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Special Operations and International Relations

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Abbreviations

SOF Special Operations Forces

MARSOC United States Marine Forces Special operations command

DEVGRU Naval Special Warfare Development Group (Seal Team Six)

DEA Drug Enforcement Agency

NPT Non-proliferation Treaty

Intro

Militaries are instruments used for preservation of security as well as for the pursuit of national security interests. Militaries have been used since the dawn of time for these types of objectives, and they have quite significantly shaped the world today. Militaries and conflict are a natural part and a constant aspect of human history and to overlook the impact of militaries from a political, social, cultural, and historical level among many others, would be a grave misstep when trying to understand the world and international relations today. There are groups within almost every military in the world that specialize in the completion of objectives that are of the highest priority. These groups are specifically selected, trained, and outfitted to endure the most complex, high risk, and surgical operations encountered by their respective governments. The US encountered many of these situations and objectives as one of the leading superpowers in the world. Our Special operations forces or SOF units are some of the bests in the world for these levels of missions. Units like Delta Force and the Seals are just a few of these specialized groups but will be discussed primarily within this paper along with relevant case studies in order to dive into the impact that these units have on international relations and world governments. These units are often kept in the shadows of the military industrial complex due to the high-profile missions. However, through this paper light will be shed on the scope that these units' impact the global stage. These units are not publicized but the consequences of their successes and failures are felt in numerous ways throughout the world.

Background

The United States military is the biggest military and has the biggest defense budget in the world. It is the most well-equipped, arguably most well-trained, and well-funded military known to man. Within the United States military there are specialized groups known as Special Operations forces or SOF units. This title encompasses units in every branch of the military and includes many different classifications and specializations. For example, Navy Seals, Army Rangers, MARSOC, Delta Force, Green berets, Air Force PJs, are all examples of United

States SOF Units that all have unique capabilities when deployed throughout the world. Within these there are even more specialized groups such as Seal Team Six or DEVGRU, and Delta Force. These two will be specifically talked about in this paper due to their relevance to the case studies discussed.

DEVGRU also known as Seal Team Six is an even more elite group chosen from all the other seal teams within the navy. They go through extremely tough qualification and training courses to be considered and eventually selected for the team, which participates in some of the most dangerous and critical missions given by the US military. These missions consist of assassinations, rescues, reconnaissance etc. In this paper, the Bin Laden raid will be discussed, which was carried out by operators from Seal Team Six. They are one of the most elite fighting forces on the planet and within the US military.

Delta Force is an even more specialized group that takes operators from DEVGRU and other special operations units and puts them through another qualification and training period designed to create the most elite fighting force in the US military. What sets Delta apart from DEVGRU is that the government denies the existence of Delta.¹ Delta is not normally talked about on the same level as Seal Team Six. It is designed like that for a reason. Delta Force's missions are meant to be kept under the radar, which is why the government does deny its existence. This is partially to instill a fear in the enemy and also to protect the lives of the operators themselves.² Delta originated as a hostage rescue force (not a hostage negotiation force). Their specialties lie in getting in, neutralizing/securing the target, getting out, and killing anyone in the way. They have branched out into more mission types such as hunting SCUD missiles in Iraq during the era of Saddam Hussein and security for high-ranking officials valuable to the United States.³ Their specialties are very much similar to that of DEVGRU in the

¹ Tim Dyhouse, "Delta Force: Secret Wielders of Death." *VFW* 89, no. 7 (March 2002), 16. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mth&AN=6386062&site=ehost-live>.

² Dyhouse, "Delta Force: Secret Wielders of Death," 16.

³ Dyhouse, "Delta Force: Secret Wielders of Death." 16.

sense that mission success is nonnegotiable, and death will be coming to those who stand in the way of these operators and their mission.

What makes SOF units so different and tactically advantageous is their ability to not be confined to a specific set of parameters. SOF units have the unique ability to infiltrate and execute their mission successfully in virtually any condition and circumstances due to their extremely high levels of training, mission readiness, experience, and physical and mental toughness.⁴ Due to their smaller numbers than conventional military, SOF Units have the ability to go deep behind enemy lines and perform highly critical missions, in highly adverse circumstances without detection.⁵ Another thing that separates SOF from conventional military is the ability to affect the political domain in unique ways. They do this through things like pre-crisis action. Security and politics go hand in hand. If issues can be handled before they become a problem for the US, then it obviously creates a much better and safer environment. This action is mostly only possible through SOF units due to their small scale and because these units do not threaten the legitimacy or disrupt the legitimacy of sovereign states.⁶ With a conventional military, pre-crisis and particularly post crisis intervention both create a bad environment for the sovereign state that essentially is being invaded with thousands of troops and military supplies. With the use of SOF, countries, particularly the US are able to mitigate these negative actions and ensure the security of the United States or whatever other country is involved with the case.⁷

In order to more fully grasp the influence that SOF units have on the global stage, some examples must be investigated. Within this paper, the cases of the Bin Laden raid, the Iraqi SCUD hunt, and the takedown of the Medellin Cartel and Pablo Escobar will be looked at

⁴ Cory M Peterson, "The Use of Special Operations Forces in Support of American Strategic Security Strategies." *FAOA Journal of International Affairs* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2013), 25. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mth&AN=93247509&site=ehost-live>.

⁵ Peterson, "The Use of Special Operations Forces," 24.

⁶ Peterson, "The Use of Special Operations Forces," 26.

⁷ Peterson, "The Use of Special Operations Forces," 26.

through the lens of how special operations forces influenced not only immediate actors within these cases but also secondary and even tertiary actors outside the case that might be overlooked.

The Bin Laden Raid

Osama bin Laden was one of the most notorious figures from the twentieth and twenty-first century, especially when it comes to the history of the United States with 9/11. He made an impact on modern history that has had irreversible effects and has caused enormous amounts of pain and death all across the world. As the leader of Al Qaeda during his life, Bin Laden amassed a massive following that stretched throughout the middle east. His followers were devoted and prepared to sacrifice their own lives for the cause of Bin Laden and Al Qaeda which was seen in not only the attacks on the twin towers but also attacks post and prior to 9/11.

In regard to the United States, Bin Laden was the cause of one of the most tragic events to ever occur on American soil. He directly and indirectly affected millions of people's lives in the attacks and the actions that followed including the beginning of the war on terror and everything that comes along with that. Bin Laden started a war that would take millions of lives, displace millions of people, and destroy millions of livelihoods throughout the world, primarily the Middle East. Bin Laden's primary mission was to destroy the US and Israel and get the United States to withdraw armies from Palestine. He believed that with the attacks on 9/11 that his goal would be achieved due to it being as he claimed a "decisive blow" that would cause the people of the United States to revolt against the US government.⁸ The attack had the opposite reaction, and started a war that Bin Laden did not calculate for. The war not only caused Bin Laden to go into hiding for the remainder of his life, but it also heavily affected Al Qaeda as an organization.

⁸ Nelly Lahoud, "Bin Laden's Catastrophic Success: Al Qaeda Changed the World--but Not in the Way It Expected." *Foreign Affairs* 100, no. 5 (September 2021), 10–21.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mth&AN=151995945&site=ehost-live>.

When the US went into Afghanistan to hunt down Bin Laden and topple the Taliban regime, it prohibited both from effectively rebuilding and reorganizing.⁹ Bin Laden changed the world, but it was not in the way that he expected. He expected to start a revolution and reinstate the Umma as the primary authority over the world. He expected to do this by attacking the US.¹⁰ However, he started a war that would change the shape of the Middle East and the world.

Bin Laden after 9/11 was the most wanted man on the planet until he was killed by Seal Team Six in a raid at one of Bin Laden's compounds in Pakistan.¹¹ The Bin Laden raid is one of the most well-known missions carried out by Seal Team Six primarily due to the status of the target. The raid occurred in May of 2011 when Seal Team Six infiltrated a compound in Palestine that was housing the Al Qaeda Leader. The operation took months of planning and surveillance from multiple different sources primarily being used by the CIA.¹² Any information or discussion about the whereabouts of Bin Laden and the plans to kill him were virtually top secret, with only about 6-8 people knowing any sort of information regarding the topic. It stayed like this until the mission was executed and completed.¹³ There was much debate within the White House when deciding what to do regarding killing Bin Laden. Drone strikes, the use of bombs, and the use of SOF units were all on the table. However, the implementation of the Seals would allow a confirmation on Bin Laden being ID'd, along with the preservation of life regarding the over 20 women and children living in the compound with Bin Laden. A raid by the Seals would also allow evidence to be taken that could help with the destruction of Al Qaeda further down the road.¹⁴ The evidence of why the Seals were a better fit for the operation is

⁹ Lahoud, "Bin Laden's Catastrophic Success,".

¹⁰ Lahoud, "Bin Laden's Catastrophic Success,".

¹¹ Colin A Ross, "A Psychological Profile of Osama Bin Laden." *Journal of Psychohistory* 42, no. 4 (Spring 2015), 310.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ahl&AN=101982352&site=ehost-live>.

¹² Graham Allison, "How It Went Down." *TIME Magazine* 179, no. 18 (May 7, 2012), 34–41.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mth&AN=74680848&site=ehost-live>.

¹³ Allison, "How It Went Down,".

¹⁴ Allison, "How It Went Down."

another example of why the use of SOF units is so important due to their unique capabilities. The raid in its entirety lasted 40 minutes. There were a total of 4 enemy casualties including Bin Laden and Bin Laden's son and zero US casualties.¹⁵ The Seals flew in by helicopter, breached the compound, killed Bin Laden's son at the top of a staircase within the compound, searched and located Bin Laden, shot him twice in the face, gathered the evidence needed (including the body of Bin Laden) ,and exited before Pakistani authorities were aware of the unit's presence. The execution of the operation was flawless and could not have been completed better, from a tactical standpoint, which considering the importance of the target is a substantial feat.¹⁶

This operation had effects that shaped the world in a multitude of ways. Some of these main ways were the implications within Al Qaeda organizationally, relations between the US and Pakistan, relations between Pakistan, and India, and within international relations.

With the death of bin Laden, there were implications within Al Qaeda. The death of a prominent leader in any organization has an effect. Al Qaeda is no different. There is a debate on how much of an effect he did have at the time of his death; whether his role within the organization was more inspirational or operational, is the main question.¹⁷ Many believe that his role was still of the operational type. It was believed that with his death and the seizure of documents and electronic data the demise of Al Qaeda would be able to be facilitated. It was believed that with Bin Laden's death, infighting would occur between core leaders as well as a lack of cohesion with affiliate groups and the lack of new recruits.¹⁸ Bin Laden helped to facilitate and orchestrate the plans and goals of Al Qaeda and bring the leaders together; however, with his death came an absence that could not be replaced in the same way. According to some analysts, Ayman Al Zawahiri was supposed to be the next leader of Al

¹⁵ Sean D Naylor, "A Triumph for JSOC." *Army Times* 71, no. 44 (May 16, 2011), 1–6.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mth&AN=60717888&site=ehost-live>.

¹⁶ Naylor, "A Triumph for JSOC,".

¹⁷ J. Rollins, "*Osama bin Laden's Death: Implications and Considerations*," 5.

¹⁸ Rollins, J. "*Osama bin Laden's Death: Implications and Considerations*," 5.

Qaeda; however, his leadership was contested and viewed unfavorably among the other core leaders within the organization.¹⁹ This power struggle could also be further exacerbated if more core leaders were to be arrested, captured, or killed. The killing of Bin Laden also showed the capability of the US and the west to find and destroy these leaders and also might have encouraged the further targeting of these leaders if their deaths had a negative effect on Al Qaeda and affiliate groups.²⁰

The effect on Pakistan is also significant due to Bin Laden being killed within Pakistan. The main issue is the relationship between Pakistan and the US. Pakistan had no role in the raid that killed Bin Laden, which has led many within the US and world governments to doubt the authenticity in which Pakistan speaks on stopping Al Qaeda.²¹ Bin Laden was located deep within Pakistan with seemingly no one knowing about it. This raises many questions on whether Pakistan was somehow involved with hiding Bin Laden or whether they were completely incompetent in finding out that he was living in their country for an extended period of time.²² After the death of Bin Laden, Pakistan still viewed it as a victory or at least claimed it as a victory. Even with the distrust between the nations, cutting ties with Pakistan would not be productive in the US goals for the destruction of Al Qaeda. Pakistan is one of the few countries within the Middle East that helps to facilitate The United States efforts to fight extremism. The US and Pakistan have a partnership where the US helps the political, economic, and security circumstances of Pakistan and the US is given aid in fighting Al Qaeda. This aid is necessary to the US. Even with the strain in the relationship, the whole dilemma involving Bin Laden is one that is being overlooked in order to keep the goals of destroying Al Qaeda on the horizon.²³

¹⁹ Inkster, Nigel. "The Death of Osama Bin Laden." *Survival (0039-6338)* 53, no. 3 (June 2011): 5–10. doi:10.1080/00396338.2011.586182.

²⁰ Rollins, J. "Osama bin Laden's Death: Implications and Considerations," 5.

²¹ Jeff Stein, "Killing the Next Bin Laden." *Newsweek Global* 168, no. 16 (May 5, 2017), 12–16. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mth&AN=122700343&site=ehost-live>.

²² Rollins, J. "Osama bin Laden's Death: Implications and Considerations," 7.

²³ Rollins, J. "Osama bin Laden's Death: Implications and Considerations," 8.

The death of Bin Laden has also affected the relations between Pakistan and India. India and Pakistan are historic rivals and with the death of Bin Laden came the claims from India stating that terrorists were finding refuge within Pakistan. India also claimed that Pakistan was compliant with these types of characters. India is in the process of peace talks with Pakistan and those seemingly will not be completely interrupted; however, they are made more complicated.²⁴ India also took advantage of this situation to press the issue of Pakistan turning in the terrorists involved in the attacks in Mumbai along with other terrorists that are anti-India said to be seeking refuge within Pakistan.

Within international relations as a whole, the death of Bin Laden did make a statement for the whole world. With the success of the raid, came the showcasing of the United States' ability through SOF units to destroy targets of mass importance in such a clean and efficient manner. It also showed that the United States was capable of making progress in the demise of terrorism. With the death of Bin Laden, along with core leaders of Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups afterward, the United States was able to emphasize the capability that the military did have in fighting these terrorist organizations.

Delta Force and Middle East

Special forces units are no stranger to the Middle East. There are many different cases and scenarios that can be looked at when discussing the effect of special operations on the global stage and international relations. They have been used extensively by both US and foreign militaries and have been an integral part in shaping and controlling conflicts in the Middle East. The era of Saddam Hussein and Iraq was one that was complex and has had a very significant impact on the Middle East. The use of SOF units throughout this era had many different effects both directly, indirectly, and preemptively. During this time, tensions between

²⁴ Rollins, J. "Osama bin Laden's Death: Implications and Considerations," 12.

Iraq, Israel, and the rest of the Middle East were rising due to the introduction and uncertainty of the nuclear presence particularly in the context of Israel.

Israel at this time did not acknowledge and in fact actively denied the existence of nuclear weapons. However, experts consistently found this to be false through a number of different tactics. Because of the nuclear presence within Israel, this persuaded other neighboring countries including Iraq to acquire and develop nuclear weapons in the case that a physical conflict was to break out.²⁵ The threat of the use of nuclear weapons was something that was on the forefront of minds within the realm of international relations. The state of mind of Saddam Hussein was also something that was put into question when discussing this topic. Iraq was a signatory member of the NPT however it was only in name.²⁶ The desire for nuclear weapons was very clear from Iraq due to the perceived threat from Israel. After the Osirak Attack by Israel on Iraq's nuclear reactors Iraq did gain technological support by the west for a legitimate nuclear program. However, this support was later regretted due to Hussein's rapid progress towards developing what was found to be a nuclear bomb.²⁷ The attack by Israel was a driving factor for Hussein's increased development in his nuclear program. The attack emboldened him and gave him more cause to believe that Israel was indeed a threat.²⁸ Hussein also said in many different interviews that the attacks were expected. He discussed the same thoughts in secret meetings as in televised interviews and he believed that these attacks were not unexpected from Israel.²⁹ For Hussein, the occurrence of conflict was only a matter of time and there was seemingly no peace to be discussed between Iraq and Israel.

²⁵ Michele Martin, "The Changing Role of the United Nations: Halting Nuclear Proliferation in Iraq," *Dickinson Journal of International Law* 10, no. 3 (Spring 1992), 487.

²⁶ Martin, "The Changing Role of the United Nations," 488.

²⁷ Martin, "The Changing Role of the United Nations," 489.

²⁸ Sadot, Uri. "Osirak and the Counter-Proliferation Puzzle." *Security Studies* 25, no. 4 (October 2016), 650. doi:10.1080/09636412.2016.1220206.

²⁹ Sadot, "Osirak and the Counter-Proliferation Puzzle," 663.

Countries throughout the world attempted to contain and restrain the growth of nuclear weapons through various means such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the International Atomic Energy Agency. Iraq signed the NPT which was a step taken by the international community to help relieve tension. However, in actuality the development of nuclear and chemical weapons was still occurring within Iraq.³⁰ Especially with the Osirak attack, Hussein's nuclear development increased dramatically.³¹ To help keep an eye on the status of Iraq's nuclear program, the UN sent in multiple investigation teams in order to find and dispose of these weapons. Teams meet a variety of responses most of which were on the side of noncompliance.³² At one point, a team was held hostage for around 92 hours until they were released following the threat of military action by President Bush.³³ These investigative teams did find evidence of nuclear weapons development. They found in multiple facilities large amounts of dangerous materials and other technology used to create nuclear weapons.³⁴ As the teams searched, they found many other things such as documents with encoded titles that all related to a nuclear program. Evidence was also found that pointed to the development of a hydrogen bomb.³⁵ A list of suppliers was found which pointed to many western companies as helping supply Saddam Hussein with the technology needed to further his nuclear program.³⁶ While these countries were not supplying direct ingredients for a nuclear bomb, the technology and equipment to create these ingredients were supplied by companies in almost every western country. Germany for example supplied gas centrifuges which are required in uranium enrichment.³⁷ The international community also did not detect the amount of money being

³⁰ Martin, "The Changing Role of the United Nations," 497.

³¹ Martin, "The Changing Role of the United Nations," 664.

³² Walzer, Michael. "No Strikes." *New Republic* 227, no. 14 (September 30, 2002), 20.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mth&AN=7373203&site=ehost-live>.

³³ Martin, "The Changing Role of the United Nations," 509.

³⁴ Walzer, "No Strikes," 20.

³⁵ Martin, "The Changing Role of the United Nations," 502.

³⁶ Martin, "The Changing Role of the United Nations," 504.

³⁷ Martin, "The Changing Role of the United Nations," 504.

moved around within Iraq. Hussein had allocated around \$10 billion dollars' worth of oil revenue and pushed it into research for his nuclear program.³⁸

The history of this era goes to show the state of mind of Hussein and the very real threat to the Middle East and the world that Iraq was. Almost all his dealings regarding his nuclear agenda were deceitful and his progress towards building a bomb was building.³⁹ The United States did many things in this era, one of them being sending in special forces units to help prevent a possible catastrophe that could occur. The SOF unit Delta Force and the British SAS (A British special forces unit) were deployed to hunt down and destroy Hussein's SCUD missiles aimed at Israel.⁴⁰ Both SOF units split up the Arab desert in search for these SCUD launch sites. Through trial and error, the operators were able to locate and destroy some of these launch sites through airstrikes.⁴¹ While not all of these missiles were destroyed and some were fired, the presence and relative success of the foreign SOF units in the region was enough to help deter Israel from retaliating. The idea that the world's most elite military units were focused on securing the SCUD threat was enough to put Israel slightly more at ease.⁴² The quote below is from General Downing who was a former assistant to the president on counterterrorism.

"I know that SOF took out six to eight Scuds, mostly by using SOF helicopters operating 250 miles behind enemy lines and guiding in airstrikes. A couple of Scuds were destroyed by antitank missiles launched by the teams. In the after-action reports, one sergeant major described being so close to a Scud launcher that he had his face singed by the explosions ignited by an airstrike he called in." (Downing 2002).⁴³

While there is dispute on certain aspects of the mission, its effectiveness and on the Iraq/Israeli conflict in general, it is undeniable that the use of Delta Force and these other SOF

³⁸ Martin, "The Changing Role of the United Nations," 505.

³⁹ Martin, "The Changing Role of the United Nations," 504.

⁴⁰ Wayne Downing, "The Tip of the Spear." *Newsweek* 140, no. 22 (November 25, 2002), 33. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mth&AN=8516374&site=ehost-live>.

⁴¹ Maj Giberson, "THE GREAT SCUD HUNT: A CASE STUDY IN OPERATIONAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF SOF," *Canada Forces College*, n.d., 3.

⁴² Giberson, "THE GREAT SCUD HUNT," 7.

⁴³ Downing, "The Tip of the Spear," 33.

units to destroy these missiles helped to deter conflict at some level between Iraq and Israel. With the evidence discussed earlier in the paper it is clear the intentions of Hussein and his plans for attacks on Israel. It is also clear of the implications of full out war with Israel. With the nuclear option on the table, the increasing tensions and the declared threats by both sides, conflict would have been detrimental for all sides, the Middle East, and the world. War would have surely broken out and the use of nuclear weapons along with other chemical and biological weapons would have taken many innocent lives. With the use of SOF and the success in this single mission, there is no definitive way to tell what truly was diverted through their actions. However, it can be said with a lot of certainty that these SOF operators did preemptively save a lot of innocent lives. Lives were not just saved from the threat of the missiles themselves but from the consequences of the use of those missiles by Saddam Hussein.

Along with this the international stage was shaped by this event. If war between Israel and Iraq were to occur. International players would have been involved creating an issue that would not have been contained to just the middle east. Iraq during this time had close ties with the Soviet Union, as this all took place within the last years of the cold war conflict in any capacity between the United States and the Soviet Union would not have ended well. This isn't to say that the launch of Hussein's SCUD missiles would have caused WW3, but It is not out of the realm of possibility that these SOF units did prevent a possible catastrophic event. Psychological special forces also were implemented during this time and within the years after to help prevent conflict.⁴⁴ The use of leaflets and radio messages were used to try and help convince soldiers to defect from Hussein's army.⁴⁵ Both uses of these SOF units while didn't have the biggest statistical effect, the certainty had a preemptive effect on the could haves of this conflict. Lives were saved and conflict was mitigated to an extent that won't ever be known

⁴⁴ Downing, "The Tip of the Spear," 33.

⁴⁵ Jennifer Ludden, "Pentagon Wages Information War in Iraq with Leaflets & Broadcasts." *All Things Considered (NPR)*, March 17, 2003.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=n5h&AN=6XN200303172007&site=ehost-live>.

for sure. However, it can be assumed that things could have ended up much worse if these units were not implemented into these regions and if they did not execute their missions in the manner that they did.

South America

South America has a rich history of strife and conflict, many cases of which involve US intervention and some of which involve United States SOF units. From cartels to tyrannical governments, the cases of South America could take up months to completely talk about in their complexity however there are a few cases that stick out more than others when discussing strife within South America. One of these cases is that of Pablo Escobar and the Medellin Cartel.

Pablo Escobar was arguably one of the most notorious drug lords in human history. He was the leader of the Medellin Cartel located in Medellin Colombia. Escobar began his industry selling marijuana throughout the streets of Medellin until he later turned to the cocaine industry. At the height of Escobar's reign, he was making billions of dollars a year from cocaine. He ran around 80% of the cocaine industry to the United States.⁴⁶ Escobar was making so much money from his cocaine business that he had to resort to burying money in farmer's fields because they weren't able to launder or clean the amount of money that was being made.⁴⁷ He was feared throughout Columbia and the world due to his immense wealth, political and social influence, and his wide array of loyal Sicarios or hired guns that were essentially his own small militia dedicated to his service. On top of his Sicarios he also had a loyal following within Columbia, specifically Medellin. While thousands of people were brutally murdered due to Escobar's reign many people back then and even now view him as a hero and a model Colombian citizen. He helped with many social projects that did help a lot of people within Medellin which gave him an even bigger persona and status that some people saw as almost

⁴⁶ Jon Lee Anderson, "The Afterlife of Pablo Escobar." *New Yorker* 94, no. 3 (March 5, 2018), 50–59. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=pwh&AN=128169195&site=ehost-live>.

⁴⁷ Anderson, "The Afterlife of Pablo Escobar,".

god-like. He built houses for the poor, funded restoration projects of football fields, lighting systems, and other civic projects. However, even with the good he did, it in no way outweighs or justifies the bad.⁴⁸ He killed thousands of people including famous politicians, policemen, rival cartel members, and innocent men, women, and children that were unfortunate enough to be found in the middle of it all. Escobar at one point bombed a plane killing hundreds of people including Americans in an attempt to take out a political adversary. The people that Escobar affected were not only contained to that of Colombia and Medellin but throughout the world. Since he ran the vast majority of the cocaine industry, he directly had an impact on the cocaine problem throughout the world. It is no mystery the effect of cocaine on humans. It is overall extremely harmful in the long run and has destroyed millions of lives both directly and indirectly. Escobar's influence was not small, and he certainly negatively affected the lives of millions of people through both his cocaine, and the actions of his Cartel.

With all of this being said Pablo Escobar was a problem and was sought out by both the Colombian government and the United States DEA.⁴⁹ He was a fugitive for seven years bouncing from safe house to safe house as the DEA and Colombian government raided Escobar's facilities.⁵⁰ While on the run Escobar continued his business and also attempted to secure his freedom by killing powerful Colombian politicians and public figures. He did this to try and stop the extradition treaty with the US from passing within the Columbian congress.⁵¹ Eventually he succeeded in achieving this when the Colombian government banned extradition to the US. Shortly afterward, Escobar surrendered under a wide array of conditions relating to his imprisonment. Most of which involved the whereabouts, faculty members, living quarters, security, and some other factors. The prison was essentially run by Escobar and his men and by

⁴⁸ Anderson, "The Afterlife of Pablo Escobar,".

⁴⁹ Anderson, "The Afterlife of Pablo Escobar,".

⁵⁰ Anderson, "The Afterlife of Pablo Escobar,".

⁵¹ Anderson, "The Afterlife of Pablo Escobar,".

normal standards was hardly a prison.⁵² While inside he continued to run his cartel. However, because of this he was charged by Colombian officials with multiple crimes including kidnapping and assassinations. Because of these accusations, the Colombian government sent in the Fourth Brigade to not only reinforce the security of the prison but to also ensure that the prison was controlled properly.⁵³ Through a series of events involving the Colombian army, prison guards, and inmates, Escobar escaped his prison and continued on the run.⁵⁴ After his escape the manhunt for Escobar continued with both the DEA and the Colombian government searching for him.

It was around this point where the United States eventually implemented our own use of SOF units. This operation, like the SCUD Hunt in Iraq, was a preventive operation attempting to help stabilize the regions in Columbia. It was during this time that the Colombian government was fighting other revolutionary groups including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). The Central government failed in providing adequate security measures against these groups which created the United Self Defense Forces of Columbia. All three of these groups turned to the narco traffickers (Primarily Pablo Escobar) in order to provide all the supplies needed to arm and fund themselves.⁵⁵ The United States during the Clinton administration put into place a plan to send in special operations units to train Columbian units in order to create a unit that would be able to effectively counteract that of the Revolutionary groups and the cartels. The United States SOF units were effective in training these Columbian SOF units and the effect was on December 2, 1993, Pablo Escobar was located by this special unit and was later shot and killed on a rooftop near Medellin.⁵⁶

⁵² David P Thompson, "Pablo Escobar, Drug Baron: His Surrender, Imprisonment, and Escape." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 19, no. 1 (January 1996), 61. doi:10.1080/10576109608435996.

⁵³ Thompson, "Pablo Escobar, Drug Baron," 73.

⁵⁴ Thompson, "Pablo Escobar, Drug Baron," 82.

⁵⁵ Peterson, "The Use of Special Operations Forces," 27.

⁵⁶ Anderson, "The Afterlife of Pablo Escobar."

This detail of US SOF units being implemented into the case of Columbia and the cartels can very easily be overlooked. However, its effect and importance are something that cannot be overlooked. The training that these SOF units have provided has decreased cocaine production since 2001 within Columbia 72%.⁵⁷ There has also been a cease in guerrilla organization kidnappings along with an increase in effective peace talks between these groups and the Colombian government since 2012.⁵⁸ On top of all of these, The Columbian SOF forces trained by the US SOF forces are helping to train units in a multitude of other South American countries. This is helping to stabilize their regions and gives these countries the ability to protect their own security interests without heavy investment and even counterinsurgency measures from the US.⁵⁹ All the effects caused by US SOF units listed above are facts, however the indirect effects are something that also should not be overlooked when looking at the effect of these units within international relations. If the statistics are dissected on the decrease in cocaine production, that alone can be seen as saving many lives throughout the world. The number of deaths from not only the use of cocaine directly but also the deaths from all the aspects of trafficking cocaine, should all be put into the equation when looking at the amounts that were possibly saved. With a drop of 72%, there is a serious amount of implied evidence that this action by US SOF units saved an insurmountable number of lives.

A similar thing can be said when looking at the stopping of Kidnapping by these guerrilla groups and increase in peace talks. It is a known fact that with the cease of war comes the cease of death and this case is no exception. The training that these SOF Units provided gave Columbia the ability to decrease and stop the conflict within their country, inevitably saving lives and thus increasing the wellbeing of those engulfed within the conflict.

⁵⁷ Peterson, "The Use of Special Operations Forces," 27.

⁵⁸ Peterson, "The Use of Special Operations Forces," 27.

⁵⁹ Peterson, "The Use of Special Operations Forces," 28.

If the chain reaction is looked at caused by the training by US SOF Units to foreign SOF units, it can be seen that there was a direct effect on international relations through the increase in international security within South America. This training has given these governments and militaries the ability to stabilize and secure their regions of the world. The amount of conflict that has been deterred because of these actions isn't entirely quantifiable. However, the effect should still be considered when looking at the effect of SOF on IR. With all of these direct effects, the implementation of SOF Units within the case of Columbia has been one that's effects can be seen both quantifiably and implicitly. The discrete use of SOF even in an indirect way like described in this case creates effects that impact lives in ways that go unseen by most of the world due to their preventive nature. However, even while it is unseen, the effects are significant.

Tie Together

It has been made clear through all of these case studies that SOF units are a highly valuable asset when it comes to fighting, preventing, and misdirecting war and conflict in a multitude of conditions, circumstances, and scenarios. While the effect that these units have on the world stage and within the context of international relations was previously discussed. It will now be tied together to give a clearer picture on the actual impacts both directly and indirectly that these units and the operations they conduct have on international relations. In order to dive deeper into this topic, the question must first be asked "Why do these units have such a big Impact?". The answer to this question is because of the level of difficulty and the threat level that these targets present to the world. In all the cases described above, each of these targets posed either imminent threats or remote threats. All of which could have come to fruition if not for the actions of these SOF units. Saddam would have most likely started a war with Israel if not for the SCUD hunt, Pablo Escobar would have kept taking lives and ruining lives with his narcotics trade, and Bin Laden would have orchestrated more attacks against the west and kept Al Qaeda in operation. These are just a fraction of the examples that the public knows about.

What makes these SOF units so valuable is their ability to take care of the high-level targets despite the level of danger, stress, and consequences of failure.⁶⁰ While conventional military can be extremely effective and dangerous towards our adversaries, they simply are not equipped to handle what SOF units are designed and trained for?

Another question that must be asked to fully grasp their impact is “What is the scope of their Impact?”. This question is one that cannot be fully grasped due to our obvious lack of not knowing every outcome; however, outcomes of history can be weighed with the probabilities of the future to give good insight on the impact that these units have. For example, in the case of the SCUD Hunt, it can be assumed that if the launching of rockets occurred against Israel, war would break out not only between Israel and Iraq but between the allies of both of those countries, which at that time would have been the United States against the Soviet Union. It can't be said for sure what would have truly happened. However, it can be assumed that the success of Delta within this scenario potentially prevented a significant conflict that could have resulted in a significant number of deaths. Similar analysis can be done for every other scenario regarding SOF. The consequences of their actions also don't have to be reduced down to casualties but also can be seen through policy changes, positive and negative relations between countries, conflict resolution and transformation etc. Their scope of impact goes beyond the battlefield and can be seen anywhere from the courtroom, congress, local government buildings to the common household.⁶¹ The consequences of these operations are like waves that ripple out far from the epicenter that caused the surge itself.

The last question that must be asked when it comes to dissecting the impact of SOF on international relations is “When/will SOF units become obsolete as technology advances?” Sometimes in order to see the true value of something it must be taken away. This is a good place to start when it comes to this question. This question can begin to be answered by looking

⁶⁰ Peterson, “The Use of Special Operations Forces,” 24.

⁶¹ Peterson, “The Use of Special Operations Forces,” 26.

at the Bin Laden case. Discussed in that section were the options that were on the table regarding killing Bin Laden. Ultimately SOF units were chosen because of their unique abilities to be surgical and show discretion during the operation. Neither of these things were on the table when discussing bombs or drones. While technology can advance and get smarter, the Human factor is something that cannot be replaced. If the US had dropped a bomb on Bin Laden's house it would have killed around 20 women and children.⁶² This would not only have been a bad look but also would have negatively impacted the United States standing on the global stage. This would have been the case especially when it comes to decision making and the values promoted and upheld during combat. However, SOF gave the ability to avoid that disaster and still get the job done. While special operations might take on slightly different roles in the future as combat changes. It will always have a place within the arsenal of countries because of the effect it can have on the battlefield and in the political realm of international relations.⁶³

Conclusion

SOF units have a very influential impact on the world stage. It is often overlooked and is often underestimated; however, the consequences of these unit's actions are extremely relevant to the world stage and the state of international relations. The case studies discussed above are just a tiny fraction of the high-profile cases that these units and units alike are a part of. While the entirety of their impact cannot be quantifiably measured, educated estimates along with knowledge from history, all conclude the importance of SOF units. These units shape politics, governments, organizations, prevent wars etc. They do so due to their specialized capabilities that set them aside from conventional military. Their small size, extreme training, mental toughness, specialized tactics, and capabilities allow them to achieve the most critical missions. SOF units are an extremely important tool for countries and militaries alike due to these

⁶² Allison, "How It Went Down,".

⁶³ Peterson, "The Use of Special Operations Forces," 26.

capabilities, and it is through units like these that the objectives and goals of countries are achieved. Through the cases of the killing of Bin Laden, The SCUD hunt within Iraq, and the reign of Pablo Escobar it has been shown how these aspects of SOF come to fruition.

Throughout all these cases, the actions of the various special operations forces have prevented future significant conflict, saved numerous lives, and influenced international relations by encouraging behavior change of the various countries involved in these cases. The actions of these SOF units on an indirect level, highlight weaknesses and expose information within the context of these cases that are significantly influential to international relations. For example, in the case of Columbia, actions by Delta Force influenced the attitudes towards SOF of neighboring countries. Countries throughout South America invested in their own SOF units and capabilities, and it helped to stabilize many different regions and countries throughout South America. Scenarios like this can be found in all other cases involving SOF. The actions of these units are influential on the international stage in ways that often go unseen to the public eye. These units prove to be very beneficial in the pursuit of security and overall national interest. However, their presence and impact will continue to go under the radar because that is the very nature and one of the many purposes of their occupation.

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