

MULTIDISCIPLINARY ANALYSIS OF UNCONVENTIONAL METHODS OF SPECIAL FORCES AND THEIR IMPACT ON NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract: This research examines the unconventional tactics and strategies inherent in special forces, focusing on methods such as diversion, sabotage, assassination, and subversion. We analyse how these strategies affect national and international security using a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates theoretical frameworks from criminology, political science, and security studies. The article reveals the complex interactions between special tactics and broader security dynamics, highlighting how they can simultaneously serve as instruments to achieve political goals and raise significant ethical and legal dilemmas. The research results provide deeper insight into the mechanisms of special operations and their consequences, offering practical guidelines for shaping effective responses to security challenges in the modern world. This article is not only theoretically relevant but also has direct practical implications for security policies and strategies at the global level.

Keywords: special forces, diversions, sabotage, assassinations, subversion, special war.

Introduction

In today's global environment, we face increasingly complex security challenges that transcend traditional methods of warfare and require innovative and sophisticated tactics. Special Forces have played a key role in shaping the response to these challenges. They are designed to operate quickly, efficiently, and often under the public radar, significantly influencing the outcome of military and political conflicts worldwide. Special units, which form an integral part of a country's security subsystem, especially the intelligence and military subsystem, use various special warfare tactics such as diversion, sabotage, assassination, subversion and propaganda to perform tasks that often balance on the edge of international legal norms and ethical principles.

This paper explores these tactics through the prism of their application in real-world scenarios, considering how they affect national and international security. Understanding these operations is essential for designing effective responses to emerging security threats. The analysis is based on multidisciplinary literature, including criminology, political science, security, and military studies, striving for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and implications of special operations in contemporary conflicts.

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Methodology

Research objective and design: The objective of this research is to analyse the strategies and tactics used by special-purpose units with reference to special war, diversions, sabotage, assassinations, subversion and propaganda, and their impact on national and international security. The research employs a multidisciplinary approach using theoretical frameworks from criminology, political science, military, and security studies. The research design is descriptive and analytical, utilizing a combination of qualitative methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of special warfare and operations.

Population and sample used in research: The population under consideration includes various special purpose units around the world, as well as historical and contemporary examples of their operations. The sample includes cases from different geographic regions and time periods, selected based on their relevance to the topics of special war, diversion, sabotage, assassination, subversion and propaganda, and their recorded effects on security situations.

Description of the protocol used: The research uses secondary sources, including academic articles, books, government reports, and media archives. The data collection protocol included a systematic review of the literature according to predefined keywords such as "special forces," "sabotage," "assassination," and "subversion." Additionally, relevant documents and reports on specific operations or events illustrating the application of special tactics are analyzed.

Description of methods used for data analysis: Data analysis is performed through thematic analysis of the content of the collected documents. A qualitative approach is used to identify patterns, themes, and connections between tactics used by special forces and their security impacts. The analysis also includes a comparative method to consider differences and similarities in the approaches of different units and countries. The goal is to synthesize information to gain a detailed understanding of the complex interactions within special operations and their broader security implications.

Special war

Special war or special warfare encompasses a set of tactics that state forces use against other states, peoples, or movements to achieve strategic interests without directly engaging in conventional war. This concept includes the application of various unconventional methods, including anti-guerrilla operations, psychological operations, and various forms of special operations, often with a subversive character. Special war can be seen as a means that lies on the border between traditional politics and open military force, where the main goal is to change the political, economic, and social relations within a certain country to impose dominance without the need for traditional warfare (Schoomaker and Hudson, 2003).

According to Schoomaker and Hudson (2003), special war includes three basic types of actions:

1. Unconventional Actions: These actions are often aimed at undermining the country's stability through subversive activities, supporting liberation movements or revolutions, carrying out terrorist attacks, and organizing "fratricidal" wars within enemy territories. Unconventional methods also include rescue operations and the extraction of agents, saboteurs, and terrorists.

2. Anti-Guerrilla Operations: This activity includes the fight against guerrilla forces operating within temporarily occupied territories. Methods may include arrests, trials, kidnappings, psychological-propaganda operations, as well as isolation and population control, which may include burning settlements, destroying sources of supply, bombing, and pacification.

3. Psychological-Propaganda Operations: These operations aim to influence the opinion, attitudes, and behavior of the population in target countries. Actions include political pressures expressed through demonstrations of military force, economic pressures through causing economic crises, and changes in the political climate in the country.

The implementation of special warfare requires a sophisticated approach and a deep understanding of the socio-political dynamics of the target country. Its effects can be far-reaching, often resulting in significant changes to governance structures, political stability, and social cohesion. Historically, during the Cold War, both the US and the Soviet Union extensively utilized special warfare tactics to extend their influence and weaken opposing blocs without resorting to direct military conflict. In contemporary contexts, these tactics have evolved into forms of political warfare that encompass non-military strategies, such as disinformation campaigns, political manipulation, and cyber operations, significantly broadening the scope beyond conventional definitions of hybrid warfare (Galeotti, 2019).

Recent developments in special warfare strategies have expanded into cyberspace and hybrid threats. Special forces increasingly integrate cyber operations to disrupt enemy communication, infrastructure, and decision-making processes. Cyber warfare tactics often complement traditional psychological-propaganda operations by spreading misinformation and influencing public perceptions, significantly enhancing their strategic impact without overt military engagement (Arquilla, 2021).

Diversions and diversion activities

Diversion, derived from the Late Latin word “*diversio*,” meaning diversion, is a tactical act aimed at diverting the enemy’s attention and resources from the main area of operations. These tactics may include attacks, alarms, or deception and may have a political dimension when aimed at disrupting the efforts of a particular group or government. Diversion is also recognized as a destructive act with the aim of destabilizing the constitutional order or compromising state security (Brozović, Kovačec, and Ravlić, 2009). According to Levy (1989), diversionary tactics can also involve initiating conflicts to distract attention from internal political or economic crises, serving both tactical and strategic purposes.

Sabotage can be carried out through various actions such as demolition, burning, destruction, or damage to objects using a wide range of tools from mechanical force to explosives. Specific methods include the use of mines and explosives, explosives in solid, plastic, or liquid form, and bombs of high destructive power. These activities require a high level of organization and readiness of the perpetrators as well as the support of the organizations behind these operations (Bošković, 1990).

Military sabotage represents a special segment in the spectrum of diversions where offensive combat operations are realized through specially organized, trained, and equipped units known as sabotage units. These units are specialized in carrying out fast, covert, and highly effective operations that directly affect the outcome of military conflicts. In addition

to subversive units, subversive activities can include other units of the regular armed forces, which increases the scope and effectiveness of these operations (Proleksis Encyclopedia, 2017).

Sabotage

Sabotage, derived from the French term “sabotage,” refers to deliberate action with a political objective, generally aimed at weakening the enemy in war or political conflict by disrupting work or directly spoiling resources. Unlike terrorism, which focuses on causing human casualties, sabotage aims at material damage and can manifest itself in forms such as passive resistance, deliberate delay, or active damage to infrastructure and production capacities. The term “sabotage” probably originates from the period of the great railway strike in Belgium in 1905 when workers removed and hid the wooden linings (sabots) of the tracks to disable their functioning (Brozović, Kovačec, and Ravlić, 2009).

Sabotage can be carried out in various ways, including covert and insidious actions carried out by employees within government agencies or companies. The goal of these actions is to cause damage that leads to direct financial losses or disruptions in the functioning of institutions. The intention of saboteurs is often to threaten the constitutional order or national security, where special care is taken that the damage caused is not directly related to their actions but appears to be the result of unfortunate circumstances or force majeure (Bošković and Skakavac, 2010).

Sabotage has far-reaching social and political consequences, especially when systematically applied in strategic sectors such as production, distribution, or infrastructure. Such activities can significantly weaken the country’s economic stability and reduce the efficiency of state authorities, thereby opening space for political changes or increasing pressure on the governing structures. Historically, sabotage was often used as a resistance tactic in situations where direct confrontation was not possible or too risky. Rovner (2023) emphasizes the evolving nature of sabotage in modern warfare, particularly highlighting its strategic applications in cyberspace as a crucial component of contemporary military strategies.

Assassinations

Assassination, derived from the Latin “attentare” (to attempt, to attack), is defined as the murder or attempted murder of a public figure motivated by ideological, political, or other reasons. It differs from ordinary murder in its political weight and the message it sends to the public or a particular group. Assassins can be professional killers, people driven by fanatical beliefs, or individuals whose motives stem from mental states. In addition to political leaders, military commanders, activists, journalists, and other famous and influential persons can also be targets of assassinations (Brozović, Kovačec, and Ravlić, 2009).

Throughout history, assassinations have played a key role in political and social turmoil. From ancient times, such as the assassination of Julius Caesar in Rome, to modern political assassinations, such as that of John F. Kennedy, assassinations have often served as a trigger for major historical changes. In the dynastic struggles of monarchies, assassination was a means of eliminating political rivals. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, assassinations were common in political battle strategies, from Russian anarchists and nihilists to various

political factions during the great European reformations and revolutions. Assassination was often a weapon in the struggle for freedom or change, thus leaving a lasting impact on the political landscape (Brozović, Kovačec, and Ravlić, 2009).

In international law, assassinations are addressed through various legal clauses such as the 'assassination clause' in extradition treaties, which usually distinguish politically motivated killings from other forms of crime. This distinction is important for understanding how states perceive and respond to politically motivated killings. In recent times, assassination is also associated with targeted killings carried out by state police or intelligence agencies in the context of the fight against terrorism, raising new ethical and legal questions (Veliki rečnik, 2017).

In contemporary international law, assassinations, particularly targeted killings, have raised complex ethical and legal debates. Calhoun (2015) critically examines the ethical and legal implications of modern targeted killings, especially those conducted via drone warfare, highlighting concerns about accountability and the erosion of international legal norms. Similarly, Gross (2017) explores how targeted killings have transformed international order, analyzing their implications for sovereignty, legal frameworks, and ethical considerations in contexts of asymmetric warfare and counterterrorism.

Subversions

Subversion, derived from the Latin term "subversio" (meaning overthrow), is a secret revolutionary action aimed at undermining or overthrowing an existing government or political order. This form of activity includes various forms of behavior that can be considered dangerous for the ruling elites but are not explicitly classified as high treason, rebellion, sabotage, or espionage. Subversion also includes providing support to individuals and groups advocating the violent overthrow of the political system or its key figures (Brozović, Kovačec, and Ravlić, 2009).

Postmodernist and poststructuralist theorists emphasize that subversive action should not be limited only to the political system but also to dominant forms of political culture, such as patriarchy or individualism, as forms of cultural hegemony. These approaches indicate the breadth and depth that subversion can have in society, including the struggle against broader social and cultural dominance (Brozović, Kovačec, and Ravlić, 2009).

Political subversion, a special form of special warfare, is carried out covertly with the aim of overthrowing the existing social system. The methods used include terror, diversionary activities, the spread of disinformation, and the creation of subcultures that oppose the official culture. Terrorist methods can include spreading panic, threats, kidnappings, and physical attacks on government officials. Subversive activities include the damage or destruction of materials and infrastructure vital to maintaining order, while diversion may include the dissemination of false information or the manipulation of media content. The creation of subcultures causes conflicts with traditional values and systems, thereby further undermining the authority of the existing government (Garrison, 1999).

Subversion has played a key role in many historical moments, especially in the context of military dictatorships in South America and real-socialist regimes between the 1970s and 1980s, where the term was often used to refer to all political opponents. These labels have often served as justification for mass arrests and political assassinations, illustrating the

dangerous implications that subversion can have when political elites decide to repress in response to a perceived threat (Garrison, 1999).

More recently, Lee (2020) has demonstrated how foreign subversion weakens state authority and impedes state consolidation, often making regimes more vulnerable to external influence. Christie (2019) has also emphasized how social media platforms are increasingly being used as tools for political subversion, allowing foreign and domestic actors to exploit group dynamics, algorithmic amplification, and disinformation to destabilize democratic institutions.

Propaganda action

Propaganda is a specific form of persuasive communication aimed at persuading, influencing, and directing message recipients. It is characterized by a planned, organized, and systematic approach to the creation and distribution of information or messages through selected media. The primary function of propaganda is to modify the perception and behaviour of the target group using language as the main tool, either in oral or written form (Tucaković, 1999).

In the structure of propaganda communication, several key elements can be distinguished: the creator or bearer of propaganda, the communicator, the message itself, the media channels through which the message is spread, and the target groups that are being reached. This scheme is analogous to the scheme of mass communication but differs in its intention and methods of manipulating perception and behaviour (Tucaković, 1999).

During the Cold War, propaganda was a key instrument in the ideological struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. Both sides used different media—radio, television, film, and print—to influence not only their own citizens but also global perceptions. For example, VOA (Voice of America) and Radio Free Europe, supported by the CIA, used gray propaganda to disseminate news favorable to the American side, while Radio Moscow used white propaganda, openly promoting Soviet perspectives. In periods of crisis, both sides occasionally resorted to black propaganda, broadcasting false information to cause fear or calm tensions depending on the needs (Šćekić, 2012).

Breton (2000), in his book *“The Manipulated Word,”* refers to Dominik’s definition of propaganda, which he describes as a process that can be broken down into five basic steps: simplification, hyperonization, orchestration, transfusion, and contagion. This methodology illustrates how propaganda transforms complex ideas into simple, emotionally charged messages that are easily accepted and spread among target audiences.

In addition, Colley (2019) highlights the strategic use of narrative in propaganda, emphasizing how storytelling shapes public perception during conflicts and supports state objectives. He illustrates how narratives serve not just as communication tools but as frameworks through which people interpret reality. Furthermore, Baines, O’Shaughnessy, and Snow (2020) analyse the increasingly sophisticated methods of propaganda in the digital age, showing how it permeates political discourse and international relations across democratic and authoritarian systems alike.

Results

Analysis of special forces strategies and tactics revealed the complex and multidimensional effects these operations have on national and international security. The research identified several key findings. Special forces often use diversions and sabotage to redeploy enemy forces and resources, significantly influencing the outcome of military conflicts. Diversions have proven effective in reducing the enemy's operational capacity without the need for direct conflict, while sabotage has enabled the long-term weakening of infrastructure and logistics chains. Assassinations have been identified as key elements in achieving short-term political goals, often resulting in immediate changes in the political landscape of countries. Although rarely used compared to other tactics, their emotional and psychological impact on the public and political leaders is profound. Subversions have proven extremely potent in changing political systems in the long term, especially through encouraging and supporting internal dissidents and revolutionary movements.

The analysis also highlighted the role of propaganda and special war in special forces operations. Propaganda actions, characterized by systematic dissemination of information to influence perceptions and behaviour, have been used to shape public opinion and political attitudes. Through methods such as simplification, hyperonization, and orchestration, propaganda can manipulate complex ideas into simple, emotionally charged messages, significantly impacting the psychological dimension of conflicts.

Special war tactics, which include unconventional actions, anti-guerrilla operations, and psychological-propaganda operations, aim to achieve strategic interests without engaging in conventional warfare. These operations are designed to undermine the stability of target countries through subversive activities, supporting liberation movements, and conducting terrorist attacks. Psychological-propaganda operations aim to influence the opinions, attitudes, and behaviours of populations in target countries, employing political and economic pressures to create favorable conditions for achieving strategic objectives.

The analysis showed how these activities effectively used elements of culture and media manipulation to achieve their goals. Despite the differences in methods and objectives, the common element of all the tactics discussed is their focus on avoiding traditional military conflict. Special operations, regardless of geographic or temporal background, used the element of surprise and a high degree of secrecy to maximize their strategic impact.

The research also addressed the complex ethical and legal dilemmas that arise from conducting special operations. While these operations are often instrumental in advancing national interests, they have also generated considerable controversy and debate within the international community about their legality and moral justification. These results provide thorough insight into the mechanics and consequences of special operations within modern security strategies. The findings demonstrate the importance of continuously evaluating and adapting special forces tactics, considering the rapid changes in the global security environment.

The table below provides a detailed overview of various tactics, their primary objectives, safety effects, and notable examples from practice. By understanding these methods, we gain insight into the complex mechanisms that underpin special operations and their far-reaching consequences.

| Tactics | Primary Objectives | Safety Effects | Examples from Practice |
|-----------------|---|--|---|
| Special Warfare | Achieving strategic interests without direct conventional warfare | Long-term geopolitical changes, covert influence on political structures | US and Soviet special operations during the Cold War to expand influence without open conflict |
| Diversions | Distracting the attention of the enemy, redistributing forces | Reduction of the enemy's operational capacity, short-term impact on the conflict outcome | WWII operations to draw German forces away before D-Day |
| Sabotage | Weakening enemy infrastructure and logistics | Long-term weakening of enemy capacities, causing economic damage | Sabotage in industrial plants during the Cold War |
| Assassinations | Political changes through the elimination of key figures | Immediate political and social changes, increasing instability | The assassination of Franz Ferdinand, which started WWI |
| Subversions | Destabilization and eventual overthrow of the existing government | Long-term changes in the political system, increasing internal tensions | Support for dissident groups in Eastern Europe during the Cold War |
| Propaganda | Influencing public opinion and behavior | Long-term shifts in societal attitudes and perceptions, potential destabilization | Cold War propaganda efforts by the US and Soviet Union using media to spread ideological messages |

Discussion

This research provides an in-depth analysis of the strategies and tactics used by special forces, highlighting their complex and multifaceted impact on national and international security. The study focuses on five key special warfare tactics: diversions, assassinations, sabotage, subversions, and propaganda. By examining these methods through a multidisciplinary lens, the research sheds light on their strategic applications and the ethical and legal dilemmas they pose.

The research identified several critical findings. Diversions and sabotage were shown to effectively redeploy enemy forces and weaken infrastructure, significantly influencing military conflict outcomes. Assassinations emerged as potent tools for achieving immediate

political changes, while subversions facilitated long-term political system alterations by supporting internal dissidents. Propaganda played a crucial role in shaping public opinion and political attitudes, demonstrating its psychological impact. Special war tactics encompassed a blend of unconventional actions, anti-guerrilla operations, and psychological-propaganda strategies aimed at undermining enemy stability without direct military engagement.

The results indicate that special operations leverage non-traditional methods to achieve strategic objectives, often avoiding direct military confrontation. Diversions and sabotage disrupt enemy operations and logistics, reducing their capacity to maintain prolonged conflict. Assassinations, although less frequently used, create significant political upheaval, demonstrating their utility in altering political landscapes. Subversions target the social and cultural foundations of adversaries, fostering internal dissent and long-term instability. Propaganda, by manipulating information and perceptions, serves as a powerful tool in the ideological and psychological domains of warfare. Special war tactics combine these elements to create a comprehensive strategy that destabilizes opponents while minimizing conventional military engagement.

The implications of these findings are profound. Understanding the multifaceted nature of special operations enables security analysts and military strategists to better anticipate and counter potential threats. The strategic use of diversions, sabotage, and propaganda can significantly alter the dynamics of modern conflicts, making it essential for defense strategies to incorporate measures against these tactics. The ethical and legal challenges highlighted by the study necessitate ongoing international dialogue to establish clear protocols and rules governing the conduct of special operations. Additionally, recognizing the role of propaganda in shaping public opinion underscores the importance of information security and media literacy in contemporary security strategies.

Despite its comprehensive analysis, this research has limitations. The reliance on secondary sources may introduce biases in the interpretation of events and strategies. The lack of primary data, such as interviews with experts and participants in special operations, limits the depth of insights into the practical implementation and consequences of these tactics. Furthermore, the generalizability of the findings to all special operations is constrained by the specificity of the contexts and cases examined.

Future research should adopt mixed methods, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a more nuanced understanding of the effects of special operations. Conducting interviews with experts and practitioners in the field would offer valuable first-hand perspectives. Quantitative analyses could help quantify the impact of specific tactics on conflict outcomes and political stability. Additionally, exploring the evolving role of technology in special operations, particularly in the realms of cyber warfare and digital propaganda, would enhance the relevance and applicability of future studies.

Concluding considerations

This research has delved into the complex strategies and tactics of special operations, underscoring their significant impact on national and international security. By analyzing diversions, sabotage, assassinations, subversions, and propaganda, the study highlights the intricate and multifaceted nature of these operations.

Reiterating the supporting points, the study found that diversions and sabotage effectively disrupt enemy operations and logistics, while assassinations can lead to immediate political changes. Subversions and propaganda play crucial roles in long-term political destabilization and psychological manipulation. Special war tactics blend these methods to strategically undermine adversaries without direct military engagement.

Tying it all together, this analysis not only enhances our theoretical understanding of special operations but also provides practical insights for security analysts and policymakers. Addressing the ethical and legal challenges posed by these tactics is essential for developing responsible and sustainable security policies. Additionally, the study emphasizes the need for ongoing international dialogue and cooperation to manage the evolving dynamics of special operations, especially considering rapid technological advancements.

As a clincher, the importance of continuously evaluating and adapting special forces tactics in response to the rapidly changing global security environment cannot be overstated. Future research should focus on creating comprehensive guidelines and exploring new technological impacts, ensuring that special operations remain effective while adhering to ethical and legal standards. This understanding is crucial for crafting informed and effective responses to the security challenges of the 21st century.

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