

ENOTA ZA SPECIALNO DELOVANJE SLOVENSKE VOJSKE – ODGOVOR NA SODOBNE IZZIVE

THE SAF SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIT RESPONSE TO MODERN CHALLENGES

Professional article

Povzetek Enota za specialno delovanje (ESD) zagotavlja zmogljivosti specialnega delovanja Slovenske vojske in uresničevanje posebnih nacionalnovarnostnih ciljev Republike Slovenije.

Visoka usposobljenost, sposobnost prikritega delovanja, zmožnost velike natančnosti zaradi zmanjševanja stranskih učinkov in visoka prilagodljivost glede na različne vire ogrožanja so samo nekatere značilnosti, ki poudarjajo vlogo in pomen ESD znotraj oboroženih sil. Te značilnosti omogočajo njeno uporabo za izpolnjevanje obveznosti Republike Slovenije do sistema kolektivne obrambe zveze Nato ter zagotavljanje mednarodne varnosti znotraj OZN v mednarodnih operacijah in na misijah, ko drugih enot ter virov Slovenske vojske ni mogoče uporabiti. Hkrati je ESD potencialna zmogljivost za obrambo države in delovanje v posebnih kriznih razmerah protiterorističnega delovanja v Republiki Sloveniji.

ESD je s potrditvijo svojih zmogljivosti v praksi pokazala, da so predlagani teoretični koncepti in rešitve, na katerih temelji, pravilni in uresničljivi, ESD pa vrhunsko usposobljena enota, ki predstavlja ost enot za bojno delovanje Slovenske vojske.

Ključne besede *Specialno delovanje, protiterorizem, protiupornišтво, Nato, Enota za specialno delovanje, na učinkih temelječe operacije.*

Abstract The Special Operations Unit (SOU) provides special operations capabilities for the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) and the implementation of special national security objectives for the Republic of Slovenia.

Specialized training, the ability to perform covert operations, high accuracy to achieve collateral damage reduction, and great flexibility in facing different sources of threat are but a few of the features that highlight the role and importance of the Special Forces units of the armed forces. Having such characteristics, the unit can be used to fulfil the obligations of the Republic of Slovenia to NATO's collective defence system and ensure the international security of UN missions when no other SAF units and capabilities can be employed. At the same time, the SOU provides

potential capabilities for national defence and specific crisis situations for counter-terrorism activities in the Republic of Slovenia.

By validating its capabilities in practice, the SOU has shown that the theoretical concepts on which it is based are both good and feasible. It has proved itself to be a highly qualified unit – the elite of the SAF's combat operations units.

Key words *Special Forces, special operations, counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency, NATO, Special Operations Unit, effects-based operations.*

Introduction The changing nature of threats and conflicts in the post-Cold War era and the projection of the security environment require countries and organisations (such as the UN, EU and NATO) to have a different and particularly more effective way of facing these challenges¹. Indeed, the threats and challenges have important implications and have required significant changes to security systems and armed forces, including special operations forces.

The Resolution on the General Long-Term Development and Equipping Programme of the Slovenian Armed Forces up to 2025 (2010, p. 7) states that:

“... the likelihood of an interstate armed conflict in the Euro-Atlantic region has diminished significantly. Military threats will mainly emerge as local and regional instabilities which can easily spill over. Moreover, contemporary threats are increasingly becoming hybrid in their form, and multi-layered and international in nature under the influence of strong globalisation effects. In addition to land, sea and air, the theatre of the future will also include cyberspace and space.”

The authors thus believe that the future security environment will become even more complex due to a combination of different elements: the greater lethality of modern weapons, the development of means for a more rapid deployment of military forces, international terrorism², the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, easier access to information, the presence of the media etc. The military structures and methods³ suitable for resolving international conflicts will not be able to manage complex 21st century security situations.

¹ *The prevailing view among different global defence and security entities is that our present and future security environments represent new complex challenges that are difficult to predict. Different and »unconventional« threats can compromise wider international stability and cause a permanent state of conflict. Special Forces are an active instrument that is ideally adapted to a non-defined and dynamic environment, while maintaining freedom of action by applying the economy of forces principle. In addition, special operations forces have a special ability to complete their tasks in environments where conventional forces are in a worse strategic or operational position (NATO Special Operations Study, 2008).*

² *Terrorism epitomizes contemporary asymmetrical threats. In this context, Prezelj states (2007, p. 67) that “asymmetry refers to the disproportionality of the entity which threatens (non-state actors against the state) the resources it uses, and the consequences (minimum input – maximum output outcome) which, for example, exceed the direct consequences of a bomb explosion”.*

³ *Naturally, the SOU is but a segment of a comprehensive response to terrorism by modern countries (Prezelj, 2007, p. 68) which enhances joint activity and the country's response (the overall picture).*

The Mid-Term Defence Programme (hereinafter: SOPR) for 2007–2012 (2006) indicates that the future strategic security environment shall be significantly affected by: globalisation, sophisticated lethal weapons and various forms of asymmetric warfare, rapidly changing security situations, demographic and political factors and the lack of resources that cause mass migrations, the spread of radical ideologies, unresolved international and internal conflicts and major natural disasters. The SOPR for 2007–2012 also anticipates that globalization will make the Western democracies, in particular their economies, even more sensitive to stability in different parts of the world, which will directly or indirectly affect their economic interest and open market operations.

Information networks already enable us to get a real-time overview of events over the world. In the future, this will be exploited by different actors employing IT-strategies, also by those whose main purpose is destruction. Increasing access to modern and advanced technologies will make terrorist and other attacks more effective. The direct threat of possible access to technologies and means of mass destruction sponsored by states will also become increasingly prominent (SOPR for 2007–2012).

The gap between developed and developing countries will continue to cause ethnic conflicts and mass migration. Economic and financial crises will build up pressure and contribute to the collapse of social systems (SOPR for 2007–2012).

There will be an increase in requirements for water, food and energy resources and climate changes will have a negative impact on water and food supplies. Environmental degradation will likely result in an increased number of natural disasters which will have long-term effects on some of the world's social and economic conditions. There will also be an increase in organised crime and poverty. New diseases will emerge and famine will strike (SOPR for 2007–2012).

The threats will be posed by unstable states, the poor management of resources and constant competition for them. Unresolved conflicts as well as groups and countries supporting radical ideologies will represent threats which could gain global dimensions. Thus, some severe forms of the threats in question might shake the foundations of global stability (Rode, 2007, p. 5).

There is the possibility of strategic surprise, which will come with little or no prior warning. For this reason, participation in the NATO Alliance will be important and will present a reasonable possibility for the activation of a collective defence.

The situation in the Balkans will remain unstable. Kosovo, in particular, will continue to be problematic. Nevertheless, international forces which ensure stability in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina will be restructured and reduced in number. At the same time, the process of integrating the Southern Balkan countries into NATO and the EU will continue.

The security situation in Africa will continue to be critical, and will be influenced by various factors, such as rapid population growth, epidemics, poverty, famine, water shortages, unstable regimes, failed states, interreligious and interethnic tensions etc. These factors and the situations they create will result in illegal migrations to Europe and the proliferation of terrorist groups that focus their operations on Europe (SOPR for 2007–2012). So far, the so-called “Arab Spring” in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and elsewhere has not confirmed these pessimistic forecasts.

The Middle East will remain a crisis area. Interethnic and interreligious conflicts with terrorist operations will continue and with a potential focus on European countries (SOPR 2007–2012).

The spectrum of future warfare will be focused on crises in which nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction could be used, on classic inter-state conflicts, internal conflicts resulting in the collapse of countries, on terrorism and other crisis situations. A particular challenge will be the fact that the different dimensions of war include not only the armed forces, but also different actors: national, international, non-governmental and local as well as elements of various instruments of power, such as political, military, informational and economic.

The state usually responds to military threats with its armed forces. Similarly, as part of the continued Alliance integration process, the SAF's units will assume increasingly important commitments, not only in terms of the size and number of participating units, but also in terms of the complexity and difficulty of the tasks assigned.

1 NATO, THE SLOVENIAN ARMED FORCES AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

Based on lessons learned and experiences gained, especially in special forces operations in Afghanistan, a decision was made at the NATO's 2006 Riga summit regarding NATO's Special Operations Forces Transformation (NATO SOF Transformation Initiative). This had the purpose of achieving greater comparability and capability for joint operations through common training, equipping, and introducing and meeting common standards. For this purpose, NATO's SOF Coordination Centre (NSCC) was established in 2007 (Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ) since the beginning of 2010). This centre has become the single body for the management and coordination of NATO's special operations. It optimises the employment of Special Operations Forces by the Alliance and provides operational command facilities in accordance with the SACEUR guidelines (see Beršnak, 2010, pp. 27–28).

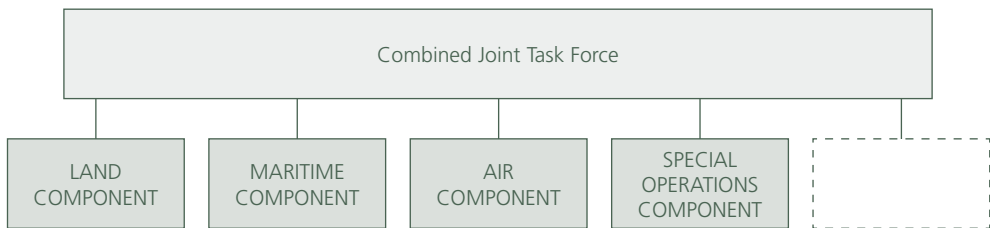
According to Paternus (2010, p. 70), the North Atlantic Council adopted the document MC 437/1 Special Operations Policy in 2006 as a starting point for the establishment of common standards. The document forms the foundation for the development of NATO's joint doctrine for special operations. In 2008, the ratification

process of the AJP 3.5, Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations, was initiated. This process was completed in 2009, when the document was ratified as the SVS STANAG 2523(1).

In fact, the documents in question, i.e. the MC 437/1 Special Operations Policy and the AJP 3.5, define the significance and purpose of the special operations forces in national and collective defence and represent the two most important documents related to special operations forces.

The Military Doctrine of the Slovenian Armed Forces defines special operations forces as one of the components of the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) (Fig. 1), which is organised according to its mission, joint operations area, and main mode of operation. In addition to the special operations component, the CJTF includes land, maritime and air components (see Furlan et al., 2006, p. 29).

Figure 1:
Combined
Joint Task Force
(Furlan et al.
2006, p. 29)



The SAF Special Operations Forces assume the leading role in special operations, which are a form of combat operations carried out by specially selected, equipped, organised and trained SAF units in support of military, political or psychological objectives of operational or strategic importance. They comprise non-conventional forms of combat operations, direct actions, special reconnaissance, intelligence, counter-terrorist actions, psychological operations and combat search and rescue. They are oriented towards military targets (Furlan et al., 2006, p. 50). According to the definition given in the Military Doctrine (Furlan et al. 2006, p. 50-51), the SAF Special Operations Forces will typically operate in small groups, independently, deep behind enemy lines, over prolonged periods of time and under cover. They carry out their tasks in support of SAF offensive, defensive and information and stability operations. Should the enemy occupy and control part of the Republic of Slovenia's territory, SAF special and other forces will carry out non-conventional forms of combat operations with an emphasis on guerrilla tactics. The units will regroup into smaller groups the aim of which is continuous disruption, destruction, neutralisation and minimising the enemy's morale. Combat operations will be conducted independently, in a covert and resourceful manner, continuously, thus forcing the enemy to refrain to static battle formation and expanding the terrain for the manoeuvre of SAF units. The units avoid frontal engagement. Combat operations in an occupied terrain are based on aggression and surprise.

2 NATO SOF TASKS

2.1 NATO SOF principal Tasks

The SVS STANAG 2523(1), Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations defines the principal tasks of NATO's Special Operations Forces (hereinafter: tasks) as follows:

- **Special Reconnaissance (SR)** is an information gathering activity which complements national and Allied intelligence collection sources and systems by obtaining specific, well-defined, and time-sensitive critical information at the operational and strategic levels. When the reconnaissance and intelligence authorities of conventional forces are constrained by e.g. high enemy activity, difficult terrain, and are thus unable to provide precise and time sensitive data, special forces are employed;
- **Direct Actions (DA)** complement NATO capabilities with strikes on specific, precisely-defined targets of strategic or operational significance. Direct actions are limited in scope and time. The main modes in the conduct of their operations are: Raids, Ambushes, and Direct Assaults, Terminal Guidance Operations, Recovery Operations, Precision Destruction Operations, Armed Reconnaissance and Opposed Boarding Operations;
- **Military Assistance (MA)** includes a wide range of support activities to friendly forces. In the context of military assistance, Special Forces can assist in training, equipping, providing support and employment (operation).

Figure 2 shows the concept of the SOF's principal task allocation and the relations among them in the performance of those tasks during the conflict, while Figure 3 shows a basic spectrum of task performance in the context of NATO's crisis management system.

Figure 2:
NATO SOF and
the spectrum
of conflict
(Newton 2010)

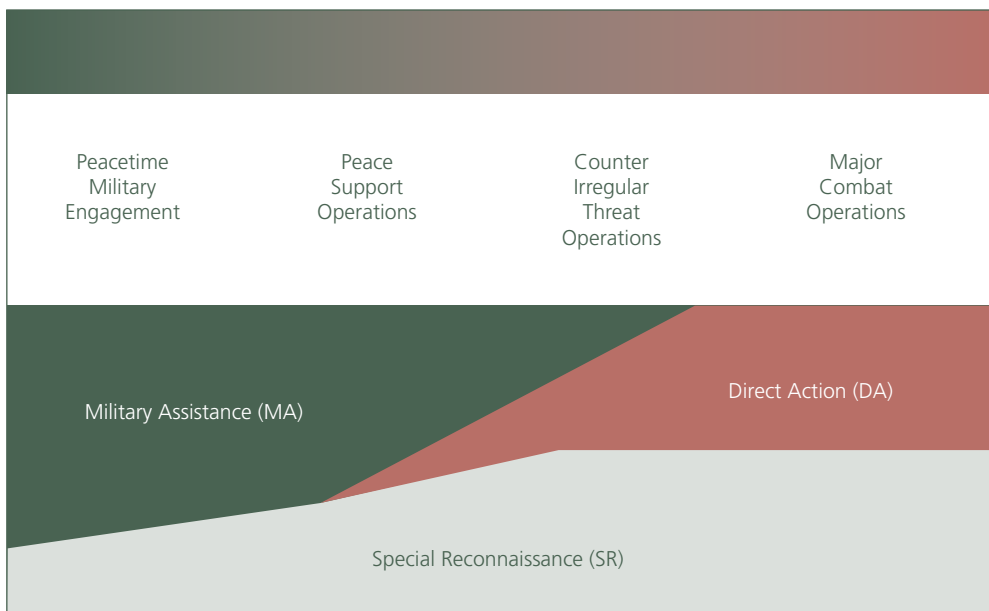
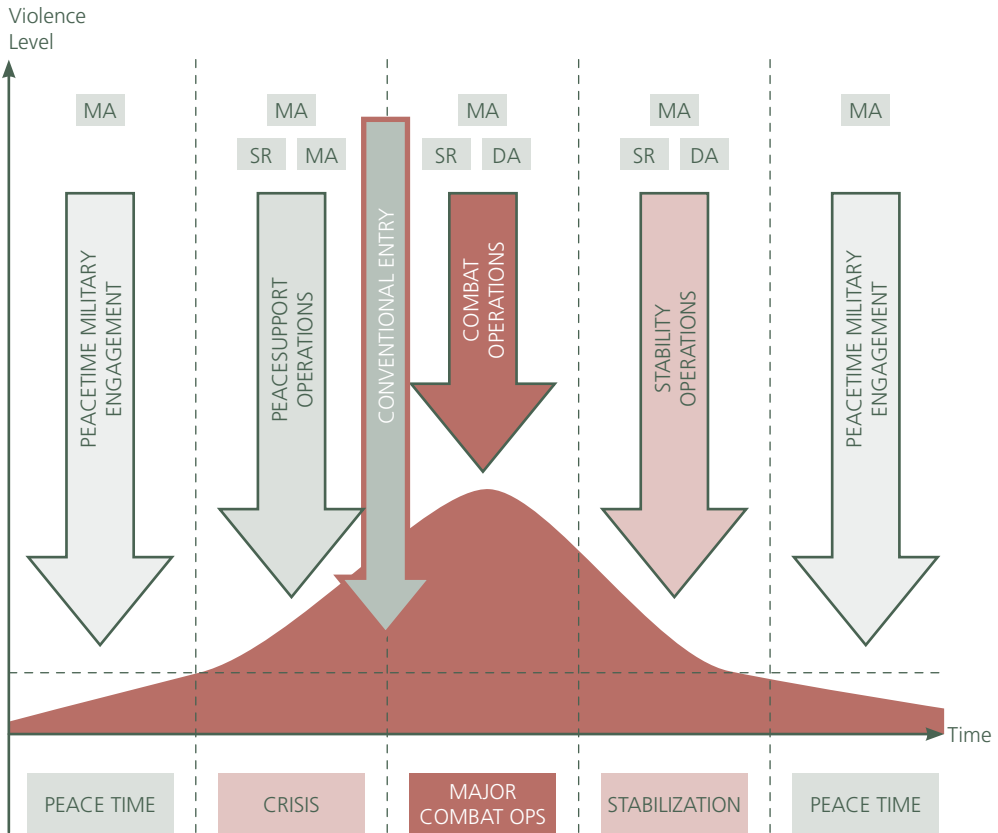


Figure 3:
NATO Crisis
Management
System and SOF
Tasks



2.2 Other SOF Tasks

In addition to the SOF's principal tasks, there are other tasks defined in the SVS STANAG 2523(1) which involve (but not exclusively) the participation of NATO's special operations forces, namely:

- support to counter irregular enemy operations and counter-terrorism⁴ and counter-insurgency⁵ operations in the context of the Alliance operations;
- hostage rescue operations – the SOF can assist in these operations under special conditions.

It should be stressed that the SOU, despite its capabilities, has no statutory powers to perform such activities in the Republic of Slovenia. Statutory powers rest with the Special Task Unit of the Police and the SAF's Military Police in military facilities and areas (Defence Law).

⁴ Counter-terrorism as one of the SOF's tasks is defined in the *Military Doctrine (2006: 50)* and the *Directive of Organisation and Operation of the SAF's Special Operations Forces (2008: 4)*.

⁵ Counter-insurgency as a form of special operations is defined in the *Directive of Organisation and Operation of the SAF's Special Operations Forces (2008: 4)* as "support to Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency".

In their final definition, the SAF's SOF tasks will have to be clearly defined and comply with the definitions set out in MC 437/1 and AJP 3.5. This refers particularly to additional tasks which involve the possible participation of SAF Special Forces. Participation is determined on the basis of statutory powers.

3 SPECIAL OPERATIONS TASK UNIT

All concepts and standards applicable to the SAF and NATO are reflected in their capabilities and are defined in force goals for individual countries. The SAF's force goals are that the SOU provides the Special Operations Task Unit (SOTU) for NATO. The SOU is organised in such a way as to provide several Special Operations Task Units.

NATO defines the capabilities of and the differences among Special Operations Task Units. Thus, the SOTU of the SOU includes command and control, combat, and combat service support elements. From this starting point, the combat unit has the following capabilities:

- planning and conducting special operations in hostile environments, either independently or as an integral part of a larger formation, with other military and security structures or allied or host nation forces;
- conducting the full spectrum of special operations, depending on special approvals;
- deployment and redeployment within planned time frames, all classes of supply included;
- ground, air or water infiltrating and exfiltrating;
- conducting special operations in remote areas or hostile environments for a longer period of time and with the minimal external support;
- performing tasks in subgroups;
- day/night reconnaissance and target control, carrying out control in vehicles and on foot;
- carrying out limited attacks from a distance using sniper weapons and man-pack explosive devices;
- performing manoeuvre operations employing tactical means of transportation and collective support weapons;
- terminal guidance operations;
- developing, organising, training and advising or guiding military and/or paramilitary host nation forces – with attached translation capabilities.

The complexity of tasks and the conditions in which SOU members operate necessitates different equipment from that of other units. Owing to the various forms and circumstances of operations, SOU members have several special purpose kits and armaments.

4 EFFECTS BASED OPERATIONS CONCEPT

The concept of *Effects-Based Operations* (EBO) was introduced in the U.S. air forces at the tactical level during the First Gulf War. It refers to the planning and conducting of combat operations by combining military and non-military methods to achieve effects. The concept was developed to take advantage of the significant progress in military technology and tactics, whereby the commander's purpose could be achieved causing minimal collateral damage and posing minimal risk to their own forces (Batschlet, 2002).

The concept was later tested at the strategic and operational levels, but was officially dropped from common usage due to different interpretations and owing to the belief that it gives the commanders a false sense of predictability (Mattis, 2008). It was replaced by the *Comprehensive Approach Concept*. According to many critics (Vego, 2006; Mattis, 2008; Riper, 2009; see also Smolej, 2011), the concept is useful especially in terms of targeting at the tactical level. Despite being no longer used at the higher levels of command, the concept still presents a useful tool for goal achievement at the tactical level. On the basis of large amounts of intelligence, special operations forces have more leeway in target identification processes, especially where the EBO concept is used to guide their operations in terms of achieving specific effects.

This usually means that in practice, commanders of SOF units primarily focus on asymmetrical battlefield targets for which they have sufficient, quality intelligence⁶. These targets can be covertly monitored and controlled (Small Footprint) by the commanders themselves, and neutralised with great precision at a selected moment. On the other hand, lower tactical unit commanders of conventional forces mainly use their forces to show the force in order to deter the enemy from its intentions (Big Footprint). Upon coming across the enemy⁷ in the conduct of their missions, they will try to keep contact with it and destroy it with reinforcement (Figure 4).

Figure 4: The difference between the Concept of Operations for Special Forces and Conventional Forces



⁶ In our opinion, so-called anti-head operations can be controversial and counterproductive if carried out in a careless manner, since it may give an additional spur to insurgency. This is also reflected in the case of the transfer of General Petraeus's strategy from Iraq to Afghanistan, which has not brought the desired effects (see also Svete, Guštin, Črnčec, 2011).

⁷ Physical contact of intelligence.

The effects should be examined from two perspectives: at the tactical level, the effect is primarily associated with damage caused to the enemy. At the operational level, the effect is assessed in terms of wider impacts on a certain geographical and social environments.

Smith (2006) observes that future conflicts and engagements will take place between civilian populations. However, the main actors of conflict will include differently organised forms⁸ rather than countries and their armed forces. The operations of their armed forces following conventional military principles will bring unnecessary casualties and further resistance.

A military operation may be successful in tactical terms, but its performance might be counterproductive at the operational level. This means the loss of trust, and failure to achieve centres of gravity⁹.

This is often the case in counter-insurgency (COIN), in which the enemy's operation primarily depends on local support (Celeski, 2005). Thus, military operations¹⁰ that have otherwise been successful at the tactical level might shift the focus of sympathy to the enemy. This is due to side effects among the civilian population and on civilian infrastructure, or due to disapproval of local communities, which, at the operational level, demands much more effort and time to create a secure environment.

For the reasons stated above, the motto of SOF combat operations is: *“Think operationally, act tactically”*. It should be stressed that in counter-insurgency operations special operations forces (in comparison with the conventional ones which primarily perform kinetic operations¹¹ (Smith, 2008)), should primarily perform non-kinetic operations. This means that they can perform tasks related to psychological operations, civil-military cooperation and military assistance to achieve their goals. The U.S. special operations forces rediscovered the concept of *“Village Stability Operations”* (VSO) in 2009, which had been employed during the Vietnam War. The main feature of this concept is that minor groups of special operations forces are accommodated in key villages or settlements and as good neighbours, they help local communities in solving their problems. This help can vary from the provision of a

⁸ *In this context, we can come across a network organization of terrorists/enemies that could also be characterized as organizational asymmetry. Organizational symmetry has always played an important role in the history of warfare. Innovations gave the actors a great advantage, even if they had no technological or other advantages. Similarly, Svete argues that “... governmental institutions will face network-organized non-state opponents rather than hierarchically-organized ones as is the case with the majority of governmental institutions in the area of national security (2007, p. 13).*

⁹ *Terrorists/insurgents/enemies attack people who are the point of focus (POF), whereby their tactical operation creates a strategic impact. The Centres of Gravity (COG) are defined as features, capabilities or sites, from which a country, alliance, military force or other group draw from the freedom of their actions, physical strength or the will to fight. These points exist at the tactical, operational and strategic levels and represent the centre of power or operation, on which everything depends. They are also the point where all the energy is focused to achieve the objective. From this point arises the enemy forces' ability, power, and will. Their destruction or neutralisation brings a decisive advantage and victory.*

¹⁰ *Successful in terms of linear battlefields, whereby the main goal is to cause damage to the enemy.*

¹¹ *The term ‘Kinetic Operation’ refers to combat operations, where physical strength is used.*

secure environment to assistance in establishing local self-government¹² and critical infrastructure which is important for the normal functioning of a social environment. One of the key tasks of Special Forces units operating this way in Afghanistan is to establish a link between local self-government and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA).¹³

The EBO concept is important for the SOU in that it dictates the contents of the training process with regard to other SAF units. This training process has to refer both to the individuals and the unit. The SOF units must have greater generic capabilities for obtaining intelligence, and more robust analytical processing capabilities to operate in accordance with the EBO concept. Moreover, they have to be adaptive, since special operations units (being small in terms of personnel) may have a wider spectrum of capabilities, even in comparison with larger conventional units. This should be, among other things, a result of the selection procedures for manning these units, for they ensure manning with competent personnel (see Spulak, 2007, p. 20).

5 CONFIRMATION OF HYPOTHESIS

According to NATO doctrines of joint special operations forces, their development and equipping, all armed forces must have their special operations forces verified and tested.

Since 2004, the SOU has participated in international operations in which the SAF completes practical tests of its doctrinal solutions. Thus, the SOU was the first SAF unit to perform tasks in Afghanistan, Chad, the Lebanon and Iraq under NATO, EU and UN operations.

It should be noted that the SOU's tasks in Afghanistan are primarily tasks of military assistance (from 7 SVNKON ISAF–OMLT¹⁴, NTM–I¹⁵) and partly reconnaissance operations (e.g. Afghanistan SVNKON 1 and 2 ISAF, SVNKON 1 UNIFIL in Lebanon, SVNKON 1 in Althea, and SVNKON 1 in Chad). The SOU also conducted combat search and rescue (Afghanistan SVNKON 1 and 2 ISAF) and information operations (INFOOPS, SVNKON 11 ISAF) in Afghanistan. The SOU has not participated in any direct actions, due mainly to the type of tasks undertaken by the SAF, and national caveats. Despite the fact that the SOU has not participated in direct actions, it has gained valuable experience and proved itself in the most demanding of environments. Modern special operations forces increasingly give attention to tasks related to military assistance and special reconnaissance, including human

¹² Especially in terms of local security services.

¹³ For more, see the above mentioned book that analyses counter-insurgency operations of the occupation forces in Slovenian territory during World War II.

¹⁴ Despite all the merits of the SVNKON 14 ISAF which started to mentor the Afghan National Army battalion in 2010, it should be pointed out that the SOU had already provided training to the Afghan National Army in 2006. The SOU members also provided training to the Iraqi Armed Forces during the NTM–I mission in 2006.

¹⁵ NTM – I: NATO Training Mission – Iraq.

intelligence. As stated by Paternus (2010, p. 64), the ISAF operation is a test of readiness and training level, not only that of the SOU, but also of the Slovenian Armed Forces as a whole, which was participating in military operations outside of South Eastern Europe for the first time. In addition, operation in a desert environment more than 6,000 km away presents an enormous professional and logistical challenge, both for the SOU members, as well as the Slovenian Armed Forces. In a comparison analysis of NATO's SOF units in the military operation *Enduring Freedom*, Paternus (2010) identified comparability with SOU ISAF tasks, which included:

- long range reconnaissance and intelligence operations,
- combat search and rescue operations,
- search and destruction of arms and ammunition caches and
- the training of allied force members.

Lessons learned from the tasks performed by SVNKON 1 and 2 ISAF indicate the ability of the SOU to operate in accordance with NATO standards (e.g. AJP 3.5). Given the complexity and effectiveness of the tasks and a record of no incidents or injuries, Paternus (2010) observed that the SOU's members were properly equipped, trained and prepared for special operations. His findings were also supported by SVNKON 14 and 15 ISAF – OMLT operations, which included the participation of SOU members.

In the NTM–I operation, SOU members trained Iraqi security forces members through military assistance. Their tasks were performed at the Iraqi military academy in Al Rustamiyah and were similar to those of SVNKON 7 ISAF – OMLT members, whereby the provision of security presented an even greater challenge. Despite the cultural differences between the members of the Afghan and Iraqi security forces, SOU members demonstrated an adequate level of cultural awareness and the ability to operate in a foreign cultural and social environment, which is one of the fundamental features of special operations forces.

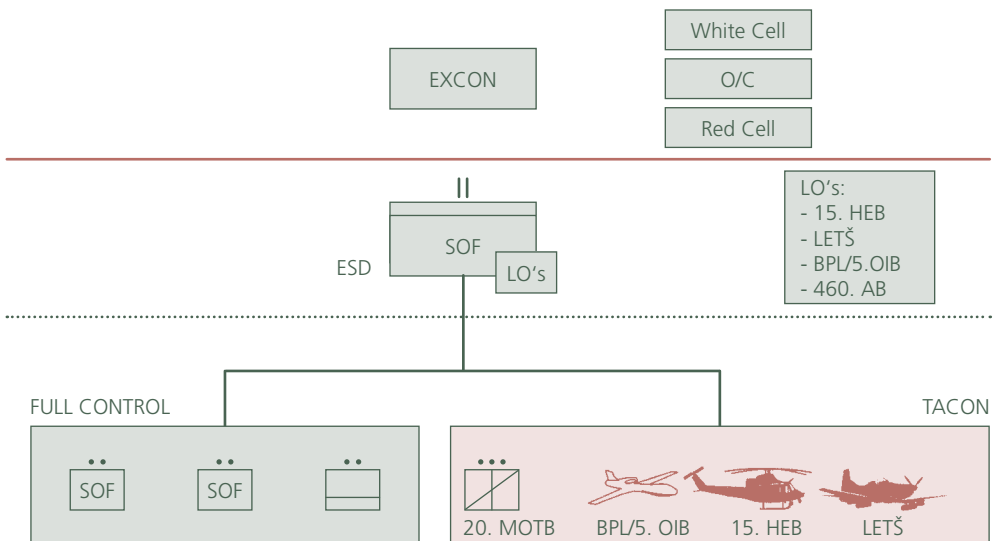
The SOU gained similar experience in CAR / Chad and UNIFIL operations while deployed in remote and rough desert areas. The tasks performed by the members for brigade-level units could be characterized as special reconnaissance as they operated in light armoured vehicles. The level of self-supply was high, which is significant given the ISAF operation. A great challenge was off-road vehicles which require a larger radius, a desert environment, while the protection against improvised explosive devices (IED) was of lesser significance, at least in operations in Chad. Both operations, although under the EU and UN auspices, have confirmed the concepts of unit training as regards the task accomplishment. The doctrinal and conceptual solutions, arising from the SVS STANAG 2523(1) proved to be appropriate for these operations.

The entire scope of tasks (direct actions, special reconnaissance and military assistance), for which the SOU is trained, has been tested in tactical exercises as well.

Thus, training and exercises are conducted prior to their use in real combat in order to test the theoretical concepts and solutions. The SOU tested its conceptual solutions and capabilities for the implementation of mission essential tasks at the *RIS 2011 Tactical Exercise*.

Its main purpose was to test the SOU Special Operations Task Unit (SOTU) while conducting special operations in support of counter-insurgency operations. They operated in the asymmetric battlefield conditions in which the SAF's ISAF units in Afghanistan have currently been deployed. Another purpose of the exercise was to test SOTU's capabilities for joint combat operations (Figure 5). This produces synergistic effects ($1 + 1 = 3$) which enable Special Forces to have relative superiority (McRaven, 1995) in space and time over a numerically stronger enemy.

Figure 5: Force Organisation of the RIS 2011 Exercise Elements



Conclusion International operations as well as at the RIS 2011 tactical exercise have proved the SOU to be a highly trained unit and the elite of SAF combat operations units. The unit has tested and confirmed, in practice and on exercise, the capability of conducting special operations and **combat joint operations** in support of COIN operations in asymmetric battlefield conditions, in which the SAF's ISAF units have currently been operating. Furthermore, by verifying its capabilities in practice, the SOU has shown that the proposed theoretical concepts and solutions underlying its operation are correct and feasible. It reaffirmed its commitment to excellence and exceeding the standards. The sayings such as the quality is more important than the quantity; a man with his knowledge and experience is more important than his equipment; and members of special forces cannot be trained in a short time, even if this be necessary, have proved true again.

The Republic of Slovenia has committed itself to have developed and prepared the SOTU, represented by the Special Operations Unit in accordance with the SAF's development plans within force goals by 2012. The SOU has achieved its goal within the limits of its competence and capabilities. This is confirmed by deployments in international operations, exercises and the personal experience of authors. For complete integration into NATO's special operations forces, it is necessary to determine the framework nation. This important issue, however, lies outside the SOU's competence.

A systematic and comprehensive approach to the establishment of the SOU provides capabilities for the SAF's special operations forces and special national and security objectives for the Republic of Slovenia. The training and equipping of special operations units is a long-term process, which should be given enough attention by the state and the armed forces in terms of the provision of human and material resources.

Specialized training, the ability to perform covert operations, high accuracy to achieve collateral damage reduction, and great flexibility in facing different sources of threat are but a few of the features that highlight the role and importance of the Special Forces units of the armed forces. Having such characteristics, the unit can be used to fulfil the obligations of the Republic of Slovenia towards NATO's collective defence system, and ensure international security in international operations and on UN missions when no other SAF units and capabilities can be employed. At the same time, the Republic of Slovenia acquires capabilities for the country's defence and operations in specific crisis situations¹⁶ of counter-terrorism activity in the Republic of Slovenia.

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