

GAO

Briefing Report to the Chairman,
Subcommittee on Investigations,
Committee on Armed Services, House of
Representatives

November 1990

DEFENSE REORGANIZATION

DOD's Efforts to Streamline the Special Operations Command



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National Security and
International Affairs Division

B-240714

November 23, 1990

The Honorable Nicholas Mavroules
Chairman, Subcommittee on Investigations
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As you requested, we reviewed the implementation of recommendations concerning the U. S. Special Operations Command contained in a February 1988 Department of Defense (DOD) task force report entitled Review of Unified and Specified Command Headquarters, commonly referred to as the Vander Schaaf Report. The report recommended, among other things, reducing three separate component command headquarters for special operations. Specifically, you asked that we assess the progress that had been made in reducing the separate Army, Navy, and Air Force component command headquarters and in creating a single integrated Special Operations Command headquarters. You also expressed interest in any other actions taken by the Special Operations Command that would affect the organizational relationships between itself and its components. We briefed members of your staff on the results of our efforts. This letter provides additional details on the matters we discussed.

Results in Brief

Our review showed that:

- The February 1988 task force recommendations have been partially implemented. The Command was given combatant command authority over the special operations forces and special operations schools of all three services as recommended. However, the Secretary of Defense did not accept the recommendation to transfer 231 positions from the service component commands to the Special Operations Command headquarters. Instead, he directed that 34 positions be eliminated from the Command headquarters and component command headquarters.
- Despite the elimination of positions directed by the Secretary of Defense, both Command headquarters and component command headquarters have increased their staffing levels since the report was issued. These increases were due primarily to planned growth, establishment of new organizations within the component commands, and additional duties assumed by the Command.

Background

The Special Operations Command, headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, was established on April 16, 1987, as a unified command to consolidate all continental U.S.-based special operations forces under one commander responsible for carrying out assigned missions.¹ Its primary mission is to support the theater commanders-in-chief by providing combat-ready special operations forces, civil affairs, and psychological operations forces for rapid reinforcement.

The Special Operations Command has three service components: the Army Special Operations Command at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina; the Naval Special Warfare Command in Coronado, California; and the Air Force Special Operations Command at Hurlburt Field, Florida. At the time of DOD's 1988 task force report, the Special Operations Command had combatant command authority over its three service components. However, only the Navy component had been designated a major command under the Special Operations Command. The Army component was part of Forces Command until December 1, 1989, when it was established as a major command under the Special Operations Command. The Air Force component, part of the Military Airlift Command, was designated a major command under the Special Operations Command on May 22, 1990.

When the Command was established, it received combatant command authority over:

- the Army's John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center,
- the Air Force's Special Operations School, and
- the Navy's Special Warfare Center.

Located at Ft. Bragg, the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center develops doctrine and provides training for Army special operations forces. The Air Force Special Operations School, located at Hurlburt Field, prepares selected personnel for unconventional warfare and special operations missions. The Navy school, the Naval Special Warfare Center, provides instruction and training for Navy personnel on special warfare doctrine.

In a memorandum dated December 14, 1987, the Secretary of Defense directed that DOD Deputy Inspector General Vander Schaaf review the unified and specified command headquarters. The primary objective of

¹Unified commands are composed of forces from two or more services.

the review was to reduce staffing levels and overhead costs, giving particular attention to overlapping responsibilities, duplication of functions, and excessive organizational layering. The task force issued its report in February 1988.

The task force identified 1,155 positions associated with Special Operations Command and its component headquarters' functions and recommended transferring 231 positions from the component command headquarters to Command headquarters. No positions were to be eliminated. The report also recommended that Special Operations Command be given operational control² over the services' special operations forces and the associated special operations schools.

Task Force Recommendations Partially Implemented

The task force's recommendation to give the Special Operations Commander combatant command authority over the services' special operations forces has been implemented. U.S.-based special operations forces are now assigned to the Special Operations Commander—approximately 38,000 active, reserve, and National Guard forces. Forces outside the United States come under the command and control of the commander in whose area of operation they are located. The task force recommendation to give the Commander combatant command authority over the services' special operations schools was also implemented.

The Secretary of Defense did not agree to transfer the 231 positions from the component command headquarters to Command headquarters as the task force had recommended. Instead, he directed, in September 1988, that Command headquarters' and component command headquarters' staffs be reduced by 34 positions. The Secretary indicated he was persuaded by a compelling case made by senior military officials that the service components of the unified commands needed to be retained. Command officials agreed with the Secretary's decision to retain the service component commands. They cited the importance of the components in providing the Command with trained personnel for special operations forces and in providing access to service headquarters.

Table 1 shows the Special Operations Command and its major components headquarters' authorized staffing baseline used by the task force, the changes recommended by the task force, and the changes that were directed by the Secretary of Defense.

²Command officials stated that, in this context, operational control is equivalent to combatant command authority.

Table 1: Special Operations Command and Its Major Components Headquarters' Baseline Staff Levels, Proposed Task Force Changes, and DOD-Directed Changes

	Baseline staff levels	Proposed task force changes	DOD-directed staff changes
U.S. Special Operations Command	342	+231	-28
Major components headquarters			
Army	471	-37	-6
Navy	27	-27	0
Air Force	315	-167	0
Total	1,155	0	-34

Command Components Increase Staff Levels

Despite the implementation of the staff reductions directed by the Secretary of Defense in his September 1988 memorandum, staff authorizations at both the Command and its components headquarters' level have increased from 1988 through 1991 as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Special Operations Command and Its Major Components Headquarters Staff Authorizations

	Fiscal year				Change
	1988	1989	1990	1991	1988 to 1991
U.S. Special Operations Command					
Headquarters	241	470	523	573	+332
Support element	101	116	122	122	+21
Subtotal	342	586	645	695	+353
Major components headquarters					
Army	471	471	484	484	+13
Navy	27	81	119	119	+92
Air Force	315	316	446	446	+131
Subtotal	813	868	1,049	1,049	+236
Total	1,155	1,454	1,694	1,744	+589

Initial Command increases were due primarily to planned growth as the Command was becoming established and beginning to assume its missions. Additional growth is associated with added responsibilities such as those involving the Special Operations Research, Development, and Acquisition Center. When formally established, this group will coordinate all acquisition and development efforts for special operations equipment.

Growth in staffing at the component command headquarters level took place primarily in the Navy and Air Force components. Most of the Air Force increases resulted from the upgrade to major component command status, which occurred on May 22, 1990. According to Command

officials, staff increases at the Air Force component command headquarters were needed to perform traditional service responsibilities, such as personnel, comptroller, staffing, information management, and engineering. The Navy increase occurred because the component began with a very small staff, which was increased as the component matured and accepted the additional work load.

Command officials expect no significant future staff increases at the Command headquarters level or at the Army and Navy component command headquarters. However, they expect further growth in staffing at the Air Force component command headquarters to bring it up to full component command status. Command officials believe that the Special Operations Command will have proportionally lower reductions in size than other units as a result of expected DOD budget cuts because the importance of special operations will increase as conventional forces decrease.

Scope and Methodology

We conducted our review primarily at the Special Operations Command headquarters, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. We discussed the Command's implementation of the task force report with Command officials and obtained documents related to changes in authorized staff levels and other aspects of the task force's recommendations. We conducted our review from June through August 1990 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

We did not obtain written agency comments, but we discussed this report with Special Operations Command officials as well as representatives of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and have included their comments where appropriate.

Unless you announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from the date of this letter. At that time, we will send copies to the Chairmen, House Committees on Armed Services, Appropriations, and Government Operations, and the Senate Committees on Armed Services, Appropriations, and Governmental Affairs; the Secretary of Defense; the Director, Office of Management and Budget; and other interested parties. We will make copies available to others upon request.

Please contact me at (202) 275-3990 if you or your staff have any questions concerning this briefing report. Other major contributors to this briefing report are listed in appendix I.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paul L. Jones".

Paul L. Jones
Director,
Defense Force Management Issues

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