



Building Strategic Lethality: Special Operations Models for Joint Force Learning and Leader Development

By **Spencer B. Meredith III** / Published July 15, 2025

The resurgence of Great Power competition as a dominant feature of the international environment brings a measure of certainty to the joint force. It clarifies adversary and ally interests by relying on decades of scholarship from bygone eras of interstate rivalries. Doing so also repurposes widespread but narrowly focused practitioner experiences from the war on terror. Once again, analysis considers nonstate actors as proxies, partners, and puppets of states, rather than as solely independent actors fighting on their own behalf.¹ Yet applying those lessons requires broad learning and effective leadership to direct it into strategically significant action—a challenge imposed across the joint force as it reimagines the nature of threat and risk while reorganizing for grander strategic problems. As a result, the convergence of all-domain threats across all elements of national power—played out locally as much as transregionally—necessitates a broad concept of strategic lethality as the ability to dominate adversary strategies while securing U.S. priorities. The joint force has already begun large-scale evolutions to meet those challenges.² What it needs now are replicable models of learning and leadership to develop “intellectual overmatch” at the points of highest national security need.³



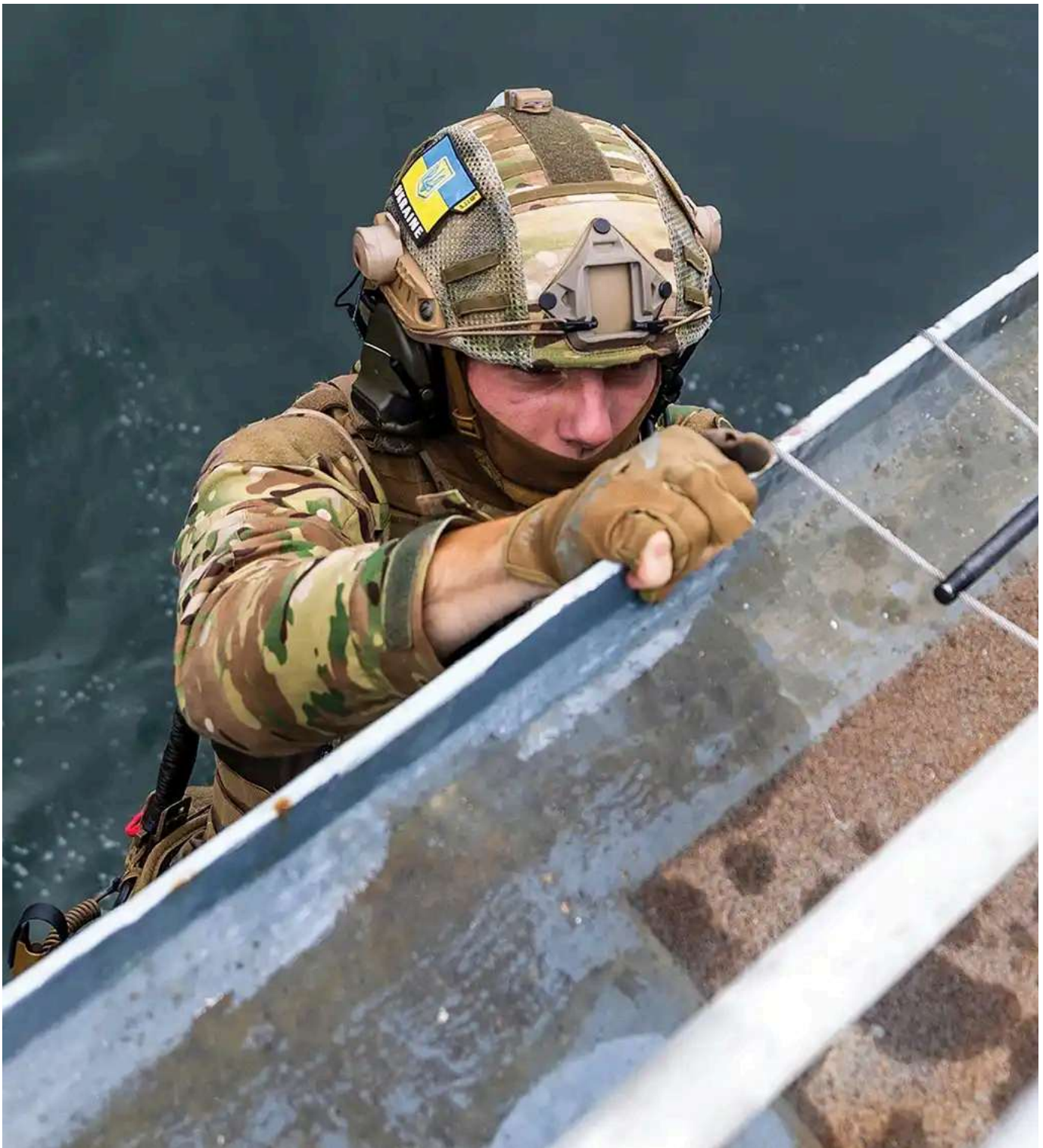
U.S. Air Force Special Tactics Operators assigned to 24th Special Operations Wing, U.S. Army Special Forces Operators, and Ukrainian special operations forces execute a bilateral military free fall from U.S. Air Force MC-130J Commando II assigned to 352nd Special Operations Wing near Vinnytsia, Ukraine, August 10, 2021 (U.S. Air Force/Izabella Workman)

The Department of Defense’s joint warfighting concepts provide goals and pathways to success over the long term.⁴ Aligned with renewed emphasis on the warrior ethos and capabilities to overmatch adversaries, the implementation of joint warfighting concepts relies on integration and interoperability across the joint force, coordination with the U.S. interagency community, and partnerships across a

range of international actors aligned with U.S. goals.⁵ Together, these advance readiness for anticipated threats and resilience in the face of strategic surprise. Long-standing pillars of U.S. strategic strength counterbalance uncertainty as much as potential adversary advantages. In particular, interorganizational alignment offers force multipliers through divisions of labor and broad perspectives as idea generators for complex problems.⁶ Yet this requires interlocution—speech between—that both translates meaning and understands the other's perspectives and priorities. But learning to work effectively together must rely on more than increasingly capable technological solutions. While advances merge hardware systems, software evolutions, and myriad information sources, they do not replace the “human in the loop” or, more important, the “human defining the loop” to understand the opportunities and constraints confronting joint force action.

In that regard, the stressors facing the joint force go beyond external threats from increasingly capable and determined adversaries. They also include persistent internal struggles to recruit and retain quality talent motivated by common vision and purpose.⁷ Even more difficult are the prospects of financial constraints forcing militaries not to “do more with less” but to do better with less.⁸ This requires efficiencies as much as effectiveness. Therefore, the call to develop greater human capital must include learning core skill sets as much as developing the latest tool kits. Much like requisite intelligence briefings for mission planning, socializing baseline knowledge supports the development of a strategic common operating picture for the joint force. Doing so helps enable integrated campaigning to align operations, activities, and investments across geographic and functional areas at a time of increasing strategic complexity.

The ubiquity of change across the breadth and depth of the battlespace, however, requires the joint force to do more than merely proliferate common base knowledge. It must also generate thought leaders and training methods that keep pace with change. Problematically, saying the joint force needs better capabilities and skills to use them often amounts to little more than “admiring the problem.” Therefore, to adapt and innovate joint force efforts, this article highlights two replicable models that bridge joint force, interagency, nongovernmental, and international partnerships to deliver effective multidomain operational capacity. These approaches use responsive training feedback loops between end users and subject-matter experts to identify efficiencies in the schoolhouse as much as effectiveness through the joint operations center. Learning thus relies on innovative processes to find new solutions for emerging challenges while developing adaptive leaders to exploit emerging opportunities.



Ukrainian special forces soldier climbs to deck of ship during visit, board, search, and seizure training with British Royal Marine Commandos and U.S. Navy SEALs in Odesa, Ukraine, June 21, 2021 (U.S. Army/Patrik Orcutt)

The first example from the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force—10 (CJSOTF-10) focuses on U.S.-led support to Ukrainian special operations forces (UKRSOF). The second example, joint special operations concept development, identifies and implements experimentation modalities transregionally. Both emphasize adaptation and innovation for learning and leader development under fast-paced, complex strategic conditions. Critically, both also work with key stakeholders across the joint force and wide-ranging partnerships. In this respect, they offer effective lessons to meet rising threats and secure key interests and thereby help the United States achieve strategic victory.

Special Operations in Context

In many ways, the beginning of the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian war was ideally timed for the joint force to step into strategic competition. Following the Russian annexation of Crimea and the Donbas nearly a decade earlier, U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) partners revitalized their approaches and infrastructures to address Russian aggression more directly. This included adapting doctrine and training modules as much as equipment and resourcing procedures globally. One central element of that modernization has been the presence and relationships of special operations forces (SOF). In particular, the progressive drawdown from the war on terror has allowed SOF to return to their roots,⁹ or more accurately, to refocus on the breadth of their irregular warfare capabilities and partnerships that build joint force advantage.¹⁰



U.S. Army Special Forces Operators and Ukraine special operations forces operators conduct military free fall operations from U.S. Air Force CV-22 Osprey near Vinnytsia, Ukraine, September 18, 2020 (U.S. Air Force/Mackenzie Mendez)

Accordingly, in coordination with U.S. Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR), 10th Special Forces Group and elements of the Naval Special Warfare Command began training nascent UKRSOF teams in early 2015.¹¹ Under the broad auspices of two U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) operations—Atlantic Resolve and Rapid Trident—special operations training focused on transitioning UKRSOF from a Russian Spetsnaz model to NATO irregular warfare capabilities ranging from strategic reconnaissance to internal defense.¹²

Some of the early challenges included designing rightsized force structure and delegating mission command to tactical units. This often flew in the face of previous Soviet systems based on mass conscript armies led by highly centralized command and control. Initial training faced organizational and cultural obstacles in moving Ukrainian partners from top-down directives for the smallest level of decisionmaking. In response, U.S. and NATO SOF worked with Ukrainian teams to enculturate a more localized approach that included better critical thinking and scoping tasks at echelon.¹³ As a result, training taught small-unit skill sets that showcased their viability to

senior Ukrainian armed forces commanders. This was an important step in leader development as much as institutional maturation—one that carried over into large-scale combat operations.

A second primary area of instruction focused on developing NATO SOF standards within UKRSOF alongside interoperability between it and other partners. Training built on Poland and Lithuania's pre-2014 support for Ukraine, which also benefited those two countries' own growing SOF capabilities aided by the United States and other NATO members.¹⁴ UKRSOF interoperability extended beyond traditional allies to included partners of partners as well. UKRSOF's resulting NATO certification in 2019 confirmed two vital elements that would become central to Ukraine's early victories and long-term survival: the need and ability to use a networked approach to partner relations and prioritization of integrated indigenous solutions wherever possible.¹⁵

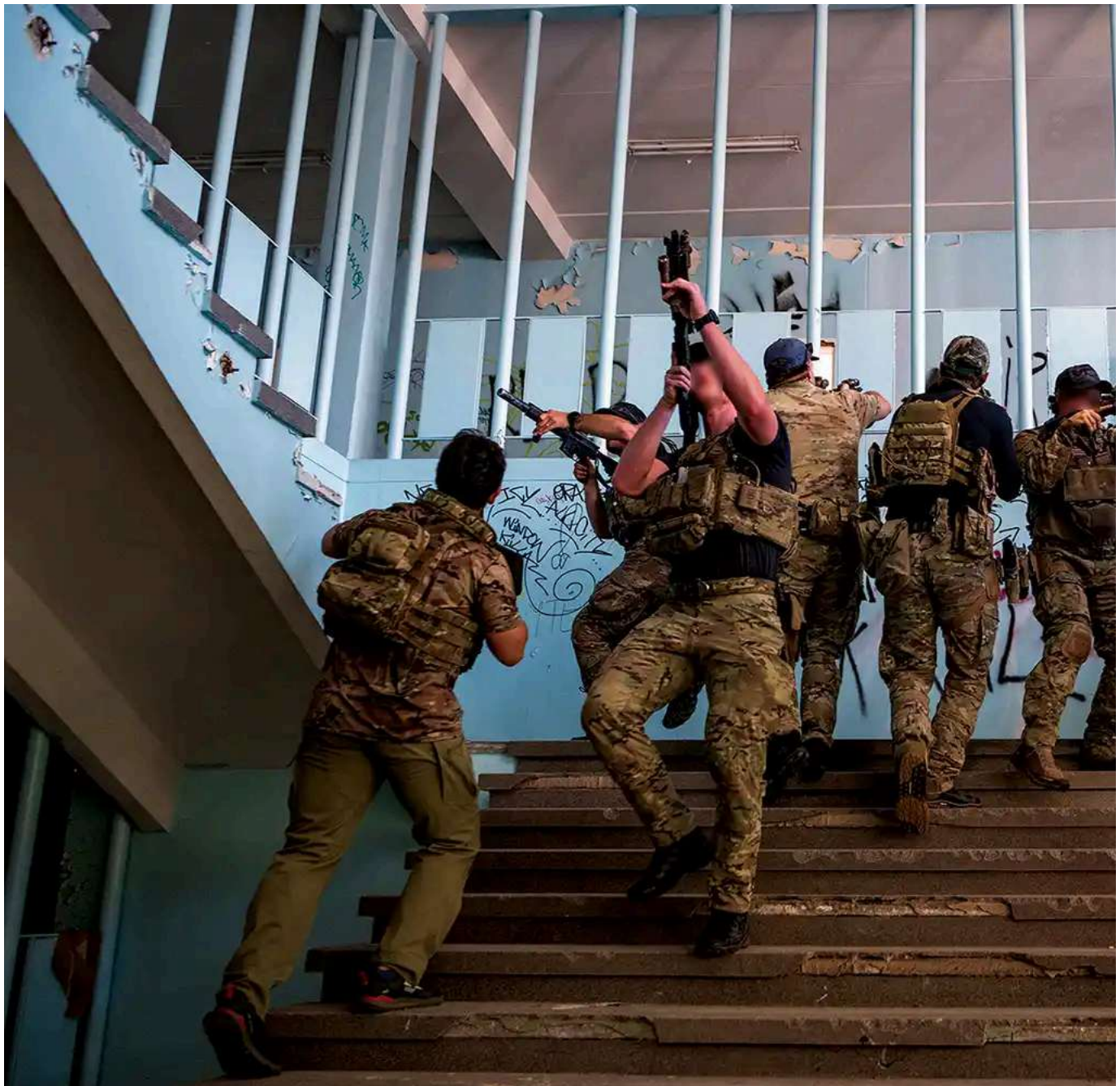
Despite lulls and acute materiel shortages at critical times of the war, Ukraine's partner network has helped to maintain high operational tempo with concentrated fires on high-value targets. Those successes have also relied on homegrown Ukrainian capabilities to fill the gaps and shortfalls in international support. Built on long-standing narratives of Ukrainian resistance to foreign imperialism, Ukraine's internal efforts to mobilize wide-ranging communities have merged business, military, and social groups to develop local solutions to battlefield problems.¹⁶

More broadly, as the war has continued, Ukraine has also become a focal point for stronger U.S.-European integration. In contrast to pre-2022 divisions over the efficacy of sanctions as a deterrent to further Russian aggression, supporting Ukraine's struggle for independence has enabled a range of foreign policy coordination, resource development, and infrastructural integration.¹⁷ Ukraine has thus become the interoperability battle laboratory in the period after the war on terror. U.S. and NATO SOF have served as the "connective tissue" for those efforts.

SOF relationships prioritize longterm presence and "upscaling" to combatant command priorities—two essential elements of joint force integration that directly support effective multidomain operations.¹⁸ Nesting within USEUCOM goals gives U.S. SOF "top cover" to develop partner capacities as supporting rather than supported efforts. As a result, in addition to increasing coordination with conventional forces, SOF have added governance support and messaging skill sets to Ukrainian efforts begun before 2022.¹⁹ Alignment of tactics, training, and procedures at the operational level has also included broader integration with U.S. Department of State strategic priorities and requirements to meet them.

However, the initial withdrawal of U.S. forces from Ukraine in February 2022 left a void across the spectrum of NATO support to Ukraine. The joint force needed an organizational structure to coordinate international support for procurement of battlefield munitions and joint fires to use them. The nature of the "partner war" meant the organization also required direct support from interagency and commercial partners working to bolster Ukraine's standing within the multinational coalition poised to assist.

The American way of war has evolved to meet that need. Far from the early days of U.S. unilateralism in the 19th century, through the expansion of global leadership during and after World War II, the U.S. military has learned to become a logistics and staffing juggernaut.²⁰ Heavylift capabilities, integrated supply chains, and resource management that enables coordinated decisionmaking across echelons show the U.S. military expertise in planning, executing, and sustaining largescale combat operations.²¹ While certainly not infinite, and with real limitations in the event of multiple major conflicts, U.S. capabilities to organize the Ukraine support effort have been remarkable. Thus far, these capabilities have outperformed enemy capabilities on the battlefield despite support from China and other international collaborators.²²



East Coast-based Naval Special Warfare Operators conduct close quarters combat training with Lithuania special operators as part of Flaming Sword 24, bringing together NATO Special Operations Forces from six allied nations, Lithuania, May 16, 2024 (U.S. Navy/Trey Hutcheson)

Two key organizations have coordinated the broad U.S.-led effort: Security Assistance Group-Ukraine (SAG-U) on the conventional side and CJSOTF-10 for special operations. Both have served as supply hubs and information conduits for the joint force, interagency, and international partners sustaining the Ukrainian war effort.

SAG-U and CJSOTF-10

Initially established under the 18th Airborne Corps in April 2022, Task Force Dragon evolved later that year into SAG-U as the core coordinating body for multinational and nongovernmental supply efforts.²³ It manages partner contributions through the International Donor Coordination Center while using the U.S. Presidential drawdown authority process to liaise with interagency contacts and comply with congressional oversight procedures.²⁴ Working with nearly two dozen NATO partners adds further organizational complexity. Given the billions of dollars of equipment that SAG-U oversees, the stakes are high to ensure the right equipment reaches the partner at the right time while not depleting U.S. or NATO supplies beyond strategically necessary levels. SAG-U thus embodies joint force interoperability, managing complicated supply chains, technical integration across various systems, and international exchanges—all at a blistering pace. What is even more startling is how quickly SAG-U achieved this level of performance while “building the plane in flight.”

Since early 2022, USEUCOM has faced the challenge of supporting a partner's ongoing combat operations while bolstering long-standing deterrence of Russian aggression against NATO. Building on decades of combatant command sustainment integration across the joint force, SAG-U is inwardly focused to ensure that daily operations support strategic objectives, as well as outwardly facing to manage the cooperation of interagency and international partnerships. It does so while directly supporting Ukrainian battlefield success against an adversary with global reach.

Understandably, many of the sustainment successes have focused on multimillion-dollar platforms such as high-mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS) and joint direct attack munitions guided bomb units. Those play a vital role along the forward line of troops (FLOT), but persistent supply constraints limit Ukraine's ability to target all available enemy capabilities.²⁵ Expansion of operations into Russia has meant that scarcity necessitates even more difficult prioritization. In itself, overcoming supply problems is a necessary part of organizational development for the Ukrainians. Scarcity can support adaptive and innovative solutions to find less expensive, more readily available alternatives, as seen in the June 2025 Operation Spiderweb.²⁶ The proliferation of crowdsourced unmanned autonomous systems (UAS) deployed along and beyond the FLOT showcases Ukraine's effective approaches to *doing better with less*.²⁷ At critical points, CJSOTF-10 helps to fill the resourcing gap by coordinating with Ukrainian SOF elements embedded with conventional units along the front. It does so by adapting a core traditional SOF function (training and equipping) while innovating a new one (remote advisement and assistance).

As the O-6 command supporting SOCEUR efforts, CJSOTF-10 responds to the Ukraine crisis as part of broader campaigning along NATO's eastern flank. With activities ranging from the high north and the Baltics to the Balkans and the Caucasus, CJSOTF-10 delegates two core tasks to subordinate elements. Special Operations Task Force-10.1 (SOTF-10.1) is based on a special forces battalion and oversees a range of special operations activities in the European theater. Elements include task groups focused on the conflict in Ukraine, stability operations in former conflict areas, security force assistance to regional partners, and support to USEUCOM defense planning.²⁸

Additionally, a tactical command element coordinates with SAG-U, linking UKRSOF into SAG-U's engagement with Ukrainian armed forces command. Critically for the success of broader support to Ukraine, SOTF-10.1 and the tactical command coordinate regularly to ensure feedback loops for equipping, training, and assessing the battlefield. They engage with elements across the joint force to ensure that coordination supports U.S. policy goals and USEUCOM strategic objectives.

SOTF-10.1. The initial SOF support to Ukraine began as an advanced operations base in 2015 as part of the SOCEUR response to the Russian annexation of Crimea. Tasked with developing and managing programs of instruction (POIs) for Ukrainian SOF, instructional approaches relied heavily on NATO partner expertise. After decades of collaboration during the war on terror, and more since 2014, a de facto division of expertise has developed among NATO SOF members.²⁹ Some have prioritized traditional assault roles, such as breaching fixed fortifications. Others embed training areas in urban environments to simulate aspects of the current war in Ukraine. In its current form, SOTF-10.1 coordinates across regional partnerships to maximize the range of effects from resistance training to strategic sensors for adversary malign influence. SOTF10.1 engages with partners to "reverse burden-share" within core focus areas to support essential mission tasks.³⁰

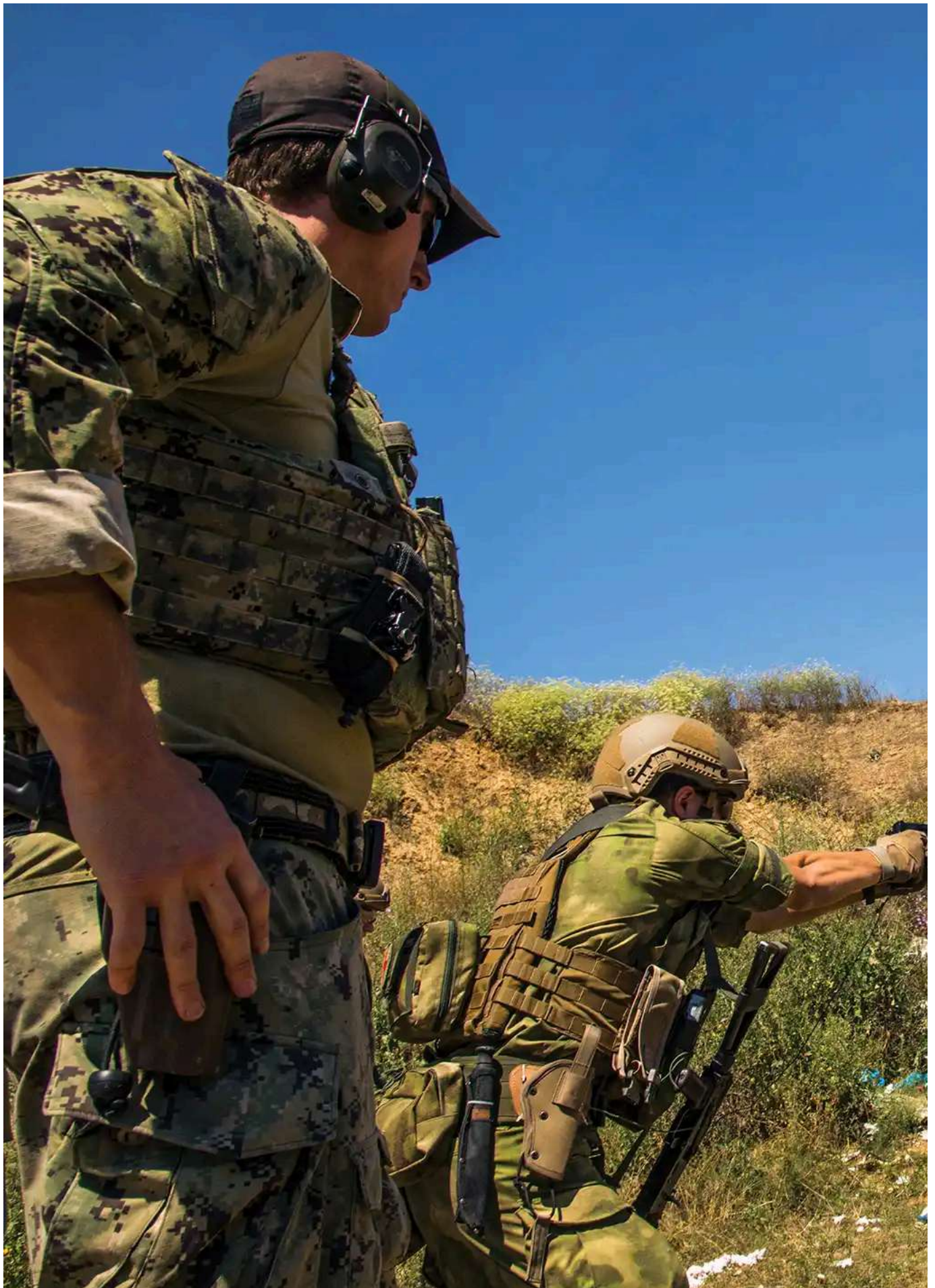
The concept of reverse burdensharing adapts traditional SOF training roles as force multipliers. It identifies partner capabilities that U.S. personnel can backfill during training modules, thereby freeing up partners to specialize in their expertise for Ukrainian students. Examples have included mesh network communications, UAS research and development, and maneuver skill sets tailored to Ukraine's topography. SOTF-10.1's specific value in the larger SOCEUR approach has been its adaptability to meet Ukrainian requests with allied SOF expertise. It does this while coordinating with joint force, interagency, commercial, and international partners to fill gaps as they arise.

One of the most important examples of learning in this context has been the transition from a Special Forces-style training program to a Rangers-style training program. Initial prewar POIs condensed the training for U.S. Army Special Forces-level qualifications—which can take up to 2 years to 5 months. UKRSOF students learned a breadth of skills focused on strategic reconnaissance, direct action, counterterrorism, and foreign internal defense. Training nested within broader Ukrainian efforts to build resistance capabilities supported by civilian resources. However, requirements changed after the fall 2022 Ukrainian counteroffensive pushed Russian forces back along the current line of contact. Battlefield conditions necessitated light infantry capable of exploiting breaches in Russia's rapidly hardening defensive lines.³¹

Throughout the conflict, UKRSOF have been used extensively because of their high levels of training and equipment from the long-standing partnership with U.S. and NATO SOF. Yet high casualty rates during the first year of the conflict created a capacity and capability gap. In early 2023, Ukrainian special operations command (UKRSOCOM) requested tactical assault forces akin to U.S. Rangers, but on an expedited basis.³² The pace of operations, and UKRSOF's vital role in sustaining it, required a rapid adaptation of POIs and reduction of training time from 5 months to 6 weeks. In response, SOTF10.1 quickly identified new locations and NATO training partners, enabling realignment of U.S. instructors toward other needed areas.³³ Cadre focused on small unit tactics, basic breaching, and trench clearing, along with mission planning for the same. The new units work alongside other UKRSOF regiments in support of conventional forces for combined arms maneuver. Notable successes include breaches in the southern and eastern fronts.³⁴

A second learning feedback loop has been in combat medicine. UKRSOF originally lagged behind their NATO partners in field triage capabilities, but not because of inferior resources. Rather, Ukrainian teams initially expressed an unwillingness to use localized combat medicine—specifically, cricothyrotomies to intubate critically wounded soldiers on the battlefield.³⁵ Partly resulting from unfamiliarity with a complicated technique, their reluctance also stemmed from experience during the previous 8 years of fighting along the Donbas line. As that conflict had frozen in place, Ukrainian armed forces concentrated medical care at centralized locations, often relying on civilian hospitals to augment military capabilities.³⁶ As a result, frontline soldiers could count on others to evacuate the wounded for lifesaving care, a circumstance supported by the relatively slower pace of battle at that time. The current combat conditions are faster, more decentralized, and over a larger geographic area. Much of the civilian infrastructure near the FLOT has been destroyed or is incapable of handling the volume of trauma patients. This necessitated dispersing combat medicine mission command to individual units.

Building on decades of “golden hour” treatment, SOTF-10.1 adapted POIs from Special Forces medics and Navy corpsmen to increase survivability of Ukrainian wounded far from medical facilities. However, battlefield assessments showed higher mortality rates than would have been expected given the training.³⁷ In response, SOTF-10.1 innovated the traditional SOF advising and assistance role to the virtual environment to address this and other support missions. The new Remote Advise and Assist Cell (RAAC) worked with U.S. Army civil affairs teams to identify nongovernmental organizations and commercial partners willing to provide 3D printers capable of producing cricothyrotomy practice kits for UKRSOF medics in the field. Using telemedicine videoconferencing, SOTF-10.1 cadre expanded training opportunities as UKRSOF teams began practicing during lulls in the fighting. Assessments showed increased survivability and greater willingness to use partner training where it is needed most.³⁸





U.S. Naval Special Warfare Operator observes Ukrainian special operations forces operator during weapons range in Ochakiv, Ukraine, during exercise Sea Breeze 17, July 18, 2017 (U.S. Navy/William Leasure)

RAAC. The ability to advise and assist remotely developed not only out of policy necessity but also as a hallmark of special operations flexibility. Relying on a network approach to problemsolving, SOF operators are assessed and selected based on leadership traits that incorporate partners as essential for mission success.³⁹ The roots of special operations lie in developing options with partners while maintaining capabilities for discrete SOF actions. Returning to those core competencies has meant advising and assisting rather than direct action in the current partner war. Given the limitations on U.S. military presence in Ukraine, SOTF-10.1 innovated technological means for virtual presence with Ukrainian partners.

Established after the first year of the war, RAAC efforts support UKRSOF through communications links, data management for battle damage assessments, and 3D printing for critical components.⁴⁰ Composed of joint force SOF and conventional personnel, the RAAC maintains direct links to interagency and commercial partners in Ukraine and neighboring countries. Using a range of communications software through a “call center” for UKRSOF units, the RAAC facilitates rapid battlefield learning while engaging senior leaders to identify battlefield effectiveness for U.S. and partner equipment. As a communications hub, the RAAC provides partners with real-time awareness and mission support through logistics and “blue force tracking.”⁴¹ Thus, despite their different tactical outcomes, the battles for Avdiivka and Kursk highlight the increased operational effectiveness of U.S.-led support efforts to integrate partners across the spectrum of defensive and offensive maneuvers.⁴²

An additional learning model arose from the continued shortfalls in standoff weapons and staunch Russian air and electronic warfare defenses that diminish their utility. In response, UAS innovation has made one-way attack drones a primary force multiplier for both sides of the conflict.⁴³ Aided by first-person-view scouting and surveillance drones, many of which are of Ukrainian design and development, Ukrainian capabilities extend beyond kinetic strikes to include their use for medical supply deliveries and as messaging platforms.⁴⁴ Combined with traditional psychological operations through loudspeakers and leaflet drops over the battlefield, amplified by an extensive social media presence, Ukrainian information operations teams contributed to nearly 15,000 Russian surrenders in the first 2 years of the war,⁴⁵ which the summer 2024 Kursk operation continued.⁴⁶

Taken together, the RAAC’s persistent virtual partnership with UKRSOF units has greatly aided SOTF-10.1 instruction modules by incorporating real-time battlefield data in drone utilization into training iterations for new UKRSOF units. More broadly, SOTF-10.1 engages with a range of U.S., NATO, and civilian instructors to support the next round of drone operators and innovators from Ukraine and other partner nations. Aggregating “up and out” to guide the combined efforts, CJSOTF-10 engages with other special operations partners to support the adaptation of lessons learned in Ukraine to other complex and strategically challenging problems facing the joint force.⁴⁷ This effectively operationalizes the SOF interlocutor role for joint warfighting concepts that necessitate integration and interoperability with a range of partners. With similar goals of advancing multidomain operational capacity through adaptation and innovation, joint special operations concept development provides an equally effective model across a global theater of operations.





Ukrainian special forces soldier prepares for mission with 12th Combat Aviation Brigade and U.S. Army's 10th Special Forces Group during exercise Combined Resolve 16 in Hohenfels, Germany, December 8, 2021 (U.S. Army/Patrik Orcutt)

Joint Special Operations Concept Development

Joint special operations exemplify the U.S. military tradition of evolutionary change to meet emerging national security threats. Guided by U.S. Special Operations Command movement toward a strategic “cooperation-competition-conflict continuum,” joint special operations emphasize adaptation and innovation to meet some of the Nation’s most challenging military requirements.⁴⁸ Yet preparing and training the future joint special operations community faces several difficulties. Foremost is legacy thinking—assuming that the force of today is what it must be in the future. In response, concept development efforts serve as an experimentation laboratory to bridge past, present, and future capabilities. They bring together elements across the joint force and its interagency, nongovernmental, and international partners to showcase *special operations as force providers and multipliers for critical national security objectives*.

Modernization takes place within the larger transformation in special operations and the joint force's understanding of their roles. The historic SOF spectrum has included Jedburgh teams supporting French resistance fighters in World War II and long-range reconnaissance patrols in Vietnam, in addition to the more recent efforts against violent extremist organizations in the war on terror.⁴⁹ Countering contemporary peer adversaries also fits into those special warfare options because across the various mission sets, whether targeting state or nonstate threats, SOF have maintained a network approach to work by, with, and through a wide range of partners.

Wide-ranging partnerships require interoperability, and joint special operations have been at the forefront of SOF evolutions given the need to standardize training and equipping across a repertoire of conventional and Service-specific capabilities.⁵⁰ Integration of those capabilities highlights the key SOF role as interlocutors who speak among a variety of organizational cultures and procedures.

Regular exercises and war games serve as primary learning and leader development vehicles through which these disparate elements communicate and coordinate. As experiments, they adapt existing approaches in response to emerging strategic requirements. They also innovate techniques and tools in advance of threats, thereby helping the joint force gain time to develop comparative advantage

over peer adversaries. Two experimentation modalities—exercises and war games—showcase ways to expand joint force multidomain options and surge operational capabilities on national-level priorities.

Experimentation for Strategic Effect. Scholars and practitioners debate the differences between exercises and war games, often distinguishing them by the number of known variables compared to unknown outcomes.⁵¹ Commonly used tabletop and culminating exercises control the inputs to ensure the reliability of capabilities at their conclusion. Participants must pass repeated validation tests before the actual event, which itself goes through multiple revisions before final execution. Consequently, the primary distinction between exercises and war games lies in the anticipated possibility of failure. Whereas military exercises are designed to showcase and test specific capabilities for mission readiness, war games not only anticipate points of failure but also often encourage failure as a vital learning tool.⁵²

Joint special operations exercises and war games test a breadth of tactical skills and tools alongside operational planning and execution for strategic effects. Exercises are sequenced to validate tactics, training, procedures, and equipment needed for specific operational requirements. This often necessitates using existing capabilities in predetermined ways. The process stresses the tools and personnel as much as the connections and supports needed for mission success. War games differ in that they are designed to stress staff thinking rather than performance on the battlefield. As such, war games include complex strategic problems ranging from denied communications to the presence of adversary proxies as escalation trip wires. Restrictions on access, basing, and overflight due to strained international relations further stress-test the participants and processes. As a result, war game scenarios match national-level assessments of challenging operational environments. Critically for learning and leader development, they evaluate how the participants approach problems rather than the specific outcomes they achieve.

Across both types of experimentation, participants learn different ways to operationalize joint warfighting concepts through expanded options for multidomain operations.⁵³ Yet the value of the effort depends in large part on assessment processes to capture and evaluate the results. Metrics for lessons learned include common methodologies such as interviews and after-action reviews. They also incorporate strategic implications showing ways in which joint special operations “buy down” risk and expand options for decisionmakers. As a result, analysis provides both *inward review* for leader development and *outward engagement* with stakeholders beyond the community.

Adaptive and innovative experiments communicate SOF’s value proposition in a time of austere budgets and escalatory operational environments. Like CJSOTF-10 efforts concerning Ukraine, joint special operations concept development shows a model of advancing joint force capabilities for complex strategic challenges. The implications for both models are clear: innovation produces advantages that overcome strategic crisis and operational constraint, networks remain essential elements for interoperability and the learning necessary to achieve it, and partnerships multiply capabilities despite the coordination challenges inherent in them.

Applying those lessons to future conflict areas, or to expanded conflict on the periphery of current wars, requires leadership to replicate them. The CJSOTF construct was not created for the Russian-Ukrainian war, but it has greatly matured under its conditions, making it more effective for potential future flashpoints. In the same way, joint special operations evolutions will remain a priority given their strategic importance to U.S. interests. While the nuances do not apply universally, the paths charted can and must carry over to others working to build and maintain strategic lethality. Doing so will advance joint force readiness to deter strategic adversaries and win the Nation’s wars. **JFQ**

Notes

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