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Afghanistan Situation Report



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AFGHANISTAN SITUATION REPORT



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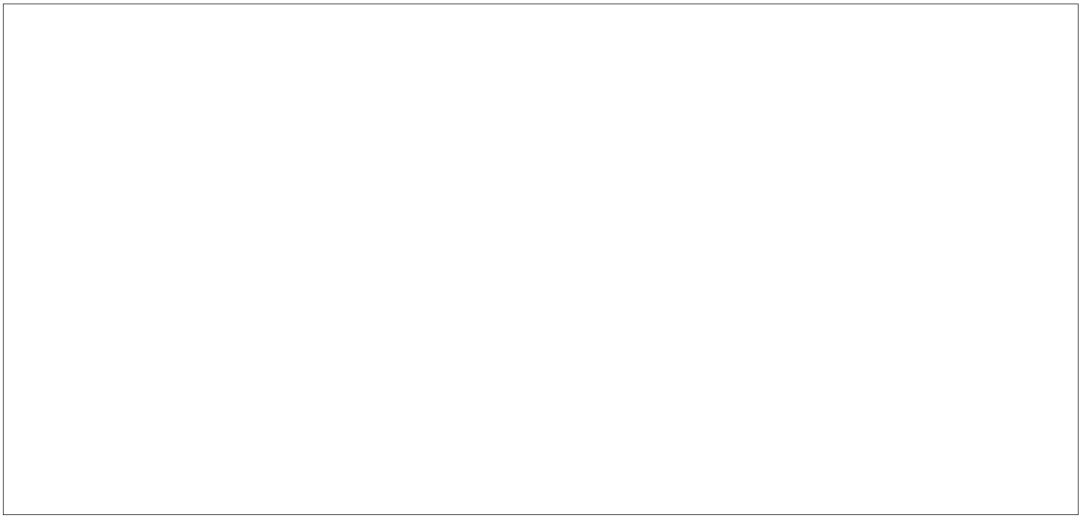
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INSURGENT ACTIVITY AROUND KABUL INCREASES



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Combat operations in Ghazni and on the Shomali Plain ended, but insurgent activity was up in Kabul. 



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IN BRIEF

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PERSPECTIVE

SPECIAL OPERATIONS IN COUNTERGUERRILLA WARFARE: DO THEY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

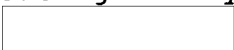


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Special forces and tactics have played an important part in a variety of counterinsurgency campaigns, even though they often comprise only a small fraction of total combat troops. This article provides a historical background for examining and evaluating such forces in the light of their increasing use by the Soviets in Afghanistan. 

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INSURGENT ACTIVITY AROUND KABUL INCREASES



US Embassy reporting indicates that insurgent activity around Kabul increased last week. Several rocket attacks, explosions, and firefights were heard throughout the city. Kabul Airport was shelled twice, according to [redacted] Embassy reports. One stray rocket landed in the US Embassy compound, but only minor damage was reported. In other activity, Soviet and Afghan regime combat operations underway north of Kabul in the Shomali Plain and between Kabul and Ghazni in late January ended and the units were returning to garrison [redacted]

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TROUBLE IN THE NORTHERN TIER (U)

Resistance efforts near Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh Province were set back last year, [redacted] primarily because of a leadership vacuum caused by the death of Jamiat-i-Islami commander Zabiullah Khan. The Soviets captured the insurgents' permanent base camp in the hills surrounding the city, discovered a network of underground bunkers, and also arrested many insurgent sympathizers in the city.

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[redacted] there has been virtually no resistance activity in Baghlan Province during the last three months. The source attributes the apparently successful pacification of the area to severe retaliation by Soviet forces on civilian communities. [redacted]

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Comment: The deterioration in the resistance's position in Balkh demonstrates the degree to which the fortunes of many insurgent groups are dependent on the skills of one leader. Moreover, Panjsher Valley leader Masood will probably have to adjust his plans to establish new units and create new alliances in Balkh and Baghlan. [redacted]

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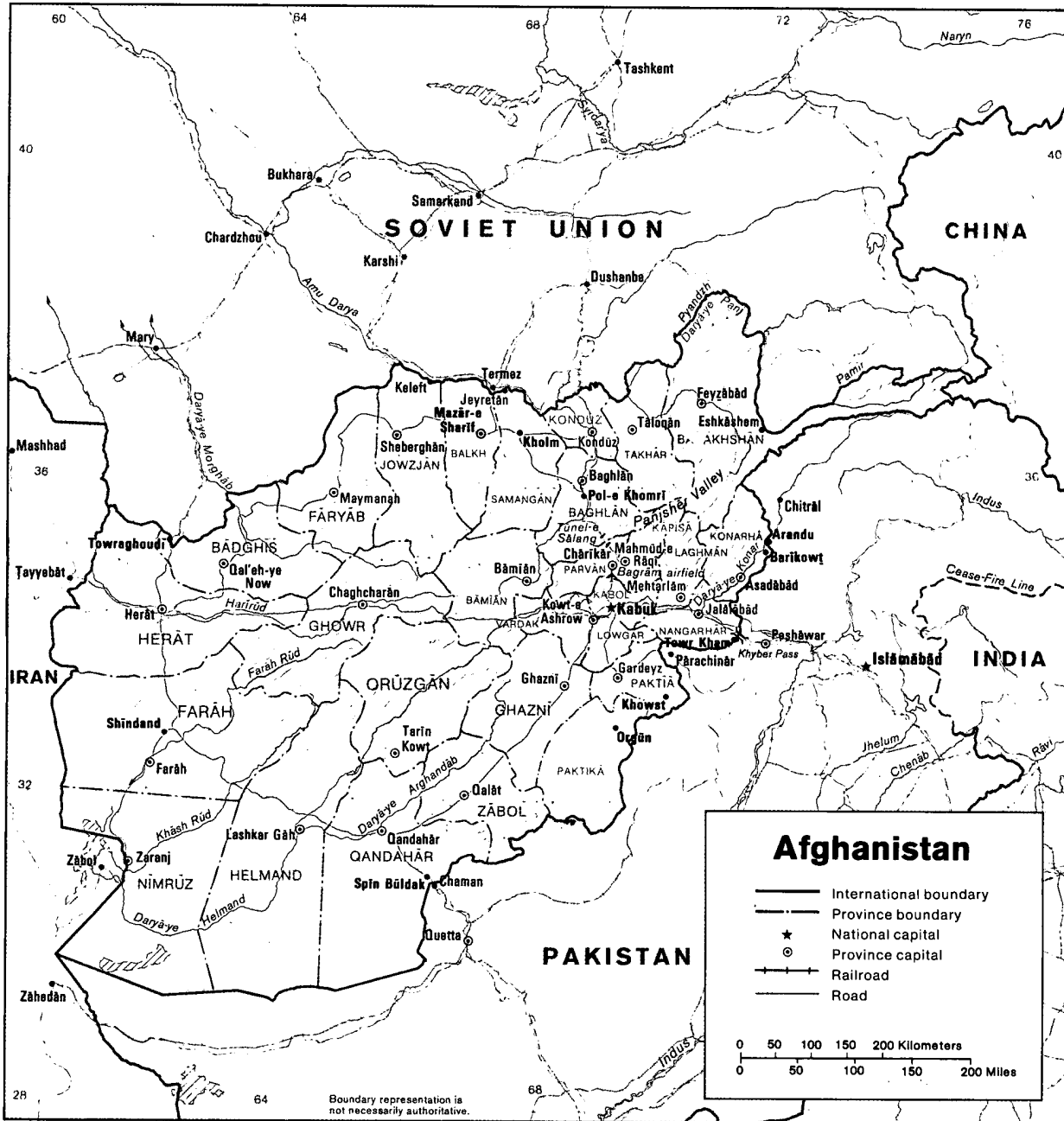


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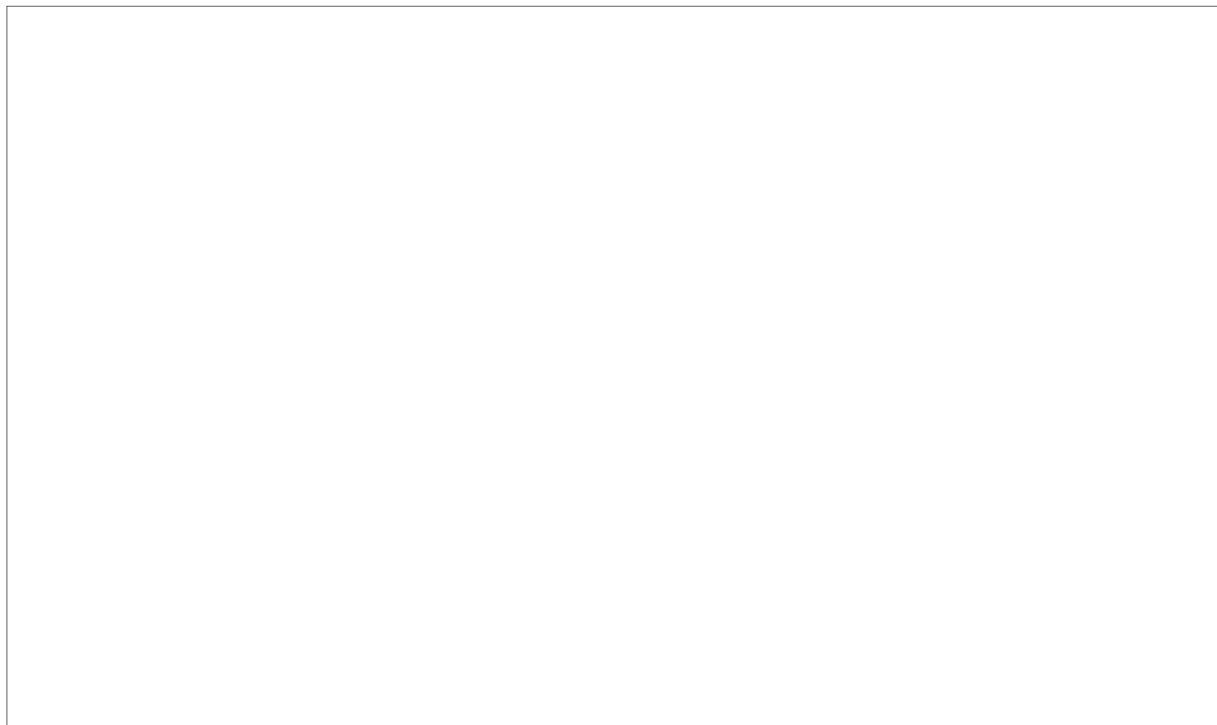
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IN BRIEF

-- Analysis of Chinese media shows Beijing is stiffening its position on the three "obstacles" to improved relations with Moscow, including its demand for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in an apparent effort to reassure Pakistan of its continuing support. In a mid-January report to the National People's Congress, Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian addressed Soviet actions in Afghanistan in unusually harsh terms, claiming that Moscow has "shown no sincerity" in moving toward a troop withdrawal. In a recent letter to the UN Secretary General, moreover, China also took the unusual step of indirectly criticizing Soviet policy in Afghanistan by refuting a Kabul regime-authored "white book" on alleged Chinese interference in Afghanistan. China normally tries to avoid the appearance of siding with either the US or the USSR at the United Nations.



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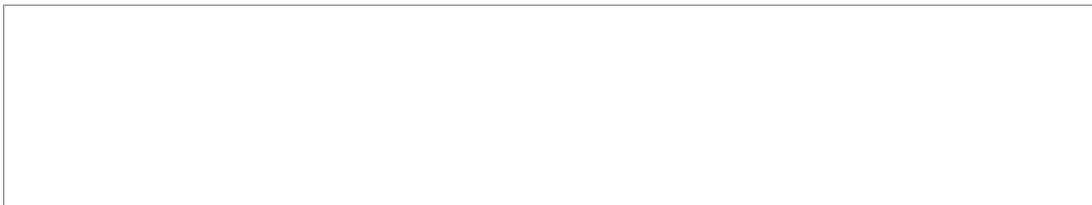


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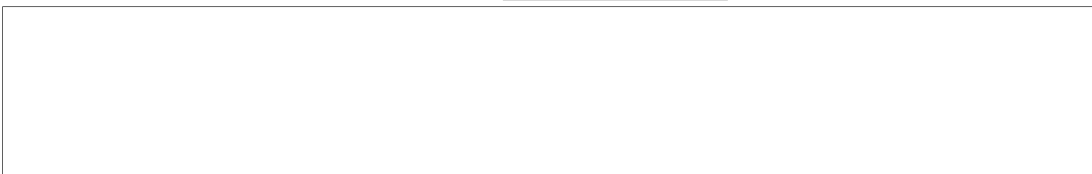
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-- Alexander Sukanov, the Soviet soldier who walked into the US Embassy in Kabul three months ago, is in the USSR awaiting demobilization, according to Soviet Ambassador Tabeyev. Tabeyev told a US Embassy official that no charges would be filed against Sukanov because of Tabeyev's earlier assurances to the US. 

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-- Soviet-Afghan air violations of Pakistani territory increased considerably in 1985, probably due to the step up in military activity in eastern Afghanistan last year. The majority of violations were concentrated around the Pakistani border towns in the Arandu/Konar Valley area and the Teri Mangal-Parachinar/Ali Kheyl area of Paktia Province, and occurred in the first six months of 1985. Most of the violations in the last quarter have appeared in the Kurram Agency area. 

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PERSPECTIVE

SPECIAL OPERATIONS IN COUNTERGUERRILLA WARFARE: DO THEY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

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The Soviets dramatically increased their use of special operations forces (Spetsnaz) in Afghanistan in 1984-85. Some analysts believe Spetsnaz units are overrated; others think they can alter the course of the war.



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The following article, by a military expert with extensive expertise in Afghanistan, examines the historical role of special operations in counterinsurgencies and is intended to provide a background for assessing the utility of such forces. A subsequent article will look specifically at Spetsnaz performance in Afghanistan.



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Special operations units and tactics have made a significant difference against many different insurgencies. Even where special forces have not proven decisive, they have made an important contribution while representing a small percentage of counter guerrilla forces.



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Tactics and Counter guerrilla Effectiveness

Two U.S. experts describe the importance of special forces units and tactics to counter guerrilla war:

- "The first principle of successful counter guerrilla tactics is to take the guerrilla as the model and fight him in his own style. This principle means the deployment of forces in small units relying largely on weapons they can carry."
- "The combination of forces and tactics that are most effective emerges clearly. Many small, lightly armed units maintaining constant patrols by night and by day to locate the enemy, doggedly pursuing him once contact has been made and having the means to call in help from larger units form the core of the counterinsurgency force. Larger units on occasion are useful for clearing operations and as back-up for small patrols. Helicopters, good communications, and good current




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intelligence are also important. Government command of an air capability to bomb with precision identified enemy units or bases, while assuring that civilians will not be killed or injured, would be useful. Long-range patrols which can operate away from their bases for as much as a week (or longer with aerial resupply) to harass the insurgents in their base areas, to capture insurgents or gather information by observation can be very useful but are not essential."

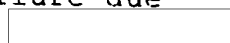
Although we have no information on a Soviet counterinsurgency doctrine, the Soviets generally use the same tools of counter guerrilla warfare as the West: helicopters, an effective intelligence network, and special operations forces. 

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The fact that a variety of different armies--coming from different backgrounds and traditions, faced with different enemies, in different terrain--moved toward using the same type of units and tactics shows that special forces can be effective. The implementation of these units and tactics suggests that they can make a difference. 

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Where Special Warfare Operations Counted

In Rhodesia, a small percentage of the security forces were responsible for a large percentage of guerrilla casualties. These resulted from the interaction of the Selous Scouts--a mostly black unit, with white officers, which conducted internal counterinsurgency efforts--and the Special Air Service, backed up by the heavier "fire forces" of the Rhodesian Light Infantry and Rhodesian African Rifles and by air support. The cycle of find-fix-destroy by special units reportedly accounted for three quarters of guerrilla casualties by mid-1979. Because their observation and hunter-killer role usually initiated the cycle, the Selous Scouts--less than 10 percent of total Rhodesian forces--claimed responsibility for 68 percent of all guerrilla kills by the security forces. At the end of the war, the guerrillas had taken no city, major communications route, or police stations, nor established any "liberated zones"--a failure due largely to the success of special tactics. 

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In Colombia, in 1962-64, operational Plan Lazo against the guerrillas stressed the use of special operations forces using lightly armed mobile patrols to locate the guerrillas and, if possible, to defeat them. They were supplemented by commando localizador, long-range penetration hunter-killer units. The Colombians deliberately minimized the use of conventional units and heavy firepower to avoid civilian casualties. 




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Another example of the effectiveness of special units and tactics in a counterinsurgency was in the war against the Huks (1946-54) in the Philippines. Ramon Magsaysay, as Secretary of National Defense and President, mandated a move away from the use of heavy firepower and large, set-piece conventional operations, and stressed persistent patrolling, ambushes, and long-range patrols. New tactical units were formed to go with the new tactics-- Scout Ranger teams and self-contained infantry battalion combat teams. Intelligence and civic action also contributed to Magsaysay's success. 

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The British campaign in Malaya (1948-60) is the textbook example of a successful counter guerrilla campaign where the contribution of special operations was significant. The British created specialized units for patrolling, observation, and ambush. The Special Air Service was converted into specialized counter guerrilla light infantry. The Gurkha battalions, which had long tours in Malaya, had built up formidable counter guerrilla expertise. 

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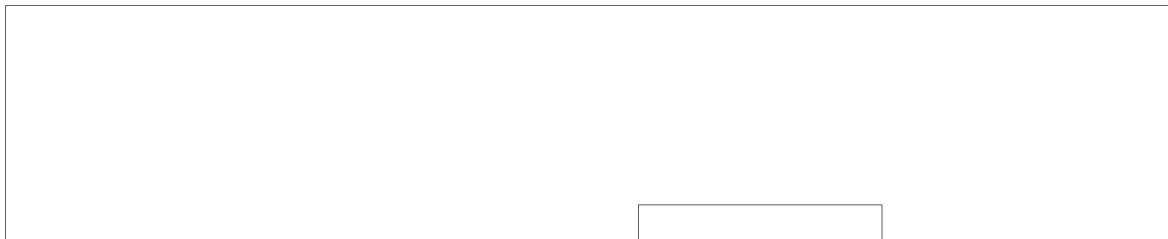
In the Oman insurgency (1970-76)  leading Omani irregulars, was used for patrolling, small sweeps, ambushes, and counterambushes. This was done in concert with conventional operations, large scale sweeps and interdiction operations carried out by Imperial Iranian, Royal Jordanian, and Royal Omani Army units. Although  a small part of the total force, it had a significant impact on the victory in Oman. 

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Why Do Special Operations Make a Difference?

In counter guerrilla campaigns, many elements of regular combat forces are unable to take effective offensive operations against the guerrillas, as distinct from their infrastructure, because they are needed to defend support units required to sustain regular combat forces. In Vietnam, for example, of the half-million Americans in country, only about 80,000 were in combat; the remainder either supported operations or defended support units. [redacted]

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Conventional forces, whether infantry or mechanized combined-arms, are also of limited value in most counter guerrilla campaigns because their use concedes tactical initiative to the guerrillas. The guerrillas will usually see the large-scale operation coming--the troops leaving their garrisons and the preliminary airstrike or artillery barrage. Unless these forces can quickly trap the guerrillas, the guerrillas will do battle only on their own terms. [redacted]

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Helicopters can help avoid this problem by allowing the counter guerrilla infantry to move faster than the guerrillas. The heliborne forces must themselves be light, guerrilla-like forces if they are not to lose this advantage in large heliborne assaults that mandate securing landing zones, holding perimeters, and establishing firebases. [redacted]

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Even with helicopter support, however, conventional operations tend not to bring guerrillas to battle. The U.S. experience in Vietnam shows that in 1967-68, less than one percent of the nearly two million small unit operations resulted in enemy contact. When the number of US "battalion days" in the field increased in 1968, the number of contacts actually decreased. [redacted]

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Many of the most effective practitioners of counter guerrilla fighting have been line infantry battalions with suitable training and experience, such as the Gurkhas in Malaya and the Forest Operating Companies in Kenya. [redacted]

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Conclusion

Experience has shown that where special operations forces, especially light, hard-hitting, infantry units,

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have been used against guerrillas, they have frequently had a significant--although not necessarily decisive--impact on the course of the insurgency. In some cases, such as Rhodesia and Portuguese Africa, effective military tactics could not by themselves bring victory when other elements--largely political--were lacking. They could, however, prevent guerrilla success. In other cases--the Philippines, Colombia, Malaya, Oman--effective tactics were a substantial contributing factor to final victory over guerrilla forces, and the use of special operations forces and tactics was a major component of these successful tactics. In many guerrilla campaigns, constant patrolling and ambushing, directed by effective intelligence and in the context of an effective overall political strategy, yields results. The fact that these forces may constitute only a small proportion of the overall counterinsurgency strength does not undercut their effectiveness.

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