within the organization of what its missions and capabilities should be.”⁵⁷ A majority of the members of organization clearly understand what the organizational essence is, especially in cases where the promotion and career structures are the same. Even in these cases though, among the subgroups of these organizations conflict can arise in regards to the organization’s essence.⁵⁸ Conflicts such as this could explain how the narrative of SOF utility is not properly perceived. Once the narrative has passed through senior members of the DOD, both military and civilian, the entire breadth of SOF’s utility could be lost in translation. Again, factors such as this will determine the stand the players will take while playing the games.

4. Playing the Game

How the game is played depends on the desired outcome, whether a policy or a decision to take action. Players come into the game with the power associated with their position, as well as the power of their organization. The player’s assumed power and his ability to control information on a given issue or event determines his advantage in bargaining with the other players and working towards an action.⁵⁹ The decisions and actions arrived at are the result of compromise—players pulling together, hauling, and pushing others towards a decision in line with a desired outcome.⁶⁰

In addition to the “pulling and hauling,” the junior players in the action games provide their expert advice to the players within the decision games before any action is taken. With the advice, the decision game, then, is played within a relatively fixed policy space. Since the policy space is slow to evolve, the expert advice given is bounded to the realm of the possible, but more importantly, is expected to aide in reaching the desired outcome. As result, the information and perception that is flowing up to inform these

⁵⁷ Halperin et al, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 27.

⁵⁸ Halperin et al, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 27.

⁵⁹ Allison and Halperin, “Bureaucratic Politics,” 50.

⁶⁰ Tulasi R. Kafle, “Making a Difference: Allison's Three Models of Foreign Policy Analysis” Academia, April 14, 2011, http://www.academia.edu/592889/Making_a_Difference_Allisons_Three_Models_of_Foreign_Policy_Analysis.

decisions proves to be critical, as the players making decisions are not subject matter experts and rely heavily on those who are.

B. THE BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS MODEL AND THE GRAY ZONE

This research finds that input into the policy, decision, and action games, whether in the realm of CT or irregular warfare, is heavily based on the expected outcome and how that relates to desired outcome. Given the fluidity of the environment between war and peace, an agile model such as the bureaucratic politics model is helpful in explaining how high-level policies and decisions are made in response to Gray Zone problems. Alternative models, insofar as they depend on immense information gathering and in-depth analysis that attempts to minimize ambiguity, may be highly rational, but they are ill suited for Gray Zone realities, where issues are intricate and opportunities are fleeting. Among its benefits, the bureaucratic politics model permits shortcuts, allowing the players to fall back on their interests and past experience.⁶¹ The bureaucratic politics model, specifically in its action games and action channels, provides a conduit for junior players to provide expert advice. This is critical, as players in the decision-making roles cannot be expected to be subject-matter experts on every situation in the gray zone. These junior players assist in shaping how their actions and organizations are perceived by the players in the decision game, as discussed in the following section.

C. WHAT INFLUENCES POLICY-MAKER PERCEPTIONS?

Jerome Bruner, a leading researcher in the field of perception, asserts that, “perception involves an act of categorization,” meaning that categorization is based on the amount of information that can be readily absorbed by the receiver.⁶² Once information is taken in, the receiver attempts to categorize it. If an object or situation is familiar and simple, less information is required to complete the categorization; if complex, more information is needed. The information may come from a vast array of inputs, but if no further data is available, the item is likely placed into an existing, well-

⁶¹ Halperin et al, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 20-21.

⁶² Jerome S. Bruner, “On Perceptual Readiness,” *Psychological Review* 64, no. 2 (1957): 123, doi: 10.1037/h0043805.

established category.⁶³ Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane observe that once an idea, group, or concept is institutionalized, it will continue to guide subsequent actions down the same path.⁶⁴

The activity of categorization is governed by the principle of simplicity, described by John Steinbruner as the mind's effort to "keep the structure of belief as simple as possible."⁶⁵ Typically, and especially under stress, the mind attempts to associate complex perceptions and processes with an established category.⁶⁶ Thus, familiar ideas and experience may serve as blinders, narrowing the field of thought and realm of conceivable alternatives.⁶⁷ Morton Halperin cites categorization theory to explain how a politician may use established understandings to diminish his or her need for the deep analysis of complex problems, such as the deployment of SOF.⁶⁸ The authors argue that among the problems inadequately perceived by policymakers, to the potential detriment of the mission and national interest, are the environmental ambiguities of the Gray Zone and the uses of SOF as a political and military asset.

For simplicity, this research categorizes SOF categorization according to the criterion of capability, investigating both formal and informal influences on this categorization. Formal influencers are those that originate through officially sanctioned channels. While informal influencers are unofficial, they may directly affect the perception of SOF.

⁶³ Jerome S. Bruner, "On Perceptual Readiness."

⁶⁴ Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, "Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework," in *Ideas and Foreign Policy. Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993): 3–30.

⁶⁵ John D. Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision: New Dimensions of Political Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 101.

⁶⁶ John D. Steinbruner, "The Cognitive Processes." *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision: New Dimensions of Political Analysis* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974).

⁶⁷ Goldstein and Keohane. "Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework," 3–30.

⁶⁸ Halperin et al, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 21.

1. Formal Influences

The authors note that SOF does not and should not attempt to influence policymakers in respect to American foreign policy. Civilian control over the tool of force must be respected.⁶⁹ It is incumbent on SOF, however, to provide sound and objective information so that policymakers have accurate perceptions of SOF and its uses. The formal methods of influence available are events such as congressional and staff-delegate visits (STAFFDEL, CODEL), papers and documents published through SOF units and academic outlets, and divisions such as Special Operations Legislative Affairs (SOLA).

STAFFDEL and CODEL visits may occur at the tactical unit or as high up as SOCOM headquarters. These visits often serve a specific purpose, such as a funding review, or may simply allow a policymaker to meet service members in his district. For most STAFFDEL and CODEL visits, the unit provides either a static or training display involving a demonstration of equipment and capability. Because the time allotted tends to be short, units typically choose to show a complete capability, such as an eye-catching direct-action skill set. The skills and capabilities emphasized have a clear and direct impact on how SOF is perceived and categorized by policymakers.

SOF publications include magazines such as *Tip of the Spear*, *Special Warfare*, and *Ethos*, in which the SOF services have an opportunity to shape perceptions both inside and outside their community. Though distributed widely, from policymakers to the most junior SOF team members, these periodicals focus on an internal audience. To influence outside perceptions, SOF primarily relies on papers in academic journals and forums.

SOLA has operated in Washington, D.C., since the 1980s as the liaison between SOCOM and policymakers.⁷⁰ Its primary role is to provide policymakers with the

⁶⁹ Hy Rothstein, "Civil-Military Relations and Assessments" in *Assessing War: The Challenge of Measuring Success and Failure*, eds. Leo Blanken, Hy Rothstein, and Jason J. Lepore (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 19-20.

⁷⁰ Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, "Admiral McRaven Charts a New Path for Special Operations Command," *New York Times*, August 9, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/02/us/politics/admiral-mcraven-charts-a-new-path-for-special-operations-command.html?_r=0.

information relevant to policy decisions. While SOLA's activities are most closely tied with bills on allocation and manpower, its ability to interact directly and in an official capacity allows it to represent SOCOM and SOF elements to policymakers.

2. Informal influences

Informal influences on SOF are not necessarily within their control. Prominent among these are news coverage, SOF depictions in popular entertainment, and social media.

The CNN effect, which states that round-the-clock media coverage by broadcasters such as the Cable News Network may affect the application and scope of foreign policy and the use of force, is a challenging concept to scope.⁷¹ Media coverage of SOF activity may spike for a number of reasons, from SOF's increasing involvement in missions to the direct access now available to the media. As Steven Livingston describes in "Clarifying the CNN Effect," historically SOF or Special Operations low-intensity conflict (SOLIC) missions were viewed as highly sensitive, with little to no coverage permitted to protect operational security.⁷² The current media coverage of SOF is widespread, from embedded journalists to near real-time press releases on operations. The trend of the last 10 years is to increase transparency in military action; this has had a major impact on the amount of direct media coverage that SOF operations receive.⁷³ News coverage is not the only source of media influence; the movies watched by everyone are watched by policymakers as well. Four recent blockbusters have centered on SOF operations: "Zero Dark Thirty," "Lone Survivor," "Act of Valor," and "Black Hawk Down." All reached number one at the box office and grossed roughly \$100,000,000.⁷⁴ The ability of the mass media to influence a population has been much

⁷¹ Eytan Gilboa, "The CNN Effect: The Search for a Communication Theory of International Relations," *Political Communication* 22, no. 1 (2005): 27–44, doi: 10.1080/10584600590908429.

⁷² Steven Livingston, "Clarifying the CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention," Shorenstein Center, January 1, 1997, Fig 4, 9, <http://shorensteincenter.org/clarifying-the-cnn-effect-media-effects-and-military-intervention/>.

⁷³ Laurie R. Blank, "Military Operations and Media Coverage: The Interplay of Law and Legitimacy," in *Routledge Handbook of Military Ethics*, ed. George Lucas (New York: Routledge, 2015), 348–362

⁷⁴ Zero Dark Thirty (\$132,820,716), Lone Survivor (\$154,802,912), Act of Valor (\$81,272,766), and Black Hawk Down (\$172,989,651) from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com>.

discussed,⁷⁵ and it can be assumed that the widespread penetration of these films has shaped audience perceptions of SOF. The plots of these movies hinge on SOF direct action. Although other aspects of irregular warfare may also be included, they are typically incidental, an adjunct in building up to a direct-action sequence.

D. THE IMPORTANCE OF PERCEPTION

Policymaker perceptions boil down to their mental categorizations of SOF and how these perceptions may provide them with the greatest returns. According to Bruner, most items are placed for convenience into a narrowly defined category.⁷⁶ Individual policymakers judge the role and utility of Special Forces based on the placement they give SOF; but a collective perception is also in play. Morton Halperin employs the concept of “shared images,” that is, perceptions shared by a large group of people, in observing, “it is rare for the images shared within the government to diverge radically from those in society as a whole.”⁷⁷ If policymakers overwhelmingly perceive SOF as a simple direct-action tool, this shared image will inevitably alter the employment of SOF in the Gray Zone, and SOF’s greatest utility will be the execution of direct-action missions such as CT. Thus, perception may create an ever-narrowing spiral of unused SOF potential. This understanding of perception is critical when moving into the BPM. The model shows that there are channels for experts to provide feedback and inform decisions; but perception may be used as a cognitive shortcut. This shortcut, unfortunately, may be based on perceptions that fail to realize the breadth of SOF utility and could lead to the misapplication of SOF as a tool.

E. SUMMARY

This chapter lays out the bureaucratic politics model as a tool for analyzing the case studies in the following chapter and highlights what perception is, how it is formed, and what its implications may be. This chapter further demonstrates how the perception

⁷⁵ Camber T. Warren, “Not by the Sword Alone: Soft Power, Mass Media, and the Production of State Sovereignty,” *International Organization* 68, no. 1 (2014): 111-141.

⁷⁶ Jerome S. Bruner, “On Perceptual Readiness.”

⁷⁷ Halperin et al, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 10–11, 13.

of SOF utility is formed, how the bureaucratic politics model plays out, and how, combined, these two factors affect the application of SOF. It is shown that policymaker perception, as revealed in the bureaucratic politics model games, is important to the decision making behind SOF employment in the Gray Zone. In Chapter IV, the bureaucratic politics model is used to reveal perceptual factors in SOF deployment. Case-study criteria and selection are presented, along with two historical cases of Gray Zone SOF deployment to illustrate this influence at work.

IV. GRAY ZONE STUDIES: SOMALIA AND THE PHILIPPINES

This chapter examines the use of SOF in Somalia in 1992–1993, and the Philippines in 2000–2015. Using the bureaucratic politics model as a framework and evaluating players, decision games, and outcomes, the processes involved in the choice to employ SOF are identified. These examples suggest that if SOF is given a clear and concise policy objective and the time to assess, plan, and execute a complete irregular warfare campaign, it may achieve policy objectives in a Gray Zone environment. Given unclear guidance and hurriedly applied in a restricted role, however, the likelihood of failure is high. In support of these conclusions, this chapter presents the selection criteria for these cases and provides background, United States policy in regard to the country in question, identification of the players involved, discussion of the decision game and outcome, and a summary of the case. The chapter concludes with a brief look at the findings in both cases.

A. CASE CRITERIA AND SELECTION

Kapusta’s article “The Gray Zone” identifies 57 instances of U.S. military involvement in the ambiguous environment between war and peace. The criteria for inclusion in this list are “...missions falling short of a declared war, yet important enough to send American service members into harm’s way.”⁷⁸ The following additional criteria were used to choose the case studies explored in this thesis:

1. U.S. interest or policy was at stake, but not above the threshold of “war.”
2. SOF were involved.
3. The conflict/incident was concluded.

The cases selected occurred in Somalia and the Philippines and offer significant contrasts for purposes of analysis. SOF involvement in Somalia occurred in the pre–9/11 world and lasted six weeks, while the Philippine engagement occurred just prior and

⁷⁸ Kapusta, “The Gray Zone,” 21.

post-9/11, and ran fifteen years. The results of U.S. involvement in these conflicts have implications not only for SOF but U.S. foreign policy as well.

Both cases are subjected to the bureaucratic politics model decision game to uncover factors that led to the employment of SOF, specifically the role of perception, based partly on the feedback loop from the action channel. This empirical analysis assists in discerning the complexity involved in SOF employment and suggests the strong influence that perception has on decision making.

B. SOMALIA

Somalis... are natural-born guerrillas. They will mine the roads. They will lay ambushes. They will launch hit-and-run attacks... If you liked Beirut, you'll love Mogadishu. To what end? To keep tens of thousands of Somali kids from starving to death in 1993 who, in all probability, will starve to death in 1994 (unless we are prepared to remain through 1994)... I have heard estimates... that it will take five years to get Somalia not on its feet but just to its knees... Finally, what will we leave behind when we depart? The Somali is treacherous. The Somali is a killer. The Somali is as tough as his country, and just as unforgiving... We ought to have learned by now that these situations are easier to get into than to get out of, that no good deed goes unpunished.

—Cable from Smith Hempstone,
U.S. Ambassador to Kenya, 1989–93,
to the Department of State, 1 December 1992⁷⁹

Ambassador Hempstone's warning on entanglement in Somalia, though colorful, did not deter the U.S. decision to intervene. The U.S. intervention in Somalia in the early 1990s has inspired volumes of literature, due its complexity and impact on U.S. policy. This research examines the case through the bureaucratic politics model, focusing primarily on the decision game to arrive at how the decision was made to use SOF, the interfered role that perception played, and implications for SOF use in the future. The object is to determine whether a short-term goal, such as a limited use for CT operations

⁷⁹ Walter S. Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia: August 1992–March 1994* (Washington, DC: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 2005), 69.

in the Gray Zone, requiring an irregular warfare approach, is likely to support long-term policy objectives.

1. Background

In 1992, Somalia was without a central government. Civil war raged among its many clans, and people were dying of famine on a biblical scale.⁸⁰ According to the United Nations (U.N.) High Commissioner for Refugees, between 240,000 and 280,000 persons were killed and up to two million displaced.⁸¹ The international community understood that someone needed to step in. At the time, with the recent end of the Cold War, there was only one true superpower presumed capable of reversing course in Somalia—the United States. Following the lead of the United Nations, the decision to intervene was made by the Bush administration and engagement continued through the initial years of the Clinton administration.

A large military footprint was planned to support the intervention, with the understanding that once the area was secure enough to deliver aid, the major responsibility would fall back on U.N. forces. Though Somalia was not necessarily secure, this transition occurred in March 1993. A critical aspect in the devolution of responsibility was that Army Special Forces and Psychological Operations units, which had been monitoring, working with, and influencing Somali clans, were no longer part of the force package. Leadership among the outgoing U.N. forces felt that without this critical element, the incoming U.N. personnel would experience a lack of engagement at the local level.⁸²

Almost immediately following the transition, the powerful Habr Gidr clan, led by Muhammad Farah Aideed, attacked U.N. forces, killing or injuring many, including U.S.

⁸⁰ Robert B. Oakley, “An Envoy’s Perspective.” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 2 (1993): 45.

⁸¹ “Red Cross: Somalia Facing Severe Famine,” CNN, updated June 4, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/africa/06/04/somalia.food.crisis/>.

⁸² David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 113.

service members, and precipitating a decision to bring in SOF.⁸³ SOF were on the ground for just over a month when disaster struck: on 3 October 1993, Aideed's forces shot down two U.S. Blackhawk helicopters, killing 18 service members, injuring many others, and detaining one soldier for 11 days. Some estimates place the Somali casualties at over 1,000. This mission led to the immediate removal of SOF and of remaining U.S. forces in the following months. This departure had a much larger impact than simply the decision to leave Somalia⁸⁴—it considerably influenced subsequent U.S. policy.

2. United States Policy

The U.S. policy on Somalia changed frequently during the intervention and was geared towards solving immediate problems with no tie-in to specific long-term policy objectives.⁸⁵ The ad-hoc posture caused constant shifts in objectives for the military and other organizations, creating confusion among the many players noted in the bureaucratic politics model action channel and frustrating the long-term goals of the intervention. The initial Bush policy was something of a moral policy in the name of humanitarian concerns—the “foreign policy of Mother Teresa,” as Michael Mandelbaum called it.⁸⁶ When the Clinton administration took over, the policy on Somalia shifted almost immediately, centering on Somalia as a test bed for demonstrating collective security in the post-Cold War era. It was assumed that success in Somalia would lessen the burden on the United States in future interventions.⁸⁷

The Clinton policy, very heavy in its military aspect and with no apparent relationship to long-term objectives beyond security, continued to morph with the metastasizing ground situation in Somalia. In August and September of 1993, as it

⁸³ Office of the Historian, “Milestones 1993-2000: Somalia 1992-1993,” U.S. Department of State, last modified October 31, 2013, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1993-2000/somalia>.

⁸⁴ Clayton Chun, *Gothic Serpent-Black Hawk Down Mogadishu 1993* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2012), 38–71.

⁸⁵ John Warner, and Carl Levin, “Memorandum for Senator Thurmond and Senator Nunn: Review of the Circumstances Surrounding the Ranger Raid October 3–4, 1993 in Mogadishu, Somalia,” United States Senate Committee on Armed Services, September 29, 1995, 50.

⁸⁶ Michael Mandelbaum. “Foreign Policy as Social Work.” *Foreign Affairs* no. 75, January 1, 1996, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/haiti/1996-01-01/foreign-policy-social-work>.

⁸⁷ Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces*, 112.

became apparent that the military option could not achieve the desired outcome in and of itself, a policy for a dual track of military and political solutions was cobbled, and in a matter of weeks, this dual track was quickly scrapped in favor of a political solution. The shift in policy was not clearly communicated to those in the action channels, specifically, to the SOF element employed in removing Aideded, which continued with business as usual.⁸⁸ After the disastrous mission in October, U.S. policy changed again. Seven months after this mission, President Clinton issued presidential-decision directive (PDD) 25 to provide guidance in determining whether the United States should involve itself in future peacekeeping operations.⁸⁹ Thus, one tactical-level incident conducted by SOF changed foreign policy. But why and how had the decision to bring in SOF been made in the first place?

3. Players and Decision Games

The situation in Somalia had many moving parts, which meant many players were involved at various levels. This thesis focuses on those involved in deploying SOF against the problem of Aideded. Some players in the decision game also played a role in the action game and the action channel, as well as the feedback loop the action channel provided to the decision game. The action game was determined by the decision to use military force. Which forces were employed and the manner in which they were employed changed over time to reflect the fluidity of the policy governing the overall situation. The requests and advice received from the action channel prove critical in determining what the eventual outcome would be.

a. Players

Ambassador Jonathan Howe, special envoy for the U.N. and a retired U.S. admiral, was the head of United Nations Operations Somalia (UNOSOM) II. UNOSOM II was charged with ensuring the flow of humanitarian aid and bringing security to the

⁸⁸ James L. Woods, "U.S. Decisionmaking During Operations in Somalia," in *Learning from Somalia: The Lessons of Armed Humanitarian Intervention*, eds. Walter Sheldon Clarke and Jeffrey Ira Herbst (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), 164; Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia*, 54–57..

⁸⁹ William Clinton, "Presidential Decision Directive 25," Federation of American Scientists, May 3, 1994, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd/pdd-25.pdf>.

area to facilitate Somalia's return to functionality. Ambassador Robert Gosende was the head of the U.S. liaison office in Mogadishu.⁹⁰ Both men had roles as junior players in the decision game and action channel, and were broadly aligned with Department of State interests in the matter.

Two senior players—the Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell—also had stakes in both arenas, as it would be their forces utilized and they were also advisors to the President.⁹¹ The commander-in-chief of Central Command General Joseph Hoar; the deputy commander of UNOSOM II forces and commander of U.S. Forces Somalia Major General Thomas Montgomery; and the commander of Joint Special-Operations Command and Task Force Ranger (TRF) Major General William Garrison were junior players in the action channel, providing insight and advice from the feedback loop to the players in the decision game.⁹²

Junior players who played solely in the decision game were members of the National Security Council Deputies Committee, specifically the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Frank Wisner.⁹³ Ambassador David Shinn also was a junior player in the decision game as the Department of State coordinator for Somalia, as well as the leader of an interagency assessment team.⁹⁴ The final player in the decision game was the individual who had the ultimate say, President Clinton.

b. The Decision Game

In response to two key events in mid-1993—the attacks on U.N. forces in early June 1993 and U.N. Security Council Resolution 837, which followed the attacks—Ambassador Howe, acting through the feedback loop of the action channel, initiated the decision game for bringing SOF in. Howe, as a result of Resolution 837, authorized all necessary means of retaliation, ordered Aideed's arrest, and offered a \$25,000 reward for

⁹⁰ Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia*, 37.

⁹¹ Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia*, 2–3.

⁹² Warner and Levin, "Memorandum for Senator Thurmond and Senator Nunn," 13, 18.

⁹³ Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces*, 121.

⁹⁴ Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia*, 46.

information. He also sent a request to the United States for reinforcements, specifically naming SOF. He felt these measures were required to achieve the U.N. mandate, which he believed was in his personal interests and the interests of UNOSOM II and the United States. Howe received reinforcements, but not including SOF. Undeterred, he continued his request,⁹⁵ reasoning that through SOF, a timely result could be achieved and the problems plaguing Somalia would be more easily resolved.⁹⁶ Other players began to add their support for bringing in SOF. Based on the outcome Howe desired, it is interfered that his perception of SOF to have been limited to a narrow CT capability.

Ambassador Robert Gosende, working from within the feedback loop of the action channel, also supported SOF deployment against Aideed. Gosende identified Aideed as a terrorist in the hope that this would add credibility to the request—again, due presumably to his perception of SOF’s utility, specifically in CT.⁹⁷ Howe and Gosende clearly believed that Aideed was the linchpin in solving the greater problem within Somalia. Both felt that with Aideed out of the picture, a United Nations-supported Somalia could become functional once again.⁹⁸ This thinking was in line with the organizational interests of the United Nations and Department of State, which suggests the reason these players were motivated to diagnose Aideed as an overarching problem who needed to be dealt with quickly, rather than just the symptom of a greater problem in Somalia. What they advocated was a quick solution to a small problem, with limited ties (if any) to long-term goals.

At this juncture, Secretary Aspin, General Powell, and General Hoar were opposed to deploying SOF, believing it was not in the best interests of the Department of Defense as an organization or the nation. From the action channel, shoring up this argument, General Hoar argued that there was a 25 percent chance of finding and

⁹⁵ Warner and Levin, “Memorandum for Senator Thurmond and Senator Nunn,” 43.

⁹⁶ Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia*, 45.

⁹⁷ Tucker and Lamb. *United States Special Operations Forces*, 118.

⁹⁸ Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia*, 45.

capturing Aideed. These players believed that Howe's requested use of SOF was a shortsighted fix.⁹⁹

The players on the National Security Council Deputies Committee supported pulling in SOF. The committee was contemplating a dual-track policy, both political and military, in dealing with Aideed. Their recommendation was to exclude Aideed from a political reconciliation while still pursuing him militarily. The request from Howe and Gosende for SOF was beginning to gain traction with the members of this committee. Following his trip to Somalia, Ambassador Shinn briefed Aspin, Powell, and the Deputies Committee, recommending that Aideed be apprehended and that SOF be used to do it.¹⁰⁰ It is assumed that Shinn's perception of SOF utility lay heavily in its CT capability. Meanwhile, the request for SOF was gaining ground within the action channel as well.

Major General Montgomery, deputy commander of U.N. forces and commander of U.S. forces in Somalia, also supported deploying SOF, whether they be United States or British. Coupled with this request, Major General William Garrison, commander of Joint Special Operations Command, told Powell that SOF personnel from his command could accomplish the mission.¹⁰¹ Both generals were acting in the interests of their organizations, but it would take more to bring about a choice in the decision game than the interests of those in the action channel—there would have to be an argument to sway the DOD players that were part of both the decision game and action channel. Pairing this argument with ongoing events in Somalia would serve to strengthen the claim.

Undersecretary of Defense Wisner, who was also a member of the Deputies Committee, provided the argument that persuaded DOD senior players and Aideed provided the events that supported Wisner's rationale. Against the advice of staff, some of whom had SOF backgrounds, Wisner argued that unless the Aideed problem were handled, specifically with SOF, U.S. casualties would mount. Since the attacks in early

⁹⁹ Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia*, 645; Tucker and Lamb. *United States Special Operations Forces*, 121.

¹⁰⁰ Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia*, 45–47.

¹⁰¹ Warner and Levin, "Memorandum for Senator Thurmond and Senator Nunn," 24, 27.

June 1993, Aideed had killed a number of U.N. forces and on 8 August, four U.S. service members. In two attacks later in August, ten more U.S. service members were injured. Wisner's argument, coming from within the DOD, combined with the requests of commanders in the field, and bolstered by U.S. casualties, played to the DOD's interests and was enough to sway Aspin and Powell.¹⁰² This pulled the DOD closer to what DOS desired and what Senator John Warner later called eventual and reluctant compliance with "civilian control."¹⁰³

Aspin took the recommendation to the President for approval. It is assumed that Clinton felt it was in his best interests to accept this recommendation, on the premise that if SOF were successful in removing Aideed, his policy of collective security stood a better chance of success. Clinton approved the use of SOF on 22 August. Three days later, Task Force Ranger, led by Major General Garrison and comprising approximately 440 SOF and support personnel, was in Somalia.¹⁰⁴

4. The Outcome

Owing to Task Force Ranger's inability to apprehend Aideed as quickly as anticipated, some players experienced buyer's remorse within weeks of the decision to send SOF. The Deputies Committee initiated a new decision game, discussing a single-track option of seeking a solely political solution with Aideed.¹⁰⁵ Ambassador Howe attempted a 48-hour truce with Aideed, which ended in the deaths of more U.N. forces.¹⁰⁶ Ambassador Gosende recommended through an official cable to the DOS to negotiate a solution with Aideed, possibly with exile as an option.¹⁰⁷ Secretary Aspin announced yet another shift in U.S. policy: that the United Nations must ratchet up its commitment in Somalia for the U.N. mission to succeed. The result of U.N. inaction, according to Aspin, would be a return of Somalia's security situation to its status prior to

¹⁰² Tucker and Lamb. *United States Special Operations Forces*, 121–122.

¹⁰³ Warner and Levin, "Memorandum for Senator Thurmond and Senator Nunn," 5.

¹⁰⁴ Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia*, 48.

¹⁰⁵ Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia*, 54.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 49.

¹⁰⁷ Tucker and Lamb. *United States Special Operations Forces*, 123.

the arrival of U.S. forces. General Hoar stated that U.N. mission exceeded the available resources and recommended that objectives be scaled back.¹⁰⁸

On 25 September, General Powell informed President Clinton that he needed to send more troops to complete the mission or pull U.S. forces out. The Clinton administration publicly changed its policy regarding Aideed two days later. The policy was now strictly political and Aideed would no longer be pursued militarily; rather, a new Somali government would be created without him.¹⁰⁹ This decision and change in policy never made it the commanders on the ground, and the disastrous raid conducted on 3 October rendered all previous decisions and policy shifts for naught. The images broadcasted worldwide, a product of the CNN effect, of dead U.S. soldiers dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, had implications for SOF and U.S. foreign policy for years to come.

5. Summary

The case of U.S. intervention in Somalia demonstrates a misapplication of SOF in a Gray Zone environment. Through the decision game, shortfalls in the decision-making process are revealed as stemming from limited perceptions of SOF utility and a single-pronged, poorly communicated campaign. The inferred perception of SOF by players who wanted to employ them was limited to only one aspect of SOF capability, namely CT—which greatly hindered the possibility of achieving desired outcomes. Limited perception was combined with the following factors to compromise the chances of success:

- Short-term objectives poorly unrelated to long-term goals
- Lack of a comprehensive campaign plan
- Promotion of organizational interests over prudential policy
- An emphasis on quick return on investment
- Ever-changing policy

¹⁰⁸ Tucker and Lamb. *United States Special Operations Forces*, 122–123.

¹⁰⁹ Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia*, 54.

Had Army Special Forces and Psychological Operations remained part of the force package following the transition to U.N. forces, the mission of clan engagement, paired with the apprehension of Aideed, would have had a better chance of producing results aligned with the desired outcome. This combined effort would necessarily have used SOF capabilities more broadly.

Two key implications emerged from this SOF operation. The first was the change in foreign policy on intervention in peacekeeping operations, as expressed in PDD-25. Peacekeeping is typically the exact the type of operation that occurs in the Gray Zone environment. While limiting U.S. intervention when there is doubt as to whether national interests are at stake is prudent, doing so from misunderstanding of the capabilities of the U.S. military, specifically in regard to SOF, is a self-imposed and self-defeating limitation that must be acknowledged and resolved, despite any queasiness induced by the debacle in Somalia.

The second implication is that the CNN effect, which was novel at the time, presents a whole new conduit for shaping the perception of SOF. The CNN effect is what the world now expects: near real-time operations revealing what has resulted from a decision making process, such as the bureaucratic politics model. According to Sean Naylor, the Somalia operation led to reactionary micromanagement and risk aversion, which is detrimental not only to SOF, but the U.S. military as a whole.¹¹⁰ Heeding Ambassador Hempstone's warnings would apparently have been wise, especially in the decision whether to commit America's premier fighting forces to a dubious mission.

C. OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM – PHILIPPINES

Let me touch on Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines because it offers some lessons.... First and foremost, U.S. operations there were shaped by assessments. These assessments occur before the plan is developed and these assessments are continually updated through the duration of the operation. Assessments conducted by special operations personnel are critical to providing information that can cause adjustment

¹¹⁰ Sean Naylor. *Relentless Strike: The Secret History of Joint Special Operations Command* (New York: St Martin's Press, September 1, 2015), 60.

to the campaign plan as well as support balance and coherency among the ends, ways, and means of strategy.

—COL(R) David Maxwell,
2012 HASC hearing on Understanding Future Irregular Warfare¹¹¹

The U.S. involvement in the Philippines illuminates how SOF can be effectively employed in a Gray Zone environment. U.S. interests in the Philippines from 2001–2015 were tied directly to the attacks of 9/11, terrorist kidnappings of U.S. citizens, and the depredations of trans-regional terrorist groups. Official U.S. involvement under the umbrella of Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines (OEF–P) ended in 2015, with the closure of Joint Special Operations Task Force–Philippines (JSOTF–P) and the transfer of future SOF operations authority to embassy-based personnel.¹¹² This case is unique in that the main effort was directed by SOF under a SOF headquarters, though non-SOF units were involved. It is also singular in that the operation employed almost all varieties of available SOF and the full spectrum of irregular warfare.

In the Philippines case, both a positive perception of SOF at the time and an understanding of SOF’s capabilities helped decision makers develop a sound course of action towards achieving long-term U.S. goals. BPM analysis shows how the decision to employ SOF was made and shaped by the players involved, specifically in the decision game. The action game is also investigated, showing that the strong influence of SOF perception allowed its continued employment and long-term success.

¹¹¹ *Understanding Future Irregular Warfare Challenges: Hearing Before the Subcommittee On Emerging Threats and Capabilities of the Committee On Armed Services, House of Representatives*, 112th Cong., 2 (2012) (statement of David Maxwell, retired Special Forces Officer).

¹¹² Linda Robinson, Patrick B. Johnston and Gillian S. Oak, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines, 2001–2014*, (Rand Research Report 1236) (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2016), http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1236.html. : 104–107.

1. Background

The Philippines is rife with a history of insurgencies, both religious and political, since its colonization by the Spanish in 1521.¹¹³ When the United States assumed control of the Philippines after the Paris Treaty of 1898, it inherited rebellion and insurgency.¹¹⁴ The United States–Philippines relationship ebbed and flowed until the United States recognized Philippine independence in 1946 and pulled all military bases out of the country in 1992. The relationship didn't end there, but did dramatically slow. In the interim, a number of Muslim insurgencies grew in strength, while the capability of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) waned.¹¹⁵ Organizations in the southern Philippines, such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), and Jama Islamia (JI), took advantage of the security situation by expanding operations.¹¹⁶

Terrorist organizations grew more and more emboldened, with ASG perpetrating kidnappings and beheadings of U.S. citizens in the early 2000s. In August 2000, ASG took a U.S. citizen hostage from Jolo Island and in May 2001, brazenly kidnapped three U.S. citizens from a resort on Palawan Island.¹¹⁷ The hostages, Garcia and Martin Burnham and Guillermo Sobero, were moved to the ASG safe haven of Basilan Island. On June 11, 2001, the ASG beheaded Sobero to gain media exposure for their cause; the media failed to note the story, but ASG's actions drew increased attention from the U.S. government.¹¹⁸ Following 9/11, the United States turned its attention to al Qaeda-linked organizations in the southern Philippines, tying the ASG and JI directly to Osama Bin

¹¹³ Geoffrey Lambert, Larry Lewis, and Sarah Sewall, "Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines: Civilian Harm and the Indirect Approach," *Prism: A Journal of the Center for Complex Operations* 3, no. 4 (2012): 118.

¹¹⁴ James H. Blount, *The American Occupation of the Philippines, 1898–1912* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913).

¹¹⁵ Thomas Lum, *The Republic of the Philippines: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report NO. RL33233) (Washington DC, Congressional Research Service, 2006), 11, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33233.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ Rommel C. Banlaoi, *Philippine Security in the Age of Terror: National, Regional, and Global Challenges in the Post-9/11 World* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2010), 17–21.

¹¹⁷ David S. Maxwell, "Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines: What Would Sun Tzu Say?" *Military Review* 84, no. 3 (2004): 20.

¹¹⁸ Robinson et al, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines*, 12–13.

Laden and al Qaeda and strengthening the case and resolve for military intervention in the Philippines.¹¹⁹

a. United States Policy Regarding the Philippines

The first change in U.S. policy toward the employment of SOF in the Philippines occurred in 2001, with the approval of a U.S.-led train-and-equip mission to create a CT-capable force within the AFP. The overall shift in policy toward military action was spurred by the ASG kidnappings and connections to al Qaeda. Although the United States had never broken military ties with the AFP, American involvement had been limited to bilateral exercises and Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) following the closure of U.S. bases in 1992.¹²⁰ The kidnapping of multiple U.S. citizens by the ASG in 2000 and 2001 changed American policy.¹²¹ In early 2000, the State Department CT coordinator called for SOF to initiate a training program under Title 22 Chapter 22 to build CT capability, specifically direct action, into a newly formed AFP unit, the Light Reaction Company.¹²² The attacks of 9/11 served to redefine U.S. policy in the Philippines, where the U.S. government opened a second front in the war on terrorism, OEF–P, under congressional authorization for military force.¹²³ At the time, most U.S. military and political attention was focused on Afghanistan; but policy dictated OEF–P to become a priority, it fell upon the players at PACOM to determine a military course of action.

2. Players and Decision Games

This section looks at the players involved in SOF employment in the Philippines, the decision games and how they played out, and how the action game’s continuous feedback loop affected final choices. Of particular interest is that SOF, serving in the

¹¹⁹ Zachary Abuza, “Balik Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf,” Strategic Studies Institute, Army War College (2005): 1–10.

¹²⁰ Robinson et al, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines*, 10.

¹²¹ Maxwell, “Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines,” 20.

¹²² Robinson et al, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines*, 14–16.

¹²³ Lum, *The Republic of the Philippines: Background and U.S. Relations*, 14; David S. Maxwell, “Partnership, Respect Guide U.S. Military Role in Philippines,” *World Politics Review*, February 5, 2013.

action channel, was allowed to assess the environment and draw up a course of action to meet policy goals. This case is unique in that SOF was provided a clean canvas. From this liberty, SOF created a plan that incorporated all the key elements of a complete irregular warfare campaign.

a. The Players

A unique characteristic of this case is that much of the decision game was pushed or deferred to levels much lower than would normally be expected. The senior players at the time—the CJCS, JCS, and SECDEF—were involved in the decision to employ SOF in the Philippines, but their focus after 9/11 was Afghanistan, the pursuit of Al Qaeda, and the buildup for Iraq. Thus, many of the players in the Philippines case were positioned close to the action channel, but their actions were hitting at the junior-player level. One of the primary junior players in this game was Admiral Dennis Blair, the Commander in Chief of Pacific Command. Admiral Blair was one of the most powerful U.S. figures in the area, with a higher profile than any state department official.¹²⁴ Another junior player was Ambassador Michael Sheehan, the state department counterterrorism coordinator. Sheehan's background was unusual; before working for the state department, he was as an Army Special Forces officer.¹²⁵ Nonetheless, his current interests aligned with the Department of State.

The second group of players falls within the action-channel game as critical in conducting assessments, filling the feedback loop, and executing decisions made. Brigadier General Donald Wurster, the commander of Special Operations Command Pacific served as advisor to the PACOM commander and as the commander of Joint Task Force 510, the JTF in charge of operations after 9/11. Colonel David Fridovich, the Commander of 1st SFG(A), served at the core of the assessment teams and was the primary planner of SOF employment. Lieutenant Colonel David Maxwell, the

¹²⁴ John Gershman, "Is Southeast Asia the second front?" *Foreign Affairs* no. 4 (2002): 70, <https://www.foreignaffairs.org/articles/asia/2002-07-01/southeast-asia-second-front>.

¹²⁵ United States Military Academy, "Ambassador Michael Sheehan," *United States Military Academy*, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/experts/ambassador-michael-sheehan>.

commander of 1st Battalion 1st SFG(A), commanded the primary forces provided for the first and second round of operations.

b. The Decision Game

The decision game played out in three rounds. The first round was the 2000 decision to employ SOF to develop a Philippine CT capability; the second was the response to 9/11 and use SOF in creating a second front in the war on terrorism. The third round was the decision to continue supporting OEF-P, using SOF as the primary force.

Following the kidnappings of early 2000, the United States took a stronger interest in the potential of the AFP. Members of the U.S. embassy team, headed by Major Joseph Felter,¹²⁶ devised a plan to increase AFP capability, which was briefed to Ambassador Sheehan by Felter.¹²⁷ Their interaction is a clear example of the feedback loop between the action channel and the decision game, in which a player such as Felter in the action channel provided direct input on a need or capability to a junior player, Sheehan.

This ability of a player in the action game to provide direct feedback to a junior player with influence enabled the decision game to move rapidly. As Sheehan pushed for a policy change to increase SOF involvement, the plan called for Title 22, Chapter 22, authorities to build an indigenous CT force.¹²⁸ This decision forced a decision to use SOF, as they are the only force capable of meeting such a mission requirement.¹²⁹ 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group deployed an SF company to train the Philippine Light Reaction Company in February 2001 and completed training in July. Although the AFP command failed to employ the Light Reaction Company properly, SOF actions allowed the input of new information into the action channel and positively influenced the

¹²⁶ Then Major Joseph Felter was a Special Forces Officer with multiple rotations to the Philippines while serving as a SF-ODA Commander. See Robinson et al, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines, 2001–2014*.

¹²⁷ Robinson et al, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines*, 13–14.

¹²⁸ Title 22 refers to programs funded and controlled by the U.S. State Department, Chapter 22 refers to mutual security assistance, or the development of host-nation capability that supports U.S. foreign policy goals.

¹²⁹ Maxwell, “Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines,” 20.

perception of SOF in the arena.¹³⁰ This accurate perception and understanding of SOF capabilities proved invaluable as the 9/11 attacks dramatically increased U.S. involvement in the Philippines.

As 1st SFG(A) prepared a second round of training with the Light Reaction Company, 9/11 changed the scale and approach employed. The Bush administration called for a second front in the Philippines to target groups such as ASG and MILF.¹³¹ Clear connections between these groups and al Qaeda drove the creation of this second front, while the kidnappings strengthened the decision.

The policy decision to employ the military in the Philippines quickly left the Washington beltway and came into the hands of the Pacific Command (PACOM) commander, Admiral Dennis Blair. Admiral Blair's first requirement was to create a course of action that met policy objectives.¹³² The plan devised for the Philippines was crafted almost exclusively at PACOM headquarters, although the ultimate decision on force employment would be made by the President and Secretary of Defense, the choice of plan rested with the PACOM commander. Of those organizations engaged in creating an operational plan, SOCPAC had the advantage of established relationships and forces already in place.

An additional asset that SOCPAC brought to the decision game was the high standing of SOF on a national level in the United States. The Philippine government slow rolled the agreement to allow U.S. forces to operate in their country.¹³³ Meanwhile, the United States initiated operations to overthrow the Taliban and eliminate al Qaeda in Afghanistan. These operations were spearheaded by the CIA and Army SF, with additional SOF to support operations added in late September and early October of 2001. As SOF handily routed the Taliban, a scene communicated through formal and informal perception channels, its success, coupled with the success of SOF training in the Philippines, shaped the perception of Special Forces as agile and capable of anything.

¹³⁰ Robinson et al, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines*, 15.

¹³¹ Lum, *The Republic of the Philippines: Background and U.S. Relations*, 14.

¹³² Robinson et al, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines*, 17.

¹³³ Robinson et al, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines*, 19.

Philippine operations in early 2001 also dramatically influenced the perception of SOF by policymakers, both in DC and in the U.S. embassy in Manila. Because the Light Reaction Company training was funded under Title 22, its reporting requirements funneled directly through the embassy, enhancing the formal perception of SOF. It is assumed that as SOCPAC and PACOM plans developed, the ambassador's counsel was sought by the President and other senior players. If the Philippine ambassador's perception of SOF was other than favorable, doubtless any plan that identified SOF as the primary force would have reflected his reservations.

As the decision game played out, it was strongly influenced by the action game. Admiral Blair requested courses of action from his subordinate components; one of the first presented was to use U.S. Marines to clear Basilan Island of ASG and rescue U.S. hostages. Blair solicited the counsel of his SOF representatives to determine the feasibility of such a plan, demonstrating, as a junior player, a well-considered outreach to the action channel for input on a plan that exceeded his knowledge base.¹³⁴ SOF feedback was that any unilateral action, or even joint action that included U.S. forces actively fighting, would result in a complete loss of rapport with the Philippine government and more importantly, its people.¹³⁵

The SOCPAC command, under the guidance of Brigadier General Wurster, initiated a full-blown assessment of what was required in the Philippines. Wurster assigned 1st SFG(A), led by Colonel Fridovich, to form a terrorism coordination and assistance visit (TCAV), consisting of Fridovich, selected individuals from 1st SFG, and Lieutenant Colonel Dave Maxwell.¹³⁶ This team formed the core of the SOF action channel as it assessed the situation in the Philippines, wrote a plan of action, and provided a two-way conduit for information from PACOM and SOCPAC into the Philippines, and information out. The TCAV gathered data such as the capabilities of SOF partners and the willingness of the Philippine command to collaborate.¹³⁷ Its ability

¹³⁴ Robinson et al, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines*, 17–18

¹³⁵ Robinson et al, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines*, 18.

¹³⁶ Maxwell, "Partnership, Respect Guide U.S. Military Role in Philippines."

¹³⁷ Robinson et al, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines*, 20–22.

to communicate directly up the channel allowed the TCAV to convey a clear understanding of how potential scenarios and the capabilities of SOF in the Gray Zone.

Once the TCAV completed their assessment, the plan was briefed to Brigadier General Wurster and Admiral Blair. The final plan was briefed in January 2001 and forwarded to Washington, D.C., pushing the process out of the action channel and back into the decision game. The decision to use SOF and employ Joint Task Force 510, SOCPAC's deployable headquarters, under the authority of Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines was approved by the JCS and signed by its chairman, General Richard Myers, on February 2, 2002.¹³⁸

Execution fell under the title of “Exercise BALIKATAN 02–1,” so dubbed to appease members of the Philippine government and not startle the local population. With Wurster as commander, members of SOCPAC, 1st SFG(A), civil affairs, and psychological operations deployed to train, advise, and equip the AFP involved over 1,300 U.S. service members.¹³⁹ The mission on Basilan, as described by Colonel David Maxwell was “to conduct unconventional warfare operations in the southern Philippines through, by, and with the AFP to help the Philippine government separate the population from and to destroy terrorist organizations.”¹⁴⁰ BALIKATAN 02–1 was widely seen as a success; it eliminated the majority of ASG on Basilan Island and increased the operational capabilities of the AFP. This is not to say that the AFP became a sterling example of military efficiency, but there was measurable improvement, and with U.S. support, the AFP conducted successful operations. When Balikpapan 02–1 concluded in late July 2002, the SOCPAC staff and a majority of the personnel deployed in support of the operation departed the Philippines. Left behind were one Special Forces Company and four ODAs—less than 70 personnel.¹⁴¹ These forces remained in the country under the authority of OEF–P.

¹³⁸ Robinson et al, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines*, 23.

¹³⁹ Gregory, Wilson, “Anatomy of a Successful COIN Operation: OEF-Philippines and the Indirect Approach,” *Military Review* 86, no. 6 (2006): 6–8.

¹⁴⁰ Maxwell, “Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines,” 20.

¹⁴¹ Robinson et al, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines*, 36–37.

The choice of ways ahead returned back into the decision game. The PACOM commander again requested courses of action to pursue ASG members who had fled from Basilan to the islands of Jolo and Tawi Tawi. The second round played out much like the second. In this iteration, SOF held even higher standing and the command and staff at PACOM had a better understanding of SOF capabilities—an understanding that was undoubtedly also heightened among the JCS and their staff. That SOF capabilities were on display in the Philippines for six months before the second round in the decision game occurred provided SOF with a unique advantage. SOCPAC presented a plan similar to the first, emphasizing pushing Army SF teams further south with their AFP partner forces. The Marines, again, presented a plan for beach landings and clearing Jolo Island. ADM Blair selected the SOCPAC plan.

3. The Outcome

In the interim following BALIKATAN 02–1, Joint Special Operation Task Force–Philippines was established and SOF remained in the country until 2015, when the mission came to an end. Throughout OEF–P, SOF remained the lead agency for planning and execution. Although OEF–P has ended and JSOTF–P has closed, U.S. SOF continues to engage with their AFP counterparts, maintaining the relationships of trust cultivated over 13 years of conflict.

4. Summary

The case of U.S. involvement in the Philippines from 2001–2015 demonstrates a proper application of SOF in the Gray Zone. By employing the bureaucratic politics model decision game, the decision process is revealed as strongly influenced by a thorough understanding and positive perception of SOF. When players in the decision game have an accurate perception of SOF and allow the time and resources needed to assess and plan an operation, SOF can deliver desired results according to a clearly defined policy. In the Philippines, U.S. policy remained clear and consistent, and SOCPAC and PACOM followed a campaign plan that supported stated policy goals. The success of this case also depended on U.S. sensitivity to Philippine perceptions, the choice to respect Philippine sovereignty, and the use of a holistic irregular warfare

approach. The focus was not on killing terrorists, but on building capacity in the military and government connections with the population.

The long-term effects of this case are yet to manifest, but the paucity of literature on this second front of Operation Enduring Freedom indicates the minimal study it has received. It is urged that the decision game and action-channel interaction involved in OEF-P, as well as its products, be looked to as a model for future engagements.

This chapter has examined recent uses of SOF in Somalia and the Philippines. In both cases, the bureaucratic politics model is used to analyze players, decisions, games, and outcomes and identify how the decision to employ SOF was reached. In the case of Somalia, poor understanding of the problem, vague policy guidance, and a restrictive application of SOF capability contributed to mission failure. In the Philippines, those in the action channel had time to properly assess the problem; clear guidance was given through policy; and a robust and consistent irregular warfare campaign was applied. These cases suggest that when the U.S. decides to engage in a Gray Zone environment, SOF employed in an irregular warfare campaign is the approach more likely to achieve policy goals.

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V. CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined two case studies of SOF use in the Gray Zone—in Somalia in 1992–1993 and the Philippines in 2000–2015. Using the bureaucratic politics model as a framework and evaluating players, decision games, and outcomes, the choice to employ SOF has been replayed and outcomes evaluated in an empirical light. This chapter briefly reviews findings, draws two major conclusions from the case studies, and recommends additional Gray Zone conflicts case studies for further research. The military does not determine the outcomes of decision games—that is the prerogative of policy makers. Nevertheless, the recommendations in this research may help policymakers towards a rounded and accurate perception of the SOF capabilities available and how they are meant to be used.

A. FINDINGS

This research suggests that if SOF is given clear and concise policy objectives and the time to assess, plan, and execute a thorough irregular warfare campaign, it is likely to achieve policy objectives in the ambiguous environment between war and peace. If, conversely, SOF receives unclear guidance that must be followed rapidly, using a fraction of its competency, the likelihood of failure is high. The two case reviewed in this thesis illustrate the extremes of SOF application and results. Although every environment is different, the lessons from these cases can be applied to any proposed involvement of SOF in the Gray Zone, given proper logistical support and permission to execute a complete irregular warfare campaign.

This research suggests that in the evolving global threat environment, conventional thinking and outdated bureaucratic structures in which the interests of the organization are paramount and top echelons are isolated from direct communication with the field are unlikely to succeed in the Gray Zone. The habituated thinking of senior decision makers and the interests of formidable bureaucracies will not accommodate reform quickly or without growing pains—yet cognitive and organizational change must occur. President Obama’s selection of General Votel to command U.S. Central Command

may indicate that change is underway,¹⁴² as, for the first time, a career SOF officer will command a U.S. geographic combatant command. An unflagging effort to ensure that Gray Zone and irregular warfare concepts are well understood by senior decision makers, together with promotion of the spectrum of SOF capabilities, remains vital, if the United States is to meet foreign-policy goals.

SOF originated with the military's need to operate effectively in the space between war and peace and differs from traditionally organized forces in that it is not designed around a weapon system or platform, but rather, relies on the operator as key. The individual SOF team member is the weapon—not because of high-tech gadgetry or the latest shooting techniques they employ, but because of their ability to nimbly and rapidly use unorthodox concepts and unconventional approaches to accomplishing missions. Deployed in small formations near the apex of a conflict, SOF is the most effective means to wage irregular warfare and the optimal choice for directly or indirectly achieving policy objectives where controlling a population by lethal or nonlethal means is the goal.

Using Allison and Halperin's bureaucratic-politics model, this research finds that interests, shared images, desired outcomes, and perceptions all influence a decision maker's choice of action and method by which to act. This thesis focuses on policymaker perceptions of SOF and how they affect SOF utilization. Whether notions of SOF capability are adopted formally or informally, perception plays a powerful role in the decision game, and, as pertains to SOF, may have grave policy implications.

B. KEY LESSONS FROM SOMALIA AND THE PHILIPPINES

The case studies presented in this thesis illuminate two critical elements in the decision game, which is the aspect of the BMG that most affects the outcome of the action channel.

¹⁴² Associated Press, "Votel, Choice to Lead CENTCOM, Testifies Before Senate Armed Services Committee," *Tampa Tribune*, March 9, 2016, <http://www.tbo.com/list/military-news/votel-choice-to-lead-centcom-testifies-before-senate-armed-services-committee-20160309/>.

1. Establish Long-Term Objectives

Senior players in the decision game must establish clear and concise long-term objectives. Conflicts within the Gray Zone are complex and often fluid in their connection to global events—but without definitive and realistic goals, players in the action channel cannot move past the operation’s immediate demands. The U.S. intervention in Somalia demonstrates that lack of clarity concerning long-term goals may have devastating effects on the action channel’s success. The concrete long-term objectives at work in the Philippines allowed an approach that, over time, attacked the problem from multiple angles and ultimately supported a more workable irregular warfare strategy than was pursued in Somalia.

2. Know Your Limits

Senior players within the decision game must have a clear understanding of the capabilities and limitations of the chosen methods in the action channel. In Somalia, a decision was made to use SOF in a very narrow manner to solve a problem that was in reality but a symptom of greater problems. This narrow focus crippled any long-term positive effects of U.S. involvement. The decision to limit SOF activity in Somalia was due partly to an incomplete perception of SOF capabilities by senior and junior players and inadequate input from the action channel before and during the operation. By contrast, senior players in the Philippines had a good grasp of SOF capabilities through a better-informed perception of capabilities and a functional feedback loop between the decision and action channels. In themselves, these elements are not enough to ensure successful Gray Zone action; but without them, the application of military force will start at a grave disadvantage in complex situations.

C. SUBJECTS FOR FURTHER BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS MODEL ANALYSIS

The authors suggest research into the dynamics of additional decision games. Though U.S. involvement in the Salvadoran civil war occurred more than 30 years ago, the challenges and operations of this conflict closely parallel those seen in modern Gray Zones. Despite significant friction experienced by junior players in the action channel

(much of it from conflicts among the DOD and inter-agencies and perceptions left over from the Vietnam War),¹⁴³ the U.S. involvement was viewed as a policy success.¹⁴⁴

Another potential case for analysis is the U.S. mission against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which is still underway. The atrocities committed by LRA strongman Joseph Kony led the DOS to designate him a terrorist in 2008.¹⁴⁵ Through executive order, four clear objectives were subsequently issued: increase civilian protection, remove Kony and senior LRA leaders, promote defections and support reintegration, and continue humanitarian assistance.¹⁴⁶ This clear, consistent guidance is likely to achieve success.

Once the pertinent documents are declassified, the process by which policy was created for the Gray Zone conflicts in Ukraine and Syria will reward analysis. SOF was used to various degrees in these operations, with player perceptions of SOF an important factor. Findings from these and other cases will confirm trends encountered in the decision game and provide a resource by which senior players may better inform their decisions before committing to an action.

D. WHAT'S NEXT?

Figure 5 presents a graphic representation of the findings of this research in the context of the bureaucratic politics model game model. The action game is expanded to include the methods used to achieve policy objectives commonly identified within the field of international studies.

¹⁴³ Kalev Sepp, "The Evolution of United States Military Strategy in Central America, 1979–1991" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2002), 51.

¹⁴⁴ Kalev Sepp, "The Evolution of United States Military Strategy in Central America, 1979–1991" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2002), 227.

¹⁴⁵ "The Lord's Resistance Army," U.S. Department of State, March 23, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/03/186734.htm>.

¹⁴⁶ "U.S. Support to Regional Efforts to Counter the Lord's Resistance Army," U.S. Department of State, March 23, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/03/186732.htm>.

Gray Zone Conflict

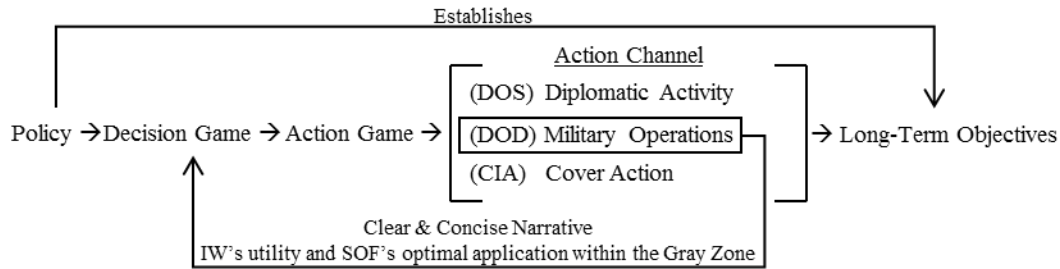


Figure 5. Gray Zone Conflict¹⁴⁷

In this figure, policy establishes the long-term objectives that help focus the intention of the decision game and direction of the action channel. The decision game's output is the method of intervention within the action channel that will accomplish desired objectives. The intervention options available to senior players within the decision game are categorized as diplomatic activity, military operations, and covert action.¹⁴⁸ Each option has a congressionally mandated institution that manages its execution. The authors submit that military operations within the Gray Zone should favor IW methods over traditional warfare as regards the action channel. This does not minimize the utility of traditional warfare; it simply means that irregular warfare must take precedence during campaigns in the Gray Zone. Irregular warfare allows the multifaceted application of military force that focuses on relevant populations, uses SOF as the primary maneuvering element, and represents these operations as enacted by some entity other than U.S. forces. Currently, these concepts remain obscure to many senior players in the decision games and a clear narrative is needed to complete their perception.

Senior players will not be prepared to establish successful policies for military force within the Gray Zone so long as their perceptions of SOF are limited or incomplete. If irregular warfare is to emerge strongly as a viable method within U.S. policy, a clear and concise narrative of SOF capabilities must be promulgated. ARSOF 2022 establishes

¹⁴⁷ Figure 5 is an adaptation to the bureaucratic politics model, Allison and Halperin, "Bureaucratic Politics,"

¹⁴⁸ Mark M. Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy* (Washington, DC: Sage Publications, 2014), 181.

the distinction between special warfare and surgical-strike operations within Army SOF, but fails to lay out for policymakers how actions taken with the range of available options can mutually support each other in irregular warfare campaigns.¹⁴⁹ To correct policymaker perceptions, the SOF narrative must move beyond CT to incorporate all aspects of irregular warfare. The global threat environment suggests that conflicts within the Gray Zone will not subside in the near future. If the United States is to prevail within this environment, decision-maker perceptions of special operations forces and irregular warfare must be accurate and complete.

¹⁴⁹ U.S. Army Special Operations Command, “ARSOF 2022.” *Special Warfare* Special Edition, 2013.

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