



CENTRE FOR
JOINT WARFARE
STUDIES

GL/01/24

**‘INTEGRATION OF SPECIAL
OPERATIONAL FORCES (SOF) IN A
THEATERISED ENVIRONMENT’**

BY

**LT GEN VINOD BHATIA, PVSM, AVSM,
VSM (RETD)**

**ORGANIZED BY CENJOWS
7 MARCH 2024**

‘INTEGRATION OF SPECIAL OPERATIONAL FORCES (SOF) IN A THEATERISED ENVIRONMENT’ BY LT GEN VINOD BHATIA, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (RETD)
ORGANISED BY CENJOWS ON 07 MARCH 2024

The speaker defined the national security as ‘to protect and project India’s national interests’, which were categorised as ‘vital’ for a conducive environment for democracy and secularism, economic growth and territorial integrity, as ‘important’ to emerge as a regional power in Asia, preserve strategic autonomy, energy and resource security and as ‘peripheral’ for creation of an equitable world order to facilitate India to sit on high table. India’s security interests as available on the Ministry of Defence website were highlighted, wherein, the need to maintain a credible land, air and maritime force to safeguard its security interests were emphasised. The national security aim, objectives and collaborative threats likely to be faced by India were explained and summarised along the Northern and Western Borders and in the Sub Conventional Domain. The speaker briefly covered his views on Theaterisation, based on threats and the need for multiple Theatre and Joint Commands.

The speaker defined the concept of special operations and explained the idea of the Special Operations Forces as ‘those, who in wartime may be assigned various special operations tasks’ and include ‘all forces involved in such tasks, in addition to the special forces.’ He narrated numerous operations undertaken by Indian Special Forces since independence. He explained the vision statement of Special Operations Forces as ‘to create strategic asymmetric advantages for the nation in integrated deterrence, crisis and conflict.’ Various roles of Special Operations Forces explained by him were as follows:-

- (a) Instrument of deterrence and threat in being for political signaling.
- (b) Force multiplier in conventional operations and in support of conventional operations.
- (c) Rapid deployment.
- (d) Act as an instrument of nation’s smart power.
- (e) Force projection in continuance with national interests.
- (f) Assist friendly governments in a crisis situation, on invitation.
- (g) HADR missions in the region and in inaccessible areas.

Various missions of Special Operations Forces were brought out, of which the theatre specific missions were as follows:-

- (a) Secure/destroy high value targets in strategic and operational depth in furtherance of national military objectives.
- (b) Strategic and operational level direct action, reconnaissance and surveillance tasks.
- (c) Create strategic and operational dilemma at the highest decision making levels of the enemy.
- (d) Punitive and pre-emptive operations akin to the surgical strikes in keeping with the revised Counter Terrorism strategy.

The speaker covered significant details on the Special Operations Forces of our adversaries, to include, China and Pakistan and also briefly explained the organisation structure and functioning of the major global Special Operations Forces to include, USA, Russia, Israel, UK and Ukraine. Indian Special Operations Forces assets were briefly covered as well.

The lecture was summed up by giving a proposed structure of Special Operations Forces Command and assets at the Theatre level, with recommendations to keep the Indian Air Force assets as integral.

The interaction following the lecture contained questions from the virtual and physical attendees, seeking views of the speaker on the evolving issues concerning the subject, including, an important question on 'the Armed Force Special Operations Division taking the lead to plan a way forward and how will it fit in theatrisation plans?' These were appropriately answered by the speaker.