

Operational tasks to optimize the operational performance of Special Forces in the Valley of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro rivers

LT COL OSWAL SIGÜEÑAS ALVARADO, PERUVIAN AIR FORCE

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Since the approval of strategic intervention “An option for peace and security development for the Valley of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro Rivers - Plan Valles Ríos Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro (herein, VRAEM)” plan, to date, ten years and some months have elapsed, during which time special forces have been performing unchanging tasks under the same military guidelines, with un-encouraging results eradicating the remnants of the Shining Path terrorist organization in that area, that is also linked to drug trafficking.

Component number two of the aforementioned Plan, called the “Program to dismantle the remnants of terrorism”, holds the Ministry of Defense (MINDEF) and the Joint Command of the Armed Forces (CCFFAA) responsible for the fulfillment of several objectives, two of which are the most important: To improve the combat capability of law enforcement agencies, and to optimize the results of neutralization and capture of terrorist elements that act in the VRAEM. Neither of these two objectives have been fully met, because these tasks are not specifically defined by the Commander of the Special Forces Component nor by Special Command of the Valley of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro Rivers (CE-VRAEM).

At present, the use of special operations forces as regular forces does not optimize operational performance, a disadvantage to perform an effective operational effort because special operations forces do not face a regular or conventional army. Instead, they must face unconventional threats, predominantly clandestine and asymmetric. In this sense it is essential that our special operations forces adapt to this type of clandestine and asymmetric scenarios, developing exclusive operational tasks to optimize their use and efficiency against the enemy and/or adversary.

It is public knowledge that the terrorist organization Shining Path (hereinafter OT-SL), acts in the valleys of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro rivers, led by DT Víctor Quispe Palomino, alias “José” or “Iván” (First leader of the OT-SL Political Command), seconded by his brother Jorge Quispe Palomino, alias “Raúl”, using drug traffickers as allies for its sustenance, and has become one more task that the special operations forces must face.

Currently, the work of special operations forces is oriented towards a third-generation war, that is, a conventional war, in which the performance of their capabilities are in accordance with the needs of the Special Command. However, they can also comply with the exclusive and specialized tasks that are specific to special forces, and be used in the area of operations and area of interest in an efficient and effective manner. However, special operations forces perform tasks beyond their capabilities such as: territorial control, combat patrol in unexplored lands, road control, support for civic military actions, among others, which causes wear and tear and deteriorate special operations forces units ability to perform for a future mission. The normal thing is

to be brief: arrive, carry out the operation and leave in a few days, as is done in combat rescue operations and evacuation of injured and deceased personnel from the units in the VRAEM.

The following are proposed key tasks that should be performed in the CE-VRAEM: special reconnaissance, to locate the enemy, direct action, to neutralize the enemy, and personnel recovery (CSAR: Combat Search and Rescue), to raise the morale of friendly forces. These three joint operational tasks should be oriented towards an asymmetric war with strategic or operational implications, which would be carried out according to the operational capabilities of the different special forces of the three military institutions. This proposal would represent a great help for the Special Forces given that all the effort would be directed towards these exclusive tasks.

Thus, to the extent that the specific tasks of the special forces have been identified, Commanders will be able to use their special operators and commandos in an appropriate manner, to achieve the effects that require the use of their unique operational skills and abilities. Consequently, if the desired effect does not require these special skills and abilities, Commanders will not use the elements of their special forces in such tasks and missions, because they should not be assigned as substitute for other forces.

The operational tasks unique to the special forces of the Special Command of the Valley of the Apurimac, Ene and Mantaro Rivers (CE-VRAEM), will fulfill the strategic and operational roles in the external and internal fronts, through the tactics, techniques and procedures of the special forces, with the purpose of carrying out military operations against terrorism in the VRAEM and others.

Within the context of the doctrine of military operations, it is stated that special operations are *“operations conducted in hostile, denied, or sensitive environments with the purpose of achieving military, political, economic, diplomatic and/or informational objectives, in which military capabilities are employed that do not demand the use of secrecy, going underground and low visibility”*. This means that Special Operations are applicable across the full range of military operations and can be conducted independently or jointly, with conventional forces or other state organizations, and may include operations with, or through, native or substitute forces, using sophisticated communication systems, means of insertion, infiltration, support and extraction to penetrate and return from hostile, denied or sensitive areas.

Special Operations are conducted in support of a specific theater or against strategic or operational objectives of the highest value. Most special operations are designed to improve the chances of success of the total theater campaign. These operations are intrinsically multidisciplinary or joint, and are planned and executed as joint operations given the requirement of multiple specialties routinely needed for the support and coordination of operations.

The difference between Special Operations and Conventional Operations lies in the degree of physical and political risk, the operational techniques, the mode of employment, the relative independence of logistical support, and the detailed operational intelligence dependence.

Taking as reference Mc Raven's (1995) definition of Special Operations [*“Special operations are military actions offensive in nature, generally of the unconventional type that are executed at the tactical level by small, but highly mobile combat units, composed of personnel specially selected, equipped and trained to attack targets of high military, political and/or economic value, considered by senior war executives as a necessary requirement for achieving their own objectives, at an operational and/or strategic level”*]. We can say that Special Operations generally must employ actions of the unconventional type, because the problem that has been entrusted to them has been considered an “impossible mission” to be carried out by military units, since they have not been able to solve them with existing doctrines and available means. This situation is what forces special operators to develop new tactics, techniques and procedures; and in many cases even “new doctrines”, since its success will be based mainly on breaking the existing paradigms. Generally, when the outcome of the special operation has been successful, new tactics, techniques and procedures developed and used become doctrine and become part of what would be known as a “Specialized Operations”. In this sense,

it can be said that a specialized operation is an operation that has specific tactics, techniques and procedures for a specific type of military operation.

Officers that hold this specialty, in different military institutions, agree that the main divergence between both types of operations is the degree of difficulty, since although it is true that both types of operations are considered “high risk”, we should take into consideration that for the specialized operation there are tactics, techniques and procedures duly identified, while a special operation must develop new tactics, techniques and procedures, to break existing paradigms and achieve success.

It can be said that while a specialized operation generally has repercussions at a tactical and operational level, a special operation has repercussions at an operational and even a strategic level, since the consequences of the failure of a special operation will mainly affect the top management of the war, especially in the political sphere. It is for this reason that values, moral, and physical strength are stressed as fundamental requirements to be a special operator.

There is also a difference between the “special operator” and a member of the “special forces” of our Armed Forces. A combatant called “regular” is one who has received training in basic ground combat skills for infantry operations. The definition that can be given to a Special Forces combatant would be as follows: that “regular” combatant who has received complementary training in some specific type of military skill. We can infer that a Special Forces member (FFEE) is not a special operator, but rather becomes a “specialized operator”, that is, has a plus that makes him a specially selected combatant, equipped and trained to make a specific type of operation, be it terrestrial, aerial or amphibious.

The main difference between special operators and special forces is in the way of thinking and acting. In essence, warrior spirit, commitment and purpose with which the operation is performed, are decisive factors in the way the combatant conceives and conducts an operation. And above all, in the way the combatant operates in changing, highly hostile scenarios, facing improvised adverse situations produced by the so-called “frictions of war”, with uncertainty about the forces themselves and their position when attacking a strongly defended objective.

This difference occurs from the very process of selection of the special operator, a process that is mainly aimed at identifying strengths in future operators, who possess psychological qualities such as initiative, creativity, self-discipline, firmness of character, moral and physical courage, integrity, selfless solidarity, proactiveness, courageousness, intellect, cunning, perseverance and humbleness, what Clausewitz called the “Moral Factors”, considering that special operators have been conceived to deal with the problems, at an operational or strategic level, that cannot be solved by military units with existing doctrine or means, that is, to take charge of the so-called “impossible missions”.

It is operationally valid to send a specialized combatant to carry out specialized operations. However, the specialized combatant must not be the first option to carry out a special operation (except one directed against a target of high strategic value) unless there are no special operators available; since the high command must always keep in mind that the special operator is the professional created to carry out operations of high physical and political risk, while the member of the FFEE (special forces) would have to improvise in this type of non-conventional activities.

There is an urgent need to be clear about the substantial difference between the special operator and the special forces combatant, and the capabilities available to each combatant that is currently in the CE-VRAEM, in order to be able to identify if they are of the special operations or specialized combatant type and optimize their tactical use in the area of operations and interest.

In a report submitted to the US Congress after the operation against Osama Bin Laden in May 2011, the effectiveness and evolution of the special operations forces was highlighted, pointing out that they have become the most lethal and effective weapon of the US government against terrorists and their networks, emphasizing that they are the best forces, the best trained, the best equipped and the best led. This means that both the Bush and the Obama Administrations have

relied on special operations forces to seek and neutralize high-level terrorist cadres in the most diverse parts of the world, which demonstrates their key role against conventional armed forces.

Special operations forces adapt more easily to an emerging strategic environment that is increasingly interconnected. It is a more agile and participative use-of-force model, which favors creativity, collaboration and integration of capabilities and that is what should be prioritized in the VRAEM.

That is why, in the current conception of the CE-VRAEM, the operational performance and current employment of the special forces in operational tasks are oriented to a conventional symmetrical war, a misconception given that the current threat is directed to a low intensity asymmetric warfare. Hence, we must direct the efforts of our special forces to the exclusive operational tasks necessary in this type of scenario of an unconventional war, according to the real situation faced by the elements of the special forces with which we have, thus optimizing their performance in joint operational employment in future operations in the VRAEM.

The CE-VRAEM carries out operations and military and police actions, permanently within their area of responsibility, to dismantle the terrorist organization Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso [OT-SL]), neutralize illicit drug trafficking (TID), illegal timber trafficking (TIM), illicit trafficking of chemical and controlled products (IQPF), illicit trafficking of weapons, ammunition and ordnance for civilian use (TIAME), and other illicit activities; simultaneously providing security to essential public services (SSPPEE), national energy structure and tourism hubs, Intelligence Command and Joint Special Operations (CIOEC) support operations, and carry out operations to support development, within the framework of the "Program of Multisector Socio-economic Development of the Apurimac, Ene and Mantaro Rivers Valley". All these actions are framed constrained respect of human rights and international humanitarian law, with the aim of restoring security and internal order in the VRAEM.

The specific tasks of the Special Forces Component in the CE-VRAEM are: 1) To carry out reconnaissance and short, medium, and long range combat operations in order to detect DDTT camps and columns; 2) Carry out interdiction operations of the enemy's axis and/or deployment and supply, prioritizing night operations; 3) Act as a mobile reserve force of the CE-VRAEM; 4) Support other components according to the Land requirements of the CE-VRAEM; and finally, 5) In coordination with the Terrestrial Component, carry out operations aimed at providing security and protection to the Camisea gas energy axis. These tasks are not necessarily performed in an optimal fashion.

Carrying out those tasks requires planning. Joint Publication (JP) 3-05, Special Operations, states that the relationship between campaign planning and support of the special operations force (SOF), and to the elements that should be included in the joint force commander's (JFC) campaign plan such as the concept for SOF activities and support, which is translated into a strategic guide within the military objectives, the Joint Force Commander's (JFC) vision to use the SOF, select priorities for SOF activities, and distribute the SOFs among the components of the JFC, including command relationships, special operations command (SOC), and service components requirements to prepare, provide and maintain SOFs assigned and in development, priority operational requirements, climate and intelligence, and coordination and integration requirements with other government agencies at the national, regional and local levels, based on the experience of SOFs and command and control capability.

Likewise, the planning of joint operations at the operational level of the joint special operations force (JSOF) in the VRAEM requires an adaptation to an environment of risk and uncertainty, since the JSOF plans, prepares and executes operations at the operational and tactical levels with probable strategic consequences, such as the elimination of military commanders and middle-ranking officers of terrorist organizations the VRAEM.

The VRAEM's geography is scenario where the threat is mobilized, is composed of high altitude, difficult terrain (mountains in high altitudes and jungles) where the units must be accli-

mated, trained and capable of fulfilling the tasks. Therefore, it is the harsh conditions, physical deterioration, and psychological depression inherent to combat in the mountains that make it necessary to have a capable leader, with good physical condition, and to whom the effects of cold weather and difficult terrain do not undermine him/her, so that he/she can properly lead the special forces unit with commitment and purpose.

The proper selection of FFEE personnel, to carry out special operations in the CE-VRAEM, has a divided perception among the commanders of the components that make it up. This is because the geographical area of the VRAEM requires personnel from FFEE, self-disciplined, and trained for this type of area of operations, in which three exclusive tasks are predominantly carried out: special recognition (RE), direct action (AD), and personnel recovery (PR), which must be at the top of planning, preparation and execution of special operations in the VRAEM.

The first operational task of special reconnaissance, to “find” the adversary or enemy of the special forces, is directly related to the operational planning of the joint staff of the CE-VRAEM, so that the special reconnaissance units are tasked on a high value objective, locating areas, routes that represent key areas, in order to find Shining Path terrorists, ringleaders, and middle-ranking officers.

The second operational task of direct action, to “finish” special forces adversaries, directly influences the fulfillment of the objectives assigned by the Chief of the Joint Command of the Armed Forces in the CE-VRAEM, through the constant execution of ambush operations, incursions, infiltration and exfiltration of special operations forces in the area of operations, in order to neutralize high-value targets.

The third operational task of personnel recovery, to “raise” the morale of friendly forces, significantly influences and is related to the strengthening of the morale of air crews and the special operations forces of the CE-VRAEM. Rescue operations in the VRAEM’s area of operations are of high risk, therefore they deserve that special forces personnel be prepared, trained and equipped in combat search and rescue operations, day and night, to rescue crews and combatants isolated or set as targets by Shining Path adversaries in the VRAEM, being a scenario in which there is a partial air superiority in the area of joint operations.

Therefore, to the extent that the operational tasks of the special forces in the CE-VRAEM have been identified, forces can be used in an ideal way to achieve the desired effects of strategic, operational and tactical objectives, assigned by the Chief of the Joint Command of the Armed Forces of Peru. In other words, insisting the use of special operations forces in unrelated and inadequate tasks, we will continue to generate wear and misuse of the forces, loss of human lives and will feed the adversary’s morale. □

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Thesis Summary

The present thesis entitled "Operational tasks of the Special Forces to optimize the operational performance in the Special Command of the Valley of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro rivers, 2017", allowed to achieve the objective of establishing the exclusive operational tasks of the Special Forces by part of the Operational and Special Commands.

Aware of the reality in the Valley of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro Rivers (VRAEM), I consider that the operational tasks that must be performed in the VRAEM are the operational tasks of special reconnaissance, direct action and recovery of personnel, oriented towards a low intensity asymmetric war with a strategic or operational implication, that would be carried out according to the capabilities of the different special operations forces, commands and special forces of the three armed institutions.

To this end, a correlational descriptive type research has been proposed, and a non-experimental design based on the empirical knowledge of the Special Operations Officers, commands, special forces and members of a Command or Staff of the Armed Forces.

De dicha investigación concluimos que en la medida que se tengan identificadas cuales deben ser las tareas operacionales de las fuerzas especiales en el Comando Especial del Valle de los Ríos Apurímac, Ene y Mantaro (CEVRAEM), podrán ser empleadas en forma idónea; para planificar, preparar y ejecutar operaciones en el nivel operacional y táctico con efectos deseados en el nivel estratégicos, de igual modo concluimos que la tarea de reconocimiento especial influye directamente relacionándose con la planificación operacional y táctica, la tarea de acción directa contribuye alcanzar los objetivos operacionales y estratégicos asignados, así como la tarea de recuperación de personal se relaciona con los factores morales, para lograr el fortalecimiento de

la moral del personal de tripulaciones aéreas, terrestres, navales y de fuerzas especiales en el Comando Especial del Valle de los Ríos Apurímac, Ene y Mantaro (CE-VRAEM).

From this investigation we concluded that to the extent that the operational tasks of the special forces have been identified in the Special Command of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro Rivers Valley (CE-VRAEM), they may be used in an appropriate manner to plan, prepare and execute operations at the operational and tactical level with desired effects at the strategic level. Likewise we concluded that the task of special reconnaissance directly relates to operational and tactical planning, the task of direct action contributes to achieve the assignments of operational and strategic objectives, as well as the task of personnel recovery related to moral factors, to achieve the strengthening of the morale of personnel of air, land, naval and special forces crews in the Special Command of the Valley of the Apurímac Rivers , Jan and Mantaro (CE-VRAEM).



Lieutenant Colonel Oswal Sigüeñas Alvarado, Peruvian Air Force, Officer School, Air War College, Western Hemispheric Institute for Security Cooperation, Armed Forces Joint University of South Korea. Master's Degree in Aerospace Doctrine and Administration. He has held different operational positions within the Peruvian Air Force's Special Operations. Among his other positions are the following: Vice Commander, San Ramon Air Base; Instructor at Officer School and Air War College. At the present time he is Deputy Director of the Peruvian Air Force's Command. His decorations include the Cross of War for Valor, the Peruvian Cross for Aeronautical Merit, and the United Nations Medal.