This report examines major U.S. decisions related to the development or employment of special operations forces (SOF). It analyzes how change has previously occurred in Army, Joint, and U.S. Department of Defense policy regarding SOF to inform future development of options for policymakers and to better articulate the ways in which the varied Army Special Operations Forces capabilities can help to meet U.S. national security objectives.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• How has successful change previously occurred in the U.S. Army, Joint, and U.S. Department of Defense policy regarding special operations forces?
• How can these observations inform future development of options for policymakers and to articulate ways in which the varied Army Special Operations Forces capabilities can help to meet U.S. national security objectives?
• How can future planning and execution by the Army Special Operations Forces, the Army, and the joint operations community be informed by an analysis of past decisions?

KEY FINDINGS

Common Factors That Affected the Decisions and Outcomes of the Cases Studied
• Identify whether a propitious policy window exists.
• Understand and leverage established processes to initiate proposals and pursue objectives.
• A proposal is most likely to succeed if development is rigorous and its substance is externally validated.
• Map stakeholders and incorporate them from the outset to solicit input and encourage buy-in.
• Cultivate networks and advocates at all levels in the stakeholder community.
RECOMMENDATIONS

• Develop “plain English” explanations of special operations terminology and narrative. Rather than coin new doctrinal terms, this report recommends using plain language for wide audiences, in particular relying on such readily understandable broad terms as *special operations, indigenous and partnered approaches*, and *precision targeting*.

• Further develop the relationship between SOF and the Central Intelligence Agency and reframe the conduct of unconventional warfare (UW). A cooperative approach readily suggests itself, which is that these forces enjoy the greatest success if they combine efforts in the conduct of UW. The historical record also suggests that most often, the President will prefer to authorize a UW mission under Title 50 authorities as a covert operation via a presidential finding.

• Prepare SOF to interact at the policy level. Perhaps the most important single focus of attention for Army SOF, considering the effects it could have for all other SOF activities, would be revisions to its personnel, leader development, and education practices to permit, motivate, and leverage SOF interagency knowledge and experience.

• Emphasize pathways to innovation and excellence. The nature of special operations, with a premium on flexibility of formations and agility in approaches, necessitates not only innovative material solutions but innovative thought leadership.