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## CONCEPTUAL ORGANIZATIONAL AND FUNCTIONAL MODELS OF THE ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES IN THE LEADING NATO COUNTRIES

### Abstract

The timely character of the article is in the necessity of further development of the theory of the deployment of Special Operations Forces in wars and military conflicts of today's world. Nowadays the new type of conflict does not present considerable and noticeable danger but it presents dissipated and interconnected threats and risks.

As far as the deployment of the armed forces only is no longer able to resist these new challenges, leaders of the countries strive to enlarge their military capabilities with flexible means of rapid response which ensure more freedom of operations and present new operational capabilities in addition to conventional operations.

Special Operations Forces are unable to provide a positive outcome in either large-scale or local war themselves. But it is impossible to imagine a modern war or counterterrorist operation without the participation of special operations units and formations. Furthermore, the "informational aspect" of combat actions, control systems, military, industrial, administrative objects located behind the lines, and the expansion of terroristic organizations, and frequent use of "guerrilla" tactics of small high-mobility groups inflicting quick blows and quickly disappearing, comes into great importance. All this enhances the importance of Special Operations Forces.

The article considers conceptual organizational and functional models of the Army Special Operations Forces in the leading NATO countries (the USA, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy).

**Key words:** Special Operations Forces, special operation, NATO

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## Introduction

The period from the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by a transition from large-scale wars to local ones, the number of which is constantly growing. Pursuant to the scientific report of the Institute for international conflicts study (Heidelberg, Germany), there occurred 414 conflicts in 2013, 45 of which were viewed unfavorable as a “conflict with high degree of violence use”. Experts declared 20 of them as wars. There were eleven military confrontations between countries. (AJP-3.5, 2013: 1–1).

Special Operations Forces units constantly participate in operations for settling conflicts and gained considerable combat experience while conducting special operations on the territory of the Balkan states, and during the war in the Persian Gulf zone and counterterrorist operations in Afghanistan. That is why foreign analysts consider Special Operations Forces as a “third force” along with nuclear weapons and conventional forces. (Сафонов 2000: 7).

The purpose of the article is to modernize conceptual, organizational and functional models of the Army Special Operations Forces in the leading NATO countries based on the analysis of published documents and specialist literature.

## United States of America

For the first time in military practice Joint Special Operation Command was established in 1987 in the US Armed Forces. At the beginning (1987) its personnel comprised 32,800 men, but since 2000 it has numbered about 46,000 servicemen (according to other sources (Прокофьев 1999: 31–32) – about 47,000 men in 1999).

Joint Special Operation Command of the US Armed Forces includes commands and SOF (Special Operations Forces) of all three armed services. The largest in structure (and in tasks number) is the US Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), which includes: five (seven (Богдан 1999: 14–21)) special operations teams (SO), “Ranger” regiment, SO army aviation regiment, psychological operations units and outreach efforts units, Special Forces Operational Detachment “Delta” and service units; total strength – 25,600 men (Balistreri 2017: <http://specialoperations.com/32070/usasoc-turns-27-today-december-1-1989>).

According to the field service manual FM 31-21 SOF of the US Armed Forces can operate in the context of war, military conflict and in

peacetime (Михайлов 1996: 12–14). The basic SOF combat unit is the operational detachment “A” (“Alfa”), consisting of 12 men and which is designated to conduct independent special operations or can be the future headquarters of “guerilla” movement. “A” detachments can also conduct all types of reconnaissance as well as use agents among civilian population.

Other important function of SOF Command is carrying out psychological operations (PSYOP) which are a part of informational operations. For this purpose, there is the command of communication with civil administrations (in operation zone) and the command of psychological operations as part of USASOC. First of all their functions include civil affairs mission and stabilizing the situation thanks to information influence, including conducting psychological operations. Every SOF command of the USA armed services has its own PSYOP forces, though basic potential (almost 85%) is concentrated in the US Army where there are PSYOP units ready for combat as well as considerable reserve components with a high degree of mobilization readiness. (Старунский 2003: 62–71; <http://www.socom.mil/ussocom-enterprise/components/army-special-operations-command> [access 1 February 2018]).

The basis of these forces is the 4<sup>th</sup> PSYOP team (airborne) 1,135 men strong.

Ranger regiment (three battalions) and seven SO teams (Богдан 1999: 14–21) are a part of the US Army SOF command. They conduct independent sabotage, reconnaissance and other special tasks. Army aviation regiment performs airborne infiltration and employment of Special Operations Forces, its pilots are able to operate under any conditions by day and by night (weekly flight hours at night is equal to 15 hours).

## United Kingdom

Special Operations Forces of the British Armed Forces are a part of the Army and the Navy. The Ministry of Defense of Great Britain exercises direction of Special Operation Forces through the Defense Staff. Permanent Joint Staff performs operational control. (Шмелёв 2006: 27–33).

The basis of the Army Special Operations Forces is formed by three separate regiments of Special Air Service (SAS), one of which is active and the other two are in cadre personnel, and by four training centers (reconnaissance, special, parachute, center of manning and training), also Special Reconnaissance Regiment (500–700 men) – counterterrorist operations.

Special Operations regiments are organized typically: 22<sup>nd</sup> separate regiment (400–600 servicemen) has a headquarters, four operational squadrons, special communication company and logistic support. Also in 1980 L Detachment was created, comprising of reserve personnel. Each company (78 servicemen, including six officers) consists of a command group and four platoons (parachute, amphibious, mountain and mobile). Two reserve regiments (21st and 23rd SO regiments) have three squadrons each. In peacetime they are subordinated to territorial command and have only headquarters deployed. In wartime they are left on account of reservists of 22<sup>nd</sup> SO regiment and servicemen of the Territorial Army. On the basis of one regular regiment there can be formed up to 50 reconnaissance and sabotage groups 8–16 men in number, able to operate far behind the enemy lines without additional supplies for five days (as a rule, in groups with specialists in reconnaissance, demolition, communication and medicine). (Меженин 1994: 12–14). Special Air Service (SAS) is officially a part of Military Intelligence structure of Great Britain, and is subordinated to the Army command. In peacetime in regional and local conflicts SAS mainly participates in reconnaissance-sabotage operations of military political orientation (sabotage, assassinating political and military leaders, conducting psychological war, forming guerrilla detachments and bases behind the enemy lines etc., <https://www.army.mod.uk/> [access 1 February 2018]).

In wartime SAS independently carries out sabotage-reconnaissance tasks in operative and tactical depth of enemy forces in order to detect and destruct missile and nuclear weapons, command and control centers, communication centers and other important objects. (Михайлов 1996: 6–10).

## France

In 1992 France through the example of the USA and Great Britain established GCOS – General Commandant les Operations Speciales as a part of its armed forces.

Special operations command joined all units and formations of the armed forces, and the formations which were designated to support them. Special Operations Command acts in four directions: cooperation, support, neutralization and influence activity.

The first direction includes military assistance abroad, which covers the means for giving assistance in instructing servicemen and training SO units of foreign countries (mostly in African regions which have

a treaty with France on military cooperation), and participation in overseas peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.

The second direction includes conducting military support operations (special reconnaissance, sabotage actions, search and rescue operations). The third direction includes counterterrorism, release of hostages and evacuation of French citizens from the territory of other countries, conducting special actions in enemy country in peacetime. The fourth direction includes conducting influence operations (psychological operations and participation in the organization of work of non-governmental organizations).

The Command is directly subordinated to the General Staff of the French Armed Forces, and the SO Commander is an assistant staff officer on special operations problems. Under his guidance the SO Command conducts operations and exercises with the participation of SOF of different armed services, and also plans and coordinates exchange of experience, and exercises with foreign SOF.

Special Operations Command consists of six interconnected administrations: operations; special training; research; development and innovations; telecommunications and information systems; general issues; civil affairs (Богдан 1999: 14–21; Шарковский 2015).

In order to carry out the assigned tasks Special Operations Command is in charge of the Army Special forces brigade (in 2016 French *brigade des forces spéciales Terre* was reorganized as *commandement des forces spéciales Terre* (Army Special Forces Command). It consists of three regiments: 1st Marine Parachute Regiment, 13th Regiment of Parachute Dragoons and 4th Regiment of Helicopters, support by a company of command and transmission), AF Special units and Marine Corps and SO Navy Units Command (<https://www.defense.gouv.fr/terre/l-armee-de-terre/le-niveau-divisionnaire/commandement-des-forces-speciales-terre/le-commandement-des-forces-speciales-terre/organismes-et-formations-rattaches>, access 1 February 2018).

## Federal Republic of Germany

The Armed Forces of Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) established SO formations in the Army and in the Navy. Units and formations of the FRG armed forces, which are designated to perform special tasks, are the part of the national armed services and are able to carry out assigned tasks in all types of operations independently and as a part of Bundeswehr large forces. Major special operations command is respon-

sible for the organization of operations control of SO units regardless of their armed service kind.

Special Operations Division was formed in the land forces on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April in 2001, in 2014 the Division was transformed into Rapid Force Division (Division Schnelle Kräfte – DSK). Now DSK consists of German 1st Airborne Brigade (4,100 servicemen), Dutch 11th Airmobile Brigade (2,100 servicemen) and also the units of Special Operations – Kommando Spezialkräfte (KSK). Total strength of the personnel is almost 10,600 men. (Топон 2001: 26–35). Among the KSK tasks there are operational and strategic reconnaissance behind enemy lines, including penetration into ~~guided~~ guarded objects; performing acts of sabotage; removing officials from military and political leadership; guidance of missiles and aviation; fighting with enemy sabotage-reconnaissance formations on our rear area and behind the enemy lines; fighting with irregular formations on their rear area; rescue and release of the servicemen of FRG and allied countries; evacuation of FRG citizens from crisis regions; and hostages release. They are also used for training personnel of allied SO units. KSK units carry out assigned tasks independently and in cooperation with formations of other armed services as well. (Топон 2001: 26–35; <http://www.deutschesheer.de/portal/a/heer/start/dienstst/dsk/gliederung/-kommandospezialkraefte>, access 1 February 2018; Шарковский 2015).

KSK consist of Headquarters (with psychological and language services), Force Development Group, Operational Forces (four Commando Companies, Special Commando Company, Training and Development Centre) and Support Forces (Staff & Supply Company, Signal Company, Support Company, Medical Company). The personnel of KSK numbers about 1,100 people.

Psychology operations units are grouped into 900<sup>th</sup> signal brigade that is subordinated to the Army Command on an administrative base and to the Bundeswehr Operational Command on the operational base. The brigade consists of: 950<sup>th</sup> signal battalion, 951<sup>st</sup> topographic platoon, 952<sup>nd</sup> training center for signalmen, and 300<sup>th</sup> training information company. (Мосалёв 2003: 33–36).

## Italy

Currently Special Operations Forces (SOF) of the Italian land forces are subordinated to the Chief of General Staff (GS) of ground forces and have a single echelon of command – Special Operations Force Com-

mand. The basis of SOF land forces is 9<sup>th</sup> Parachute Assault Regiment “Col Moschin” consists of the command (commander and deputy commander), staff (departments of drill command, cadre personnel, operational activity, combat training, reconnaissance, administration and service support), signal company, 1<sup>st</sup> raider battalion and SO training section (A. Succi, Forze Speciali Italiane. I Migliori Corpi Della Difesa Italia GUIDA, <https://www.infiltrato.it/sicurezza/forze-speciali-italiane-corpi-difesa-italia/> [access 1 February 2018]).

The 1<sup>st</sup> raider battalion consists of the command, 110<sup>th</sup>, 120<sup>th</sup> 130<sup>th</sup>, 140<sup>th</sup> raider companies. The availability of four raider companies allows the regiment command to have one of them in constant combat readiness on the force rotation basis while the personnel of the three other companies practice combat tasks and then take rest.

The raider company includes several strategic groups consisting of eight men each (under the officer’s command), which are the basic organizational structure of SOF while conducting special operations. Each company must have groups for conducting marine operations and high altitude airdrop. Each raider group can be split during operations and, as a rule, raiders operate in pairs. Recently in the company a security unit has been formed providing security for the leadership of the armed forces. Special operations training section organizationally consists of the command, 101<sup>st</sup> (basic training) and 102<sup>st</sup> (recruitment) training companies and SO training base for raiders. (Алексеев 2016, №8, С. 41–44).

Recently, the tasks and organizational and staff structure of the unit have been finalized. In wartime the regiment is able to carry out such tasks as: reconnaissance and elimination of means for delivery of weapons of mass destruction, depots and its storage facilities; organization of sabotage at objects of state and military control, the military and industrial complex of the country, population sustainment; neutralization of representatives of higher BBP; conducting psychological operations aimed at demoralization of population and enemy troops; participation in search and rescue operations, and participation in combat operations conducted by OUN, NATO, and EU.

## Employment of the SOF in the NATO

Analysis of the experience of the Army SOF deployment in the leading NATO countries shows that the smallest unit acting independently is able to find (detect and determine coordinates) from three to five objects, afflict one big stationary object and destroy up to three moving targets,

and one commando in ambush can kill up to 20 enemy soldiers. Moreover, such formations are designed to create critical lines of destruction, inundation, placing booby-traps, using small-size nuclear weapons, and initiate terrain and water contamination. According to expert NATO evaluation, the probability of carrying out combat task by sabotage-reconnaissance formation in destructing conventional object is 0.7 – 0.8, which can be compared with the strike capabilities of a high-precision weapon. (Барынькин 2001: 12–15).

US Armed Forces, which act in different global locations, carry out operational and even strategic missions, primarily for the benefit of achieving success at the initial stage of war or military conflict, have the greatest experience of SOF employment.

Peak readiness for the SOF actions is planned 3 – 30 days prior to the beginning of military operations. So, SOF units can be pre-deployed in usual environment to the required regions all over the world (Сафонов 2000: 7). This is shown by the exercise experience of the US Armed Forces and NATO. During the preparatory stage of the exercises over a period of 30 days, a part of operational detachments “Alfa” came to the maneuver area in civil clothes. They passed through customs and border control posing as biologists, geologists and ornithologists that allowed them unopposed movement on the area. They practiced the following tasks: studying in detail the area of operations; preparing main and emergency landing grounds for landing personnel and cargo, future camps of guerrilla formations; studying the objects for future sabotage and approaches to them; updating probable maneuver routes; searching supporters among local population; preparing covert accommodation; laying the ammunition underground storage. “Alfa” detachments find out the units identification on the operation area, their combat tasks and state. They also can help local population and gain confidence in such a way (Богдан 1999: 14–21).

Before the beginning of military operations in the interests of higher political leadership, land-based and air units of SOF usually conduct special reconnaissance in order to collect information about the political, economic and psychological environment, armed forces and military and technical capabilities of the country. SOF specialists have consultations on military issues aimed to influence the national environment of friendly countries, or participate in actions focused on the prevention and suppression of anti-government strikes, subversion or insurgency in these countries, performed by opposing forces (Анедченко 1998: 30–36).

In recent times counterterrorism has become an important SOF mission. Special operations forces provide training and take part in antiter-

rorist operations, search for illegal military formations, provide projection operations, provide air fire support, assassinate terrorists and destroy their bases.

It is important to emphasize the growing role of SOF in such a sphere as information war. For the first time information technologies were used in the war with Iraq in 1991. At the same time US SOF destroyed informational elements of combat control systems of the Iraqis.

In 1996 US Department of Defense put into effect the “Doctrine for command and control warfare” which specifies the simultaneous use of techniques and methods of security, deception procedures, psychological operations, radio electronic warfare, and the destruction of enemy control systems for reducing its ability to command and control combat actions on the battlefield. Main objects under influence in new wars will be informational infrastructure and mentality not only of military but also civilian population. (Шаблювский 2004: 20–31).

Destructive influence on the process of control and decision making is achieved first of all by conducting psychological operations (PSYOP) aimed primarily at the personnel and individuals who have to make decisions according to their positions. This type of action is difficult to identify before the beginning of operations and at the beginning of military operations.

In the judgement of the US military and political leadership at the present time PSYOP are a necessary element in military conflicts of different intensity, in peacekeeping, humanitarian and counterterrorist operations. US Special Operations Forces conduct strategic (at the national level), operational (in the interests of joint commands at the theatre of operations) and tactical (in specified regions) psychological operations. OK SOF is responsible for organizing and conducting PSYOP in the US armed forces, the main executive is the US Army SOF, in its structure there is the command of cooperation with civil administrations and psychological operations. (Старунский 2003: 62–71).

Strategically and operational-tactically PSYOP, measures of psychological influence were improved during the deployment of US SOF in Grenada (1983), Panama (1989), Iraq (1991, 2003), Haiti (1994), Yugoslavia (1999) and Afghanistan (2001–2002).

Some psychological operations were unsuccessful. American experts think that one of the main causes of failure was faulty judgement of objects of influence that led to problems in planning and organizing PSYOP. While conducting PSYOP in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan, the quality of information and propagandistic materials, especially at the beginning, was unsatisfactory. Operation staff did not take into account

the national religious specific nature of the region and population mentality, low standards of living and education. (Тюрин 2003: 7–11).

An important role is given to psychological provisioning of different peacekeeping and military actions. According to the Manual of the US Army FM-100-23 “Peacekeeping Operations” SOF specialists not only provide informational and psychological support, but participate in the process of forming temporary commanding structures in the region of conducting operations. All this is performed in combination with other types of SOF operations.

So, despite the fact that special operations forces in NATO countries have different titles (“Special Operations Forces” /the USA, Great Britain, France/, “Special Forces” /FRG/, “Special Designation Forces” /Turkey/), they carry out specific functional tasks which are described below.

The primary tasks of SOF in peacetime are as follows: organization of anti-state activities, insurgency and guerrilla movements aimed at destabilizing situation in the country; capturing or assassinating prominent political, state or military leaders; conducting sabotage acts; collecting intelligence of political, economic and military and strategic character; training and forming guerrilla and insurgency detachments; stockpiling, distributing and deploying weapons and resources of logistical support in specified regions (future guerrilla bases), that is planned to provide conducting special operations in wartime; training servicemen and civilian personnel of the host country within the frames of giving it military assistance and support in the interests of its national security; capturing hostages or release of citizens; protection of citizens and property that are located on the territory of other country, their evacuation if necessary; conducting psychological operations and actions of civil administration in the interests of accomplishing above mentioned tasks; giving assistance in counterterrorism, finding and organizing attacks on headquarters and bases of terroristic organizations.

In wartime: collecting intelligence in the interests of friendly forces actions on the area of operations; destroying or seizing of the important military and industrial objects behind the enemy lines with the use of conventional, nuclear, chemical and biological weapons; performing raids and making ambushes behind the enemy lines; destroying communications, systems of state and military control and logistic support; directing friendly aircraft to the target, adjusting airstrikes with missiles and artillery fire; conducting sabotage acts and psychological operations in order to weaken enemy rear area, demoralize enemy personnel and population; finding and stealing nuclear weapons, equipment and weap-

on systems, confidential documents; organizing escape of our servicemen and civilian personnel from captivity.

In different NATO countries Special Operations Forces distinctly differ in number, combat strength and capabilities. However, their organizational structure is similar. As a rule, it includes a definite number of combat units (reconnaissance-sabotage), staff units, signal units, logistic support and medical units, and in some cases – fire support units. Combat equipment of SOF includes specialized weapon and military equipment systems: aircraft and helicopters, submarines, ships and motor boats, small-sized nuclear mines, chemical and biological resources, demolition agents and mines, small arms of silent and flameless firing, portable small-sized satellite communication terminals and other means for carrying out tasks well to the enemy rear.

Conceptual views of the armed forces commands in the NATO countries pertaining to the deployment of special forces refer to their ground, air and naval components and cover different aspects of SOF use in crises and military conflicts.

In some NATO countries (the USA, France, Turkey) national armed forces formed SOF units and certain control organs (Command) which provided their effective use and coordination of cooperation with other armed services and arms (Joint Special Operations Forces Command /the USA/, Special Operations Command /France/, Special Operations Forces Command /FRG/, Special Designation Forces Command /Italy).

Operational control of special operations forces is performed by General Staff (Defence Staff) of the armed forces (Turkey, France) or JCS (the USA) through corresponding SOF commands.

Some NATO countries (Great Britain, Italy and FRG) do not have joint SOF commands and have only two components – ground and naval. In this case SOF units and formations are operationally subordinated to the commands of the armed services, and in the case of their combat deployment – to general staffs of the national armed forces.

It should also be taken into consideration that SOF solve tasks beyond the functions of the armed forces; they closely cooperate with special services of the country (MI-6 /Great Britain/, National gendarmerie /France/, Gendarme forces /Turkey/, Federal border surveillance /FRG/).

The basis of the Army SOF (the most numerous) consists of separate brigades (commands) and SO regiments which include: combat units (battalions/SO companies; deep reconnaissance companies); combat support units (company of special radio communication); logistic support units; units for personnel training (training centers).

Combat deployment of SOF is realized, as a rule, in SO groups, the strength of which depends on the type of assigned tasks and may include: up to 4 men (Great Britain, FRG); up to 8 men (the USA, Italy); to 10–12 men (France, Turkey). Personnel duties are clearly delegated considering the specialization of each member (group commander, deputy commander, reconnaissance trooper, signalman, demolition engineer, weapon expert, medical attendant).

In addition, SOF of the ground forces (the USA, France) comprise army aviation units (160<sup>th</sup> aviation regiment and army aviation detachment) which are responsible for troop projection and support for SOF units in operational regions. In several European countries (Italy, FRG, Turkey) SOF combat units are reinforced by helicopters from the army aviation brigade.

Experience of the participation of US forces in present-day conflicts shows that in the process of training and conducting special operations, Command of Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations (CA and PSY-OP) of the US Army plays a leading role. According to the experts' estimation, the activity of this command considerably enables efficient deployment of combined arms formations in combat actions for settlement of crisis situations. The Civil Affairs Group (to 97%) is composed of reservists with high levels of professional training in the field of public security (police), agriculture, finance and administration.

The psychological operations group of the CA and PSYOP Command supports all types of special operations through conducting informational war aimed at forming public opinion, corresponding to the USA interests, among the local population of the crisis region.

Along with that, in order to provide support to SOF units and conduct deep reconnaissance companies of deep reconnaissance have been formed (FRG, Italy), which consist of command group and platoons of deep reconnaissance. The total strength of a deep reconnaissance company is about 80 servicemen.

At the same time, the tendency to include reconnaissance units and formations in the SOF structure is observed in other NATO countries, France in particular, where forming the deep reconnaissance regiment in the SOF structure is considered to be viable. A similar regiment was created in the UK in 2005.

## Conclusion

Special methods of conducting a war (psychological operations, demolition actions, SOF operations) will play an important role in eliminating and preventing a growing level of “asymmetric” threats.

Wide deployment of Special Operations Forces in the leading NATO countries in present-day armed conflicts shows the further growth in their role in achieving political objectives with the use of unconventional means by the leadership of leading countries.

The conducted analysis allows for the clearing up of such essential features of conceptual orientation and organizational and functional structure of the Army Special Operations Forces in the leading NATO countries:

- determination of a functional place in the system of national armed forces, tasks, structural features and tactics of SOF actions by geopolitical orientation, doctrinal documents of military-political strategy of the country, distribution of functions in the system of collective (coalition) military missions, historical traditions of military development and resource capabilities of a specific country for conducting SO on land part of the Theatre of Combat Actions;
- clear tendency to separate SOF into independent highly professional, combat effective and highly mobile Army component of the armed forces and to form separate command and control (coordination) elements;
- gaining the Army SOF capabilities for independent execution of important military and political missions without involving the main armed forces as part of strategies of asymmetric confrontation;
- definition of the Army SOF tasks for peacetime and wartime considering the degree of threat and intensity of real armed conflict;
- organization of SOF in main armed services, particularly in the Army and definition of cooperation mechanism between them;
- definition of the Army SOF main tasks with priority-oriented actions behind enemy lines including special reconnaissance, sabotage and demolition operations, neutralization of weapons of mass destruction, conducting combined-arms air and ground operations;
- presence of the units for performing non-combat and asymmetric tasks (psychological operations, developing insurgency and guerrilla movements, cooperation with friendly civilian population etc.) in the organizational and functional model of the Army SOF;
- availability of specific system (establishments, centers etc.) of training and retraining of “elite force” including trained contingent of reservists as well in the Army SOF.

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## Konceptualne, organizacyjne i funkcjonalne modele wojskowych służb operacyjnych w wiodących państwach NATO

### Streszczenie

Aktualność tematu wynika z potrzeby dalszego rozwoju ogólnej teorii użycia sił specjalnych w wojnach i konfliktach zbrojnych współczesności. Obecnie nowy rodzaj konfliktu nie ma już charakteru dużego i zauważalnego zagrożenia, lecz stanowi rozproszone i wzajemnie powiązane zagrożenia i ryzyka.

Ponieważ wykorzystanie samych tylko sił zbrojnych nie jest już w stanie sprostać nowym wyzwaniom, liderzy krajów starają się rozszerzyć swoje zdolności militarne za pomocą elastycznych mechanizmów szybkiego reagowania, które zapewniają większą swobodę działania i nowe możliwości operacyjne jako uzupełnienie konwencjonalnych operacji.

Same siły specjalne nie są w stanie zapewnić pozytywnego wyniku ani dużej, ani lokalnej wojny, jednak żadnej współczesnej wojny, interwencji zbrojnej czy operacji antyterrorystycznej nie można sobie wyobrazić bez działania jednostek sił specjalnych. Coraz większe znaczenie „elementu informacyjnego” działań bojowych, systemów kontroli, obiektów wojskowych, przemysłowych, administracyjnych znajdujących się poza bezpośrednim polem walki, a także ekspansja działalności organizacji terrorystycznych, coraz częściej stosowana taktyka „partyzancka” małych, szybkich grup, które powodują szybkie ciosy i szybko znikają, podnoszą znaczenie sił specjalnych.

Artykuł zawiera konceptualne modele organizacyjne i funkcjonalne sił specjalnych funkcjonujących w siłach zbrojnych w wiodących krajach NATO (USA, Wielka Brytania, Francja, RFN, Włochy).

**Słowa kluczowe:** siły specjalne, operacje specjalne, NATO