

Reflections on the International Special Forces Conference Tampa, Florida, 8-11 June 2005

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Center for
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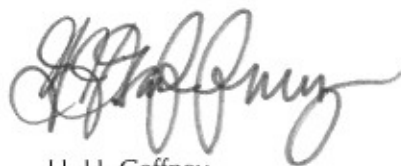
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Reflections on the International SOF Conference

Tampa, Florida, 8-11 June 2005

By H. H. Gaffney, The CNA Corporation

Introduction

This was the first international Special Forces conference. 63 countries were invited, and 59 were present, including Iraq (which got the biggest round of applause during the introductory ceremony). It was held at the Tampa Conference Center.

The international participants will have to speak for themselves as to whether the conference was successful. Most will be happy to have been included. Some will have been disgruntled because some things may have not gone smoothly. The variety of subjects and points of view must have been bewildering to many. But, listening with a keen ear to what might be sensitive to other countries, I do not think there were many, if any, slip-ups in this regard. And the speakers from other countries made credible and useful presentations—which also revealed the wide extent of common interests among the Special Forces of many countries.

There was certainly no overweening sense of superiority on the part of the Americans. General Brown and Admiral Fallon were modestly to the point. Vice President Cheney said all the appropriate things. Mr. O’Connell provided insights into how the U.S. is organized. He demonstrated that the U.S. was sincerely interested in the transnational problems and international cooperation to handle them.

Major General Hindmarsh from Australia laid out what was perhaps the real agenda of the conference—the functions of SOF. Lieutenant General Baek from South Korea laid out the exemplary coordination that had been honed over time by South Korean and American Special force together for the defense of South Korea. Hindmarsh basically represented those countries who are not beset themselves internally, but are ready to go elsewhere to resolve local problems and contribute to overall global stability. Baek represented the other extreme, as it were: an internal contingency situation—the prospective infiltration by sea, tunnels, or other means by massive numbers of North Korean special forces in the event of a conventional North Korean attack on the South.

As appropriate at this point in history and at an international conference, the focus was mostly on terror, both global and local. The problem of the almost unique coincidence of guerrilla warfare with drugs in Colombia was also discussed by U.S.

Ambassador Wood and the Colombia representative. Incidentally, the term “WOT” was used throughout the conference, but did not seem to evoke any sensitivities that I could detect (despite some in Washington saying the term might be objected to). Neither did anyone at the conference dwell on the old distinction between “freedom fighters” and “terrorists” (the Indian representative, with obvious reference to Kashmir, said references to “freedom fighters” are an obfuscation). All the international attendees at the conference were representing their governments.

The countries that had an opportunity to speak each had unique situations to worry about, whether terror or insurgencies, that is internal warfare. Terror is generally manifested as “incidents,” whatever the overall strategy of the global terrorists may be, whereas internal warfare in countries is either civil war (with distinct sides) or insurgency (irregular forces vs. the government where the guerrillas are spread over areas and may have organized units that fight). These kinds of classifications arise from observing a series of situations over time, but are not generally helpful to describe particular situations in countries. That is, each country’s situation may be unique to it. A strong message of the conference was that the terrorists had gone global, but Special Forces had not. That is, the need for individual country’s Special Forces to communicate and cooperate across borders and to both give and receive assistance has become a critical matter.

Because the actions and numbers of Special Forces are “small,” as General Brown emphasized, the direct actions they take are small and discrete, unless embedded in a larger state or international combat operation. The term “direct action” did not arise in this conference, but Special Forces were certainly seen as apt trainers (at least among those countries that would send their Special Forces elsewhere) to assist in training local forces for internal defense—training more than just local Special Forces. But the very fact that terror has become global, i.e., no longer just local, though much terror is still home-based, has placed Special Forces in a newly prominent role and this provided a uniform underlying theme for the conference. That is, if the terrorists have gone global, then Special Forces must do so as well. But since they all belong to individual countries, their globalization is done by coordination, cooperation, and coalitions.

General Brown’s keynote remarks

General Brown, Commander, U.S. Special Forces Command, provided themes in his opening remarks at the conference that were reinforced across the three days of the conference. They included:

- The tasks in the era of terrorism are to improve security, stabilize societies, and defeat global threats.

- Special Forces contribute, and they can develop professional bonds. They share common objectives against terrorism and tyranny.
- Special forces are small, and carefully selected and trained, so that they can take on more risk, in unexpected circumstances, than conventional forces. Though they operate in small units, they can have strategic impact.
- Special forces take on the most difficult missions in the most difficult environments.
- But Special Forces can also assist through civic action in reducing the fertile grounds in which terrorists may grow. They do this through cooperation with police, other government agencies, and non-government organizations.
- The United States cannot do all these things alone, but Special Forces must build trust in each other through habitual operations. The terrorists have built a network to go after us, and thus Special Forces (and their nations) must build a network against them.

The spectra of situations involving Special Forces

The presentations and discussions at the conference surfaced several spectra of conditions that would govern international cooperation in tasks appropriate to Special Forces.

- First is the spectrum of situations from the contingent to the active.
- Second is the spectrum from purely internal country situations, through cross-border actions to more widely international situations.
- Third is the spectrum from isolated small unit actions to the embedding of Special Forces in larger joint and combined operations.
- Fourth, in connection with the war on terror, is the spectrum from just killing terrorists one-by-one to “eliminating their breeding grounds.”
- Finally, there is a spectrum of participating countries from those who have as much as they can handle internally to those who are “donors,” with no troubles of their own at home, but who can go elsewhere to help other countries. It should be noted, however, that the British representative recalled their own internal experience with terrorism, by the IRA (an experience compounded by the bombings of 7 July 2005).

Within each of these spectra, there was a range of threats expressed at the conference. The main threat discussed was global terrorism, but it was also clear that Special Forces may be involved in countering piracy, smuggling, especially drug-smuggling,

other kinds of transnational crime, and in responding to natural disasters. They may assist governments in various ways in times of internal disorders.

On the spectrum of countries and situations from the contingent to the active:

- The contingent situations ranged:
 - From the preventive and prophylactic measures taken to guard against the possibilities of terrorist attacks on the Olympic Games played in Greece in August 2004
 - To the measures that South Korea and the United States plan on in the event of North Korean special forces flooding South Korea in the event of a North Korean attack on the South.

Both of these kinds of contingent situations require close coordination, not just between special forces themselves, who, after all, would have very special roles, but also among special forces and regular forces, between all forces and local police authorities, and between local authorities and incoming supporting international units and groups.

In the South Korean case, Lt. Gen. Baek spelled out the intricate command arrangements between the two countries. These have been worked out over a long time, as opposed to the preparations for the Olympic Games as a one-time event. It should be noted, however, that South Korea hosted its own Olympic games back in 1988, and the threat of North Korea disruption then was a contingency to be planned against.

- Of the currently active situations of concern to the Special Forces personnel attending the conference, those mentioned included southern Thailand, the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the situation within Afghanistan itself, and the insurgencies in the Philippines, and Colombia. The situations in Kashmir, Nepal, Chechnya, and Sri Lanka might well have been included (Sri Lanka has been quiet for a while as negotiations have continued with the Tamils; the recovery effort after the catastrophe of the tsunami may also have deferred any new insurgent attacks, though the Tamils still feel discriminated against in relief efforts).
- The global terrorists pose another problem, though. The experience with terrorist incidents so far—other than in Iraq and Afghanistan, where terror mixed with insurgency continue almost unabated—is that the incidents are scattered in time and geographically.¹ There are active police and financial

1. Terror incidents may well characterize internal insurgencies as well, as a tactic by the insurgents. But in this paragraph, we are discussing the dispersed global terrorist cells in various countries.

investigations, and occasional arrests of suspected terrorists, going on at the present time. Special Forces may assist in these cases. They may well assist in training local forces to cope with terrorists who may crop up on their territory.

As for the spectrum of country situations, they range from purely internal situations, through cross-border engagements, to the more international situations. A good example is the situation with regard to Pakistan and Afghanistan, as laid out by Major General Faisal of Pakistan (a complete set of notes on his remarks is to be found beginning on page 10). Both countries have their internal terrorists. Afghanistan has the remnants of the Taliban conducting an insurgency. The Pushtu tribesmen move freely across the border along with the remnants of the Muslims that migrated to Afghanistan to join al Qaeda. Pakistan itself also has seen clashes between Sunnis and Shias.

Pakistan's case raised the problem of borders for Special Forces. As General Faisal said, Pakistan takes care of things on their side of the border, and the Americans take care of things in Afghanistan. Neither crosses the border. They cooperate, but it is not a combined operation. Thus there were clear lines drawn at the conference about borders. Special Forces are not adventurers who can go wherever they want. They go to other countries by invitation. They cross borders at their peril. For the "donor" nations, they usually send their Special Forces to help, e.g., in training, not as invaders, although in Afghanistan U.S. Special Forces (and possibly the Special Forces of other NATO countries) are still conducting operations.² In any case, the British representative made it clear that each country is its own "AO" (or as we Americans say, "AOR," that is, area of responsibility).

Yet the point was made strongly that global terrorists and local insurgents operate "across the seams" of globalization, including borders. They exploit these seams. Thus, the need for cooperation among countries, including the sharing of information, even if military personnel can't cross borders, has become very important.

The general from Kenya listed his country's attractiveness to terrorists. He noted that Kenya has porous borders, weak border controls, tribalism that can be exploited, and a generally open country—it's easy to enter it. Thus, Kenya has been subject to three serious terrorist attacks, though one wonders why there haven't been more. He noted that weak institutions and poverty also make for fertile grounds. Their main problem, however, has been Somalia next door. They have been trying to assist Somalia to create a government, through endless negotiations there in Nairobi.

2. These arrangements are made with the country. Some countries, like the Philippines, may insist that U.S. Special Forces trainers not engage or come close to any combat, and the U.S. honors this insistence (unless U.S. military personnel are attacked by insurgents, in which case they can defend themselves).

Colombia poses a fantastically complicated situation, as described by U.S. Ambassador Wood. There are the long-standing insurgencies of FARC and ELN, mixed in with the drug trade, where cocaine is grown in the same areas to which the government's writ does not extend. The FARC certainly terrorizes the local population. And the FARC is now spreading into Peru and Ecuador to the south. There may even be some terrorist connections—Irish Republican Army (IRA) types were captured there, but no one mentioned Islamic terrorists. It is not a situation that small Special Forces units could solve on their own, but the training that U.S. Special Forces have provided, plus strong action by the Uribe government, have led to great progress by the Colombians.

Another spectrum is the range for Special Forces from small-unit actions—squad size—to their embedding in larger joint and combined operations. Vice President Cheney cited the use of U.S. Special Forces in western Iraq. He also noted that their best work goes unrecognized—if it is recognized at all, it may be years later.

Themes of cooperation among Special Forces

The theme throughout the conference, as might well have been expected for an international conference, was that of sharing, especially of information and intelligence. Perhaps Admiral Fallon's remarks captured this theme as well as any of the presentations. He laid out five focus areas for his Pacific Command:

1. Using Special Forces in key roles in security assistance in order to build local capacities.
2. Maturing joint and combined capabilities and readiness, which he said required sharing of information, interoperability, and training together.
3. Credible operational plans (not further elaborated).
4. Getting subject-matter experts together, especially on terror, drugs, and crime.
5. Posturing forces for agile responses. He noted how mobile Special Forces are, and he contrasted this to how long major platforms last and how command and support structures tend not to be flexible.³

In short, he noted how small groups have more influence in Tom Friedman's "flatter world."

3. An anecdote about agility: At a Washington news conference, General Alexander Lebed of Russia, who negotiated a peace treaty with the Chechens in 1996, was asked how he was able to do that so quickly. He said, "Well, you know us paratroopers—we just drop in!"

The steps he saw as necessary to take advantage of these characteristics of Special Forces included:

1. Sharing of information.
2. Building of relations. It was necessary to find out about each other.
3. Increased capacity, less in hardware than through training in individual skills, expanding the tool kits for action beyond the military, and exercising efficiency with limited resources.

Finally, he noted that Special Forces must maintain high standards of professionalism, in protecting the basic rights of people, and performing for results.

As noted, what came up several times was the need to share information and intelligence. As someone said, Special Forces have been used to operating secretly and alone, not to share. But, against global terrorism, and in Special Forces of different nations operating in one country or in countries in close proximity to one another, there is a definite new need to share information. The situation along the Afghani-Pakistani border is a case in point. For those countries, like Kenya, that can only reach to their borders, and may not even be able to do that well, given the terrain the lack of forces, the need for international sharing is even greater. The sharing extends to law enforcement, and among law enforcement agencies as well. As the United States has found out within its own borders, all this sharing is not easy. Special Forces, with their agility and their increasing tendencies to cooperate with one another, could lead the way.⁴

The U.S. participants made it clear that “the U.S. can’t do it all.” It is likely that the other countries at the conference were surprised that the U.S. would even contemplate “going it alone,” especially in other countries. Whatever the case, the American participants made it clear that they don’t have the intimate knowledge of the countries, their cultures, and their languages, no matter how well-trained. They also can learn from the experience of other nations, and build personal relations with the Special Forces of other countries in the process.

The point was strongly made that cooperation, with all that entails in rules of engagement, intelligence sharing, communication, and avoidance of blue-on-blue clashes (fratricide) is not something invented just at the time two or more countries rush to a crisis. These arrangements can’t be made at the last minute. The chances of misunderstandings and incidents are too great, at the cost of efficient and successful operations and good relations between countries. This puts a further premium on

4. Special Forces serving as intelligence collectors was not raised at the conference. Perhaps this was too sensitive a matter.

interaction during times of peace and in anticipation of the need for future operations together.

In addition to providing training to local forces, the need for Special Forces to engage in civic action was discussed. This includes providing water and sanitary facilities, providing electricity, taking care of refugees, providing medical care, and building schools—all often under the general heading of “rural development.” There were references to the need to be “in with the people.” People-to-people skills were recognized as a specialty of Special Forces.

This broad range of activities in which Special Forces may be called upon to engage, especially in the war on terror, raises the point that the British representative raised when he said, “We can’t kill our way to success. That’s only a short-term solution.” Clearly, the tradecraft of Special Forces is much broader.

The need for long-term efforts was also pointed up by the experiences report in Colombia and the Tribal Areas of Pakistan, as well as current U.S. experience in the towns of Anbar province in Iraq. That is, Special Forces and other forces cannot attack an area and then withdraw, because insurgents than simply flow back in.

In the context of the war on terror, this was described at the conference in terms of “our network vs. their (the terrorists’) network.” It was noted that the radical terrorists are expanding their network, so those opposed to them must expand their networks as well. Special Forces would thus seem to have special roles in reaching the hearts and minds of the people. There was little discussion of the global nature of the current terrorist threat, however. There were references to the fact that the current threat doesn’t respect borders. This meant that increased emphasis on cooperation among Special forces across borders was needed.

There were some references to the need to set rules of engagement. It was said that rules of engagement are always national—but they can be coordinated. After all, rules of engagement are usually set at higher policy levels by governments. Moreover, it was made clear that Special Forces always operate under their country’s political umbrella. But upon comparison, they may turn out to be comparable. Command and control arrangements were not discussed at this conference, nor were the setting of rules of engagement by consensus in an alliance. The need for deconfliction and the avoidance of blue-on-blue engagements were mentioned. It would appear that Special Forces may be operating down the chain of national cooperation efforts, from state-to-state cooperation, through national military staffs coordination, down to individual units. At the same time, the extensive lateral coordination in which Special Forces may engage was also discussion, to include with law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

Both the questions of rules of engagement and of cooperation in general point up the need to develop common doctrines. Within the dialogues that take place, there is a great need to establish common terminologies.

Altogether, General Brown and others made it clear that what was in the heads, the brains, of Special Forces, was critical. As was said, Special Forces equip the man, not man equipment. They do not rely just on force, on kinetic means. The term “interoperability” was raised, but, for Special Forces, it obviously went beyond equipment compatibility to understanding each other and the various national ways of operating. Conferences, seminars, joint training, and other exchanges of experience were seen as useful—back to the point of not having to invent such understandings and cooperation at the last minute, on the spur of the moment, given the risks that would entail. In short, people can interact better than platforms. Another way of saying this was that culture was more important than technology and material resources.

General Faisal at SOCOM

8-10 June 2005

Major General Faisal Alawi is the Commander of Pakistan's Special Services Group and was in charge of recent Pakistani operations in pursuit of terrorists in Waziristan.

Remarks at the Panel on “How to Work Together”

Pakistan is a front-line ally fighting al Qaeda for real. Pakistanis have found **most** of the terrorists captured to date. We don't believe in being in a coalition, but in cooperation. Pakistan has never had a natural alliance with the U.S. Pakistan has a long, porous border. The U.S. operates on the other side of the border (in Afghanistan). The border is hard to see. It's a tribal area on both sides; brothers live on either side and cross back and forth. Pakistan is doing its best, including using high technology. But the terrorists find solutions to anything we try. They include Uzbeks, Chechens, Arabs, et al. The local people are sympathetic to the terrorists. The locals have **no knowledge** of the outside world.

In Afghanistan, the “Wild West” belongs to the warlords. Karzai governs only Kabul.

How many terrorists do we have to kill? There were no al Qaeda people in Pakistan before the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. Now they are flooding in. Killing them is only a short-term solution. We need to find long-term measures, eliminating the grievances of the locals. We are trying to build up the local infrastructure—building roads into the area for the first time, building schools, installing tap water, etc.

Remarks at the SOCCENT Break-Out Session

After 9/11, the U.S. said, “You are either with us or against us.” So Pakistan made an abrupt, unequivocal shift. It had already been shifting away from the Taliban. Few countries are as threatened by the terrorists as Pakistan, so we have to combat them.

Terrorism is the big confrontation in the world today. Conventional wars are down. But the terrorists are hard to find. They are separated from Islam, marginalized. They have no religion. [I am reminded that all Islamic sects think all others apostates.]

Pakistan has ethnic problems. There have been two attacks on the president. 18 people were killed in those attacks. Pakistan's problems include poor police and sectarian clashes—with arms. Pakistan decided to fight terror. It's good for its

international standing, but bad internally. So we've gotten a wave of terrorism in Pakistan right after the fall of the Taliban.

There was a huge influx of arms (into Afghanistan, through Pakistan) after the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1980 (his implication was that many had stayed in Pakistan, or flowed back in).

Pakistan has no real external threat [so much for the Indian threat!]. But it has internal threats: weak government, weak economy, unemployment, corruption, poverty, law and order problems, 2-3 million refugees still in Pakistan, social injustice, feudalism as represented by the landowners, etc. All of these problems could derail the peace process with India.

The problem of education, as represented by the *madaris*, is exaggerated. But there is a problem of sectarianism. There are political religious parties, each with its different perspectives. There is extremism in the armed forces [presumably the "bearded captains"]. But the armed forces are largely moderate and disciplined.

As for external threats, they include the terrorists in Afghanistan, and Al Qaeda and Taliban people in the tribal areas. There is a problem with Iran, both from the religious and the technological standpoint. We have different views on India. Are the Iranians provoking things in Baluchistan? The internal troubles in Pakistan are supported by Indian intelligence.

As for the future, we have caught lots of terrorists, with heroic efforts, costing lives. We will be fighting the terrorists for years to come. The religious parties are still trying to destabilize the country. There is Baluch dissidence. Our economic progress is not reflected among the poor. India will still try to subvert us. The threats are a complex of pipeline politics (the Baluchs blowing up the gas pipelines), personalities, crimes, and kidnappings.

His Special Services Group is conducting the war on terrorism and has broken their backs. He conducted Operation Tight Noose, 2 kms. from the border. In Operation Kalusha, they found 150 Uzbeks and destroyed houses. They found literature in Russian in those houses. In Operation Zeraki, they found 3 Kazakhs. In Operation Shakat, they landed bang on top of Uzbeks. They rescued the two Chinese who had been kidnapped—unfortunately, one of them died. They found an IED factory. They found a Libyan and a Uighur, a Sudanese and a European (an Albanian), Tajiks and Chechens. (He recounted lots of other operations. It sounded like they destroyed more houses than they killed terrorists.) The Waziri houses are all forts.

Pakistan is really into the GWOT. It's daunting, but it may help our unity.

Questions and Answers

Q. (Bahrain) Religious schools have existed for a long time. Why the change?

A. Religion in Pakistan is a fight between two countries—Saudi Arabia and Iran. Iran is providing aid to the Shias, who are 25 percent of the Pakistani population. Some *madaris* have been hijacked by the Saudis: the kids (from age 5 or 6 to 18) get a free education, they are brainwashed, all in Arabic. They are taught an old version of Islam. They become walking-talking time bombs with a religious duty to kill Shias so they can go to heaven. Pakistan is clamping down on these *madaris*.

Q. (Egypt) Most operations are in Pakistan, against infiltrators. Is it so hard to control the borders?

A. Yes. All the Afghan Arabs had to flee Afghanistan when the Americans came. They couldn't go to Iran since they were Sunnis. The Taliban Pushtus live on both sides of the 1800km border. The border is rugged. Most of those we catch are caught upon their crossing. But lots are not caught. Their allies are Taliban. We would have let them stay in Pakistan if they wouldn't cross back into Afghanistan. But they violated this. So then we started operations. There is close confederation among them—both attacks on Musharraf were planned by al Libbi.

Q. What's the trouble in Baluchistan?

A. It's a very tribal area. There are three major tribes. Their leaders are causing trouble. They have been anti-Pakistan from the founding of Pakistan. The Bugti tribe is newly troublesome, and they sit on the gas (at Dera Bugti). Their chief just wants more money. He is not a big threat, but Pakistan doesn't want a new front.

Who sponsors them? Even friendly countries do. But we now have Gwadar building, as an exit port for Central Asia. Iran wants its own port to be used, so they fund the Baluchs to make trouble.

Q. How do Pakistan's efforts relate to global terrorism?

A. The tribal people shot at the British to the very end. The tribal person gets a gun at age 10 or 11. There are weapons all over the area. But there's a difference between the tribal *areas* and the *tribes*. The Baluch tribes have strong leaders. The Pushtus never have a leader; every guy is a leader. Every house is a fort. They sympathize with the Taliban, who ended up in the area. They are very backward. They have only a small perception of the world. They are fighting Americans since the Americans support Israel in their suppression of the Palestinians [at least that news gets through to them]. So it's difficult.

We in the Army don't want to fight Muslims. For those people to go to Qatar they need a passport. But they don't need one to get into Pakistan. We have no problem fighting them now, but it's not easy. We will fight to the end.

The long-term solution is to get rid of the Taliban. To cure the situation, we have to bring in the Pushtus. There are more Pushtus in Pakistan than in Afghanistan. We want Afghanistan to be stable because we want trade with Central Asia. He's fighting the Taliban, not the Afghanis.

Q. (Saudi Arabia) Wahhabi is not a new movement. It is an attempt to find a clean Islamic truth. Saudi Arabia has been funding the madaris, but the government is now trying to control it. There had been \$100 billion in transfers, but the government is now monitoring that. There are bad practices of Islam, but you can't blame us for that. Saudi-Iranian relations are in a good phase now. There is trouble in Karachi between the natives and the Mujahirs (the immigrants from India upon Partition in 1947), which has existed for a long time.

A. Wahhabism is a pure form of Islam. He would be one himself. But the Wahhabis are attacking Shias, who are supported by Iran. Saudis have helped Pakistanis a lot, including building the big mosque in Islamabad. There's still lots of private Saudi money coming in that supports extremist groups. Saudi Arabia has been attacked, too. He lived in Saudi Arabia for two years, and saw that security was strong there. But even in Saudi Arabia, there are troubles.

The clash in Karachi occurred when the Mujahirs brought in Urdu. The clash has been curtailed to a great extent.

Pakistan is one of the most difficult countries in the world to govern, though we're trying. The fight against terror is against fighting terror. Now everyone (in Pakistan) wants the foreigners out, except the people in the tribal areas. The Pakistani Army has entered the tribal areas for the first time in 50 years. We're like an occupation force, but we won't leave. We want a settled area.

Notes by H. H. Gaffney, The CNA Corporation

