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Stronger together: the integration of a nation's special operations forces and voluntary-based formations in comprehensive and total defence

Introduction

Throughout the last twenty years of the war on terror, special operations forces (SOF) used their specialised skills and powers to conduct what North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) doctrine calls military assistance (MA) with and through partners. While in some cases MA was conducted with the uniformed service members or law enforcement of other nations, some of the more interesting partners were voluntary-based formations (VBF) made up of local civilian volunteers who simply wanted to protect their families, their land, and ultimately, their countries. SOF-VBF efforts are nothing new. VBF programs like the SOF-led village stability operations (VSO) in Afghanistan helped to develop pockets of resistance against the Taliban.¹ In Iraq, SOF-led efforts with VBFs against al-Qaeda

¹ D.R. Green, "It Takes a Village to Raze an Insurgency", Defense One, 31 August 2017, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2017/08/it-takes-village-raze-insurgency/140663/>

in Iraq included the Awakening movement in Al Anbar and the turning of the Sunni 1920 Revolutionary Brigade insurgents in Diyala, the latter of which filled the ranks of the Sons of Iraq Civil Defence Programme, successfully changed the dynamics of the insurgency, and gave the governments and coalitions a chance to succeed.² In each case, SOF demonstrated its unique ability to harness grassroots “people power” to degrade, disrupt, and defeat threats.

These programmes were reminiscent of past indigenous VBF programmes, such as the Civilian Irregular Defence Group (CIDG) programmes in Vietnam. SOF-led efforts to organise these indigenous groups later transitioned into programmes such as the helicopter-supported mobile strike forces and the mobile guerrilla forces which raided behind enemy lines for extended periods of time.³ In some cases, as few as one or two SOF non-commissioned officers led company or even battalion-sized units of irregulars and successfully took the fight to the North Vietnamese guerrilla and regular forces in their sanctuary areas.⁴ These, combined SOF-VBF irregulars, successfully achieved their task and purpose, “[SOF] and irregulars assume an offensive role with the mission of becoming hunters and finding and destroying the enemy.”⁵

Ultimately, modern SOF-VBF integration can trace its lineage back to World War II. The British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the precursors to modern SOF, developed the foundational doctrinal concepts for organising, training, equipping, and advising, and in some cases leading VBF irregulars resisting German occupation throughout Europe. In doing so, the combined efforts were integrated into the Allied campaign plans, providing valuable intelligence, subversion, sabotage, and guerrilla actions causing the occupier to expend manpower and resources to counter these efforts instead of using them against Allied conventional fronts.⁶

Given the rich history of foreign SOF and local VBF integration and successes both against irregular and conventional threats, it is not surprising that the same

[accessed: 15 February 2022]; W. Knarr, M. Nutsch, *Village Stability Operations and the Evolution of SOF Command and Control in Afghanistan: Implications for the Future of Irregular Warfare*, JSOU Report 20-2, MacDill Air Force Base, FL: Joint Special Operation University Press, 2020, https://jsou.libguides.com/ld.php?content_id=53882;70 [accessed: 15 February 2022].

² Authors’ personal experiences participating in or leading these efforts.

³ S. Stanton, *Green Berets at War: US Army Special Forces in Southeast Asia, 1956–1975*, New York, NY: Ivy Books, 1985, pp. 242–265.

⁴ J.L. Plaster, *Secret Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines with the Elite Warriors of SOG*, New York, NY: NAL Caliber, 2004, p. 21.

⁵ E.G. Piasecki, “Civilian Irregular Defense Group: The First Years: 1961–1967”, *Veritas*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2009, https://arsof-history.org/articles/v5n4_cidg_page_2.html [accessed: 21 February 2022], p. 2.

⁶ E.H. Cookridge, *Set Europe Ablaze*, New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1966; B.F. Smith, *The Shadow Warriors: O.S.S. and the Origins of the C.I.A.*, New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc., 1983.

concept is now gaining traction as an irregular internal defence component of national comprehensive defence (CD) or total defence (TD) efforts. CD and TD are synonymous, focusing on whole-of-society military and civil defence measures. The NATO *Comprehensive Defence Handbook* (CDH) defines CD as “an official Government strategy, which encompasses a whole-of-society approach to protecting the nation against potential threats.”⁷

Applying the integrated SOF-VBF capacities and capabilities defensively at home as part of CD or TD and not in a foreign country, allows the nation to harness the expertise and experience of its own SOF to train, advise, equip, support, or lead its own VBF formations to increase irregular combat power. This combination ideally serves as a deterrent by complicating the threat's strategic calculus and decision making. If it fails to deter, SOF-VBF integration can play a crucial role against the threat's military actions, including grey-zone operations, invasion, and occupation. SOF-VBF integration also allows conventional and civil defence forces to focus where they are most needed during a crisis.

Currently, NATO doctrine, specifically military assistance (MA) doctrine, does not provide options for integration of SOF with a partner, let alone for a nation's SOF and VBF integration for internal defence.⁸ The CDH does provide general considerations for SOF's role in CD, but with little applicable detail.⁹ NATO doctrine does not explicitly differentiate between internal versus external support to resistance as a tactical task either. Some nations have addressed this issue individually, defining this more specifically as unconventional warfare (UW), similar to the United States Department of Defense (DoD) UW definition.¹⁰ The Special Operations Command – Europe-sponsored *Resistance Operating Concept* (ROC) provides only a general overview of UW in support of resistance.¹¹ However, both the CDH and ROC address the concept of *resilience*, the civil defence efforts to strengthen society against natural or man-made disasters, which includes developing the resistance capacity.¹²

⁷ NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ 80-010), *Comprehensive Defence Handbook*, April 2016 [hereinafter: NSHQ CDH], <https://www.nshq.nato.int/nshq/library/nshq-comprehensive-defence-handbook-volume-1/> [accessed: 15 December 2021], p. 15.

⁸ North Atlantic Treaty Organization Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ 80-010), *Military Assistance Handbook*, April 2016 [hereinafter: NSHQ MAH].

⁹ NSHQ CDH, pp. 86–88.

¹⁰ For example, the DoD UW definition is “activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area.” Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, November 2021, <https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf> [accessed: 29 January 2022], p. 223.

¹¹ O.C. Fiala, *Resistance Operating Concept (ROC)*, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida: Joint Special Operations University Press, 2020, https://jsou.libguides.com/ld.php?content_id=54216464 [accessed: 10 January 2022], pp. 5–6.

¹² NSHQ CDH, pp. 17–19; O.C. Fiala, *op. cit.*, pp. 3–4, 7–15.

Upon actual invasion and occupation, the CDH and ROC both use the term *resistance* – the whole-of-society organised armed and non-violent actions to disrupt, coerce, or defeat an occupier. Although SOF-VBF integration is indicated in the CDH and ROC, neither sufficiently explains the options across the levels of war from the tactical to strategic levels.

This study aims to fill these doctrinal gaps by conceptualising a SOF-VBF integration framework for internal defence as part of CD and TD at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels.¹³ Using a mixture of qualitative and comparative research methodologies, based on secondary historical resistance sources, this study will achieve four goals: defining the purpose behind SOF-VBF integration during resilience and resistance; establishing a seven-option SOF-VBF integration framework at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels; assessing these options based on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks of each to inform the implementation; and finally, addressing overarching risks common to all options to inform broader risk mitigation measures.¹⁴ Lastly, this study focuses only on SOF-VBF integration as part of resilience and resistance and will not address SOF-VBF integration to counter grey-zone operations.¹⁵

Defining the purpose

Defining the purpose starts with one question: is the purpose of the SOF-VBF integration to resist an invasion, an occupation, or both? The answer to this question frames the requisite skills, range of operations, operational signatures, and the preferred integration option for SOF-VBF.

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine highlighted the power of a nation resisting an invasion and included legislatively directed SOF-VBF integration.¹⁶ If resisting an invasion is the goal of the SOF-VBF integration, then it defines the requirements more clearly. In this case, the VBF skills required to counter an invasion span the entire range from tactical to strategic levels. At the tactical level, it could

¹³ This answers the primary research question: what are the various SOF-VBF integration options at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels?

¹⁴ The four “goals” are the resultant answers to the secondary research questions: what is the purpose of SOF-VBF integrations for internal defence?; what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks of each integration option?; and what are the risks common to all of the SOF-VBF and require special consideration?

¹⁵ Grey-zone analysis is beyond the scope of this study due to the inherent complexities of nation-specific legal issues related to countering this threat in peacetime or short of war, however, the same framework would likely apply.

¹⁶ *Law of Ukraine: On the Foundation of National Resistance*, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 19 February 2022, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1702-IX?lang=en#Text> [accessed: 6 March 2022].

focus on shoot, move, communicate, and medicate skills, and the employment of a range of weapons systems from personal defence to anti-tank. At the strategic level, it might be the employment of large-scale VBF forces as part of the territorial defence force or home guard in support of the nation's conventional defence to counter an invasion. One key consideration is that resistance to invasion forces are overt elements and will be targeted throughout the conflict. VBF will inherently lose the civilian protections afforded them by the laws of armed conflict (LOAC) after taking up arms and will have a much more difficult time blending back into the population. The increased signature also means they would be targeted as active belligerents. They could receive prisoner-of-war status if they follow the four requirements outlined in Article 1 of the 1907 Hague Regulations, including being part of a chain of command, wearing a fixed symbol recognisable at a distance, openly carrying arms, and following the laws and customs of war.¹⁷ However, they will have difficulty transitioning from the overt resistance to invasion where they use physical terrain to mask their operations to the clandestine resistance to occupation which leverages the human terrain to conceal the resistance.

Because of the inherent need to hide among the population using clandestine tradecraft, resistance to occupation is a much different problem set for both SOF and VBF. To be successful in this unique operational environment, SOF and VBF need to possess the specialised skills, expertise, and experience to effectively hide among the human terrain while continuing to resist an occupying force. Unlike SOF, VBF have everyday lives that would permit them to blend into the population and carry out their clandestine missions if they remained undiscovered by the occupier. While the VBF would operate as armed resistance to invasion, in resistance to occupation, they would serve as members of the underground resistance organisation (URO). The URO includes the underground – the core members of the resistance that live a completely clandestine life and execute the main efforts of the resistance, and the auxiliary which provides logistical and intelligence support to the underground under the cover of their daily lives. Additionally, the URO can include clandestine armed resistance elements, such as urban guerrillas who operate largely in urban areas using clandestine tradecraft to minimise their signature.¹⁸ Historically, the largest part of the resistance has been made up

¹⁷ See R. Alcalá, S. Szymanski, "Legal Status of Ukraine's Resistance Forces", Articles of War, Lieber Institute, West Point, 28 February 2022, <https://lieber.westpoint.edu/legal-status-ukraines-resistance-forces/> [accessed: 29 February 2022]. The final requirement of following the laws and customs of war adds a further requirement to provide LOAC training to the VBF in a similar fashion to the rest of the nation's armed forces.

¹⁸ T. Bór-Komorowski, *The Secret Army: The Memoirs of General Bór-Komorowski*, Barnsley: Front Line Books, 2011, pp. 142–143; A. Richie, *Warsaw 1944: Hitler, Himmler, and the Warsaw Uprising*, New York: NY: Picador, 2019, p. 155.

of non-military elements, highlighting the vast potential of the VBF with regard to resistance to occupation.¹⁹

Finally, if the national leaders desire both resistance to invasion and resistance to occupation, then they will have to make key strategic decisions early on, ideally before the conflict. Specifically, they will need to allocate their SOF and VBF appropriately to ensure both types of resistance efforts are adequately trained and supported. Given sufficient lead time, VBF focused on resistance to occupation can be established long before the crisis and can “go to ground” or stay hidden during the invasion in preparation for occupation.

Seven options for integration

Based on the purpose, there are seven SOF-VBF integration options, each with its own associated set of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks. In all seven cases, the purpose will impact how the option is applied. The seven integration options focused specifically on resilience and resistance to invasion and occupation are 1) tactical integration with SOF in the lead; 2) tactical integration with VBF in the lead; 3) operational integration with SOF in the lead; 4) operational integration with VBF in the lead; 5) strategic integration with SOF in the lead; 6) strategic integration with VBF in the lead; and 7) tactical, operational, and strategic integration at all echelons.

It should be noted that “in the lead” means the supported element has the lead for operational decision-making, the other is the supporting element.²⁰ It should also be noted that the assumption for the seven framing options is that the SOF-VBF are sponsored by the government, which also provides the appropriate oversight. The VBFs are true volunteers, even if they are already government servants due to the enormous risk they are taking to be part of an organised resistance effort.

1) Tactical-level integration with SOF in the lead

The first option is SOF in the lead at the tactical level.²¹ The task organisation for SOF in this option depends greatly on the size of the nation’s SOF and the number

¹⁹ D. Jones, *Understanding the Form, Function, and Logic of Clandestine Insurgent and Terrorist Networks: The First Step in Effective Counternetwork Operations*, JSOU Report 12-3, MacDill Air Force Base, FL: Joint Special Operations University Press, April 2012, https://jsou.libguides.com/ld.php?content_id=51792142 [accessed: 15 January 2022], pp. 5–6.

²⁰ NSHQ MAH, p. 12.

²¹ Office of the Command Historian, “Jedburghs: D-Day 1944 and Beyond”, OSS: Office of Strategic Services Primer, US Army Special Operations Command, https://arsof-history.org/oss/7_jed.html [accessed: 24 January 2022]; Office of the Command Historian, “Operational Groups”, OSS: Office of Strategic Services Primer, US Army Special Operations Command, https://arsof-history.org/oss/2_op.html [accessed: 24 January 2022].

of Special Operations Task Units (SOTU).²² The size of SOF would dictate the task organisation of SOF supporting VBF, including split team and even singleton operations. Due to the tactical focus of most SOF units, this is where they are most comfortable operating, especially in support of VBF tasked with overt resistance to occupation. While in the lead, SOF can also provide training, equipment, and leadership for their tactical VBF forces. The SOF leaders serve as sector commanders to borrow from US unconventional warfare doctrine.²³ At this level, the SOF leader would largely be responsible for ensuring the execution of tactical operations, including picking out targets for subversion, sabotage, and direct attack that achieve their mission per their superior's guidance. While this option would empower young SOF leaders to take on significant responsibilities, like the Vietnam-era mobile strike and guerrilla units, it would also require time and dedicated training, especially to lead and conduct resistance to occupation clandestinely.²⁴

The strength of this concept is the provision of experienced and trained leaders to harness the power of the VBFs at the tactical edge. This leverages the SOF leader's tactical guerrilla warfare prowess during the resistance to invasion, and ideally, their expertise in clandestine operations for resistance to occupation. The weaknesses, however, are tied directly to the type of training SOF are receiving on resistance, both resistance to invasion and the more difficult resistance to occupation. Being SOF does not automatically confer the requisite knowledge of resistance theory and applications onto the SOF operator to successfully execute resistance. They need training and experience to include above their level of responsibility so they can understand higher-level missions and requirements and provide the leadership required. This task is made more difficult in a clandestine organisation where leaders may be separated from their direct reports by compartmentalisation meant to keep both levels safe.²⁵ Regarding opportunities, this option is best where tactical-level formations have numerous experienced SOF leaders that can train, equip, and inspire their VBF partner. There is also the need to ensure tactical-level SOF fully understand resistance theory and the overall resistance plans well enough that their tactical actions support the nation's strategic outcomes. There are significant risks at the tactical level. Even with compartmentalisation and good clandestine

²² NATO, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations (AJP-3.5)*, NATO Standardization Office, Edition B, Version 1, August 2019 [hereinafter: NATO AJP-3.5], pp. 17–20.

²³ M. Grdovic, *A Leader's Handbook to Unconventional Warfare*, Publication 09-1, Fort Bragg, NC: The US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, November 2009, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/USArmy-LeadersUW.pdf> [accessed: 13 January 2022], p. 13.

²⁴ For example, US Special Forces officers and noncommissioned officers spend up to two years in the Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC) to learn these skills, and in most cases, they are more experienced and mature due to previous conventional military experience.

²⁵ Office of the Command Historian, "Jedburghs: D-Day 1944 and Beyond", *op. cit.*

practices, the proximity to the tactical action and the subsequent detection could lead to the SOF leader being killed or captured.

2) Tactical-level integration with VBF in the lead

VBF in the lead at this level happens for three reasons – to ensure civilian oversight of local tactical efforts, the VBF leader has more experience and expertise in resistance than the SOF advisor, or there is a lack of dedicated SOF, so they must rotate to the units. Civilian oversight, just as in other aspects of the government, ensures that there are checks and balances on military actions, unless the military action, such as during resistance to invasion, is the primary task, in which case option 1 is better. This option, most likely applied in resistance to occupation, would require the VBF leader to have a significant amount of experience or natural ability to lead and excel in a clandestine environment. SOF in this case would provide the military expertise for this portion of the underground movement, including training, organising supplies, conducting detailed tactical planning for various missions, and potentially leading the execution of tactical missions against the occupier due to their advanced training compared to a local civilian leader. Additionally, this option would allow multiple tactical task organisation options if SOF or VBF could take the lead depending on the mission and experience.

The strength of this option is primarily related to resistance to an occupation where the VBF leaders and members have better cover for their clandestine actions, maybe even more experience operating clandestinely, than the SOF member. Their ability to blend in among the population and their familiarity with an area, especially if they are local, would provide a significant bonus. The weaknesses of this option really rest on the abilities of the VBF leader. If they are natural leaders or leaders that inspire confidence, then they will be followed regardless. If, however, they are poor leaders or clandestine practitioners, the SOF members can provide coaching and lead from behind as needed to help the leader and organisation.

3) Operational-level integration with SOF in the lead

SOF in the lead at the operational level would likely include a larger operational or region area and thus a larger organisation, such as Special Operations Task Groups (SOTG) or Component Commands (SOCC), where the SOF leader would serve as the area or regional commander with several subordinate tactical units.²⁶ For countries with limited SOF capacity, their support may start at the operational level, not the tactical one. SOF Leaders operating at this level require significantly more organisational leadership experience, comfort with ambiguity, and decentralised

²⁶ NATO AJP-3.5, pp. 17–20; Office of the Command Historian, “OSS Detachment 101: 1942–1945”, OSS: Office of Strategic Services Primer, US Army Special Operations Command, https://arsof-history.org/oss/10_101.html [accessed: 24 January 2022].

command and control, as well as the ability to execute resistance campaign plans as part of a broader resistance strategy.

One of the major strengths of this option is that it ensures the SOF leaders are positioned at the operational level, away from direct action, and thus, able to operate much more clandestinely and protected from interdiction, than tactical level leaders. While there are several strengths to this option if the individual SOF leader has the capabilities to lead at this level, there are some weaknesses. Firstly, military leadership at the operational level may not be desired, especially if the political members of the shadow government – the designated government representatives leading the day-to-day resistance activities – are capable and willing to lead. This is akin to civilian oversight of the organisation.²⁷ Additionally, the SOF leader would ostensibly need to be an expert in leading a URO at this level with the right theoretical underpinnings. This would require a specialised leader development pipeline and career management to ensure the leaders were fully prepared for this task. The risk at this level is the fact that military leaders who have spent their lives in action would now have to take on the challenges of clandestine organisational leadership and allow subordinates to develop the situation. Additionally, their previous overt positions at the operational level would likely mean that these leaders were high on the occupier's target list.

4) Operational-level integration with VBF in the lead

On the other hand, when VBF is in the lead at the operational level, civilian oversight is in place at a critical position within the organisation. From this position, the operational level VBF leader would be able to effectively control armed and non-violent resistance efforts as part of a regional campaign plan. The ability to integrate capabilities to modulate activities based on the enemy's operational tempo, the needs of the organisation to achieve effects, and understanding of how long the resistance must stay viable, provide a significant challenge for the VBF leader.

Per the previous section, one of the major strengths of this option is the civilian in the lead. SOF elements in support can focus on several tasks in support of the operational-level leaders. They can advise the leader, provide specialised training to organisational members, support detailed campaign planning, and lead the military component under the civilian leadership. They can also provide specialised support, training, direct-action attacks, sabotage, and close protection for the civilian leader. Lastly, they can serve as liaison officers to external support networks or with the shadow government or government-in-exile. The weaknesses with this option are minimal, as are the risks. The biggest weakness and its resultant risks reside with the leadership ability of the VBF leader, their comfort with decentralised

²⁷ S. Korbonski, *Fighting Warsaw: The Story of the Polish Underground State 1939–1945*, transl. by F.B. Czarnomski, New York, NY: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 2004, pp. 286–289.

operations, and the slowed communications and resultant lack of awareness due to compartmentalisation.

5) *Strategic-level integration with SOF in the lead*

In this option, SOF is responsible for the entire resistance effort.²⁸ Ukraine's legal construct prior to the Russian invasion put SOF in the lead of the entire resistance effort.²⁹ How this works out is still to be determined, but one of the main concerns of this option is the lack of civilian oversight, which can lead to a heavily militarised resistance movement, and a question of how well-prepared SOF senior leaders are for leading a national resistance effort. The lack of civilian oversight also potentially impacts the legitimacy of the effort. Managing an organisation at this level also impacts SOF's actual contributions to the fight since the SOF leaders will be focused on leading this strategic organisation with little focus on SOF-specific efforts. One opportunity is that if there is an uprising planned, the SOF strategic leader would likely lead the effort as a predominantly military operation. This was the case in the WWII Polish Underground in 1944 when the Warsaw Uprising began.³⁰ A similar option would happen if the resistance had success and was able to transition to a more direct challenge of the occupier, in which case the SOF strategic lead may make sense. There is also a risk of running afoul with the civilian leadership if the SOF strategic leader takes over prior to an uprising or shifts to more military-centric options.³¹

6) *Strategic-level integration with VBF in the lead*

Ideally, at the strategic level, VBF is optimised for legitimacy where the VBF formations include the government-in-exile and the shadow government.³² The shadow government which manages the daily resistance effort, both violent and non-violent, should be the largest portion of the clandestine underground. Additionally, for legitimacy, all the above would be designated legislatively in the continuity of government plans to ensure there is no disruption or ability of the occupier to delegitimise the government regardless of its form. Historically, the gold-standard example of this strategic integration is the WWII Polish Underground State. This organisation was an all-volunteer formation, led by civilians, with the military subordinated until the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. Above this organisation was the Polish Government-in-Exile in London, providing the overarching guidance and legitimacy to the shadow government. It was also simultaneously working with partners and

²⁸ Office of the Command Historian, "OSS Detachment 101: 1942–1945", *op. cit.*

²⁹ Law of Ukraine: On the Foundation of National Resistance, *op. cit.*

³⁰ S. Korbonski, *op. cit.*, pp. 286–289.

³¹ *Ibidem.*

³² For information on shadow governments and governments in exile see O.C. Fiala, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–15.

allies and seeking international support for the cause. The underground itself had upwards of 300,000 members, including schools, clandestine printing presses, and even a court system with representation for collaborators to be fairly tried. The integration of armed and non-violent resistance rested with the civilian leadership, but in close coordination with the military commander.³³

SOF can play a significant role at this level as strategic advisors to the strategic VBF leaders. Additionally, this frees up SOF to focus on what only SOF can do – lead a SOF campaign of subversion, sabotage, direct actions, and conduct liaison with foreign SOF members infiltrated into the country to provide support. The special operations command leadership of the country can either be co-located with the government-in-exile coordinating foreign SOF support or with the shadow government providing expertise on resistance. Additionally, at the strategic level, all SOF capacities can be integrated into the overall campaign plan, or in support of bilateral or multilateral planning with external powers. This can include the integration of air, maritime, and ground SOF capacities in support of the larger war effort. There are few weaknesses for this option unless the country is unable to prepare the resistance and train the senior leaders of the underground in their own security. Lack of key personnel training will likely result in a larger failure. However, there are many historical examples, like WWII Poland, where without any training they developed the largest, most organised underground and resistance organisation in history while under occupation.³⁴ A better option at this level is to build the strategic organisation prior to conflict when not under the pressure of the occupation.³⁵

7) *Tactical, operational, and strategic integration at all echelons*

This option would take the best of options 1–6 and ensure nested integration of all capabilities to empower an entire organisation. At each echelon, the best options can be chosen to optimise the organisation for success, adapting to the integration based on the mission, threat, or needs, including special skills. This would allow the entire organisation to flourish. The weakness of this option is the need for a large SOF force to cover an entire organisation. It can be done if the force is fully capable at all levels, especially if they can operate at the singleton or small team level. This also offers an additional opportunity, which is the dispersion of the SOF forces across the nation, hidden, which significantly increases their resilience under occupation. Similarly, for resistance to invasion, this option allows SOF to impact the defence of the nation considerably regardless of whether VBF or SOF is in the lead.

³³ S. Korbonski, *op. cit.*, pp. 166–199.

³⁴ K. Utracka, “The Phenomenon of the Polish Underground State”, *The Warsaw Institute Review*, 4 December 2019, <https://warsawinstitute.org/phenomenon-polish-underground-state/> [21 December 2022].

³⁵ O.C. Fiala, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–27.

The dangers of SOF-VBF integration

By their nature and completely unintentionally, the SOF and VBF present operational risks to each other, which must be understood by all involved to mitigate those risks. Firstly, SOF will likely be known to the occupier long before the invasion as part of normal intelligence collection on these types of specialised forces. Therefore, SOF will be high-value targets from the beginning of an invasion, especially if they are known participants in the URO. The occupier will expend maximum time and resources to find and finish SOF, which therefore puts their VBF partners at risk. Risk mitigation includes three options – SOF identity protection, new identities, and clandestine tradecraft. Firstly, a nation can establish ways to protect the identity and records of SOF from the start of their career to deny this information applying similar methods used with sensitive intelligence personnel. Secondly, the nation may opt to provide SOF with new identities at a decision point prior to the start of the conflict to disassociate them from their real identity making them harder to track. Lastly, SOF can practice clandestine tradecraft to mask their connection to the VBF, as well as other SOF and family associates.

Secondly, competing SOF operational requirements must be accounted for, particularly out of the country, forward deployments of SOF personnel – both routine and crisis. For example, if the nation has an external support requirement, such as expeditionary operations in support of a bilateral or multilateral partnership, there is still a chance a crisis could start with little to no notice, and deployed forces might be unable to return in time. Therefore, SOF forces must have enough capacity to ensure they can continually support the chosen option for SOF-VBF integration or ensure the integration plan accounts for expected and unexpected SOF deployments for continuity.

On the other hand, VBF presents two risks to SOF. First, VBF leaders or members who are former government employees, especially military, police, diplomatic, or thought leaders will be targeted like the SOF members. In this case, the same risk mitigation measures can be applied based on the individual's unique risk factor. Second, due to the VBF's likely being employed locally, their familial and friends' linkages become a liability, especially if those same family and friends are providing clandestine support to them or their VBF unit. Families and friends will be leveraged to either find, fix, or finish the hunted VBF member, either held as hostages, detained, or killed as part of retribution to try to force the VBF members to expose themselves.³⁶

³⁶ T. Bór-Komorowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 36–39.

Conclusion

Integrating foreign SOF with a local VBF has historically been successful against various types of threats within the VBF's country. This study applies the concept to a single nation, leveraging its own SOF and VBF to counter threats to its sovereignty from foreign invasion and occupation. The deliberate and planned integration of SOF and VBF provides a unique opportunity for the development of pre-crisis resilience and resistance capacity to increase the nation's ability to deter, or if this fails, respond to invasion and occupation. The first step in using the framework is to understand the purpose of the SOF-VBF integration related to resilience and resistance answering the questions: is the integration for resistance to invasion, occupation, or both? Once the purpose is clear, the SOF and VBF capacities and capabilities can be analysed to frame the most viable options. Based on the analysis of various historic examples, this study has identified seven integration options across the three levels of war – tactical, operational, and strategic – each with its own associated set of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks. The seven integration options are 1) tactical integration with SOF in the lead; 2) tactical integration with VBF in the lead; 3) operational integration with SOF in the lead; 4) operational integration with VBF in the lead; 5) strategic integration with SOF in the lead; 6) strategic integration with VBF in the lead; and 7) tactical, operational, and strategic integration at all echelons. The study has also noted risks for nations to consider that apply to all the options. Ultimately, the viability of the seven options is wholly dependent on the SOF and VBF capacity of the nation, and their most likely threats. However, regardless of the option chosen, the pre-crisis development of the URO to resist occupation provides the best overall chance of success but is also the most labour and resource-intensive and takes the longest to establish due to its clandestine nature.

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Stronger together: the integration of a nation's special operations forces and voluntary-based formations in comprehensive and total defence

Abstract

Special operations forces (SOF) have a history of integrating with voluntary-based formations (VBF) overseas against a wide variety of threats. Despite the historical record, the current doctrine does not provide any applicable concepts to inform SOF-VBF integration. This study aims to fill this doctrinal gap and explores the concepts of a nation applying its SOF-VBF to its own comprehensive defence or total defence to make any territorial incursion or occupation too costly for an adversary. Using a mixture of qualitative and comparative research methodologies, based on secondary historical resistance sources, this study achieves four goals: defining the purpose behind SOF-VBF integration during resilience and resistance; establishing a seven-option SOF-VBF integration framework at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels; assessing these options based on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks of each to inform the implementation; and finally addressing overarching risks common to all options to inform broader risk mitigation measures. The result is seven integration options focused specifically on resilience and resistance to invasion and occupation. This paper will assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks of each. This study sets the stage for future analysis and additional research on this important topic.

Key words: voluntary-based formations (VBF), special operations forces, total defence, comprehensive defence, command and control

