

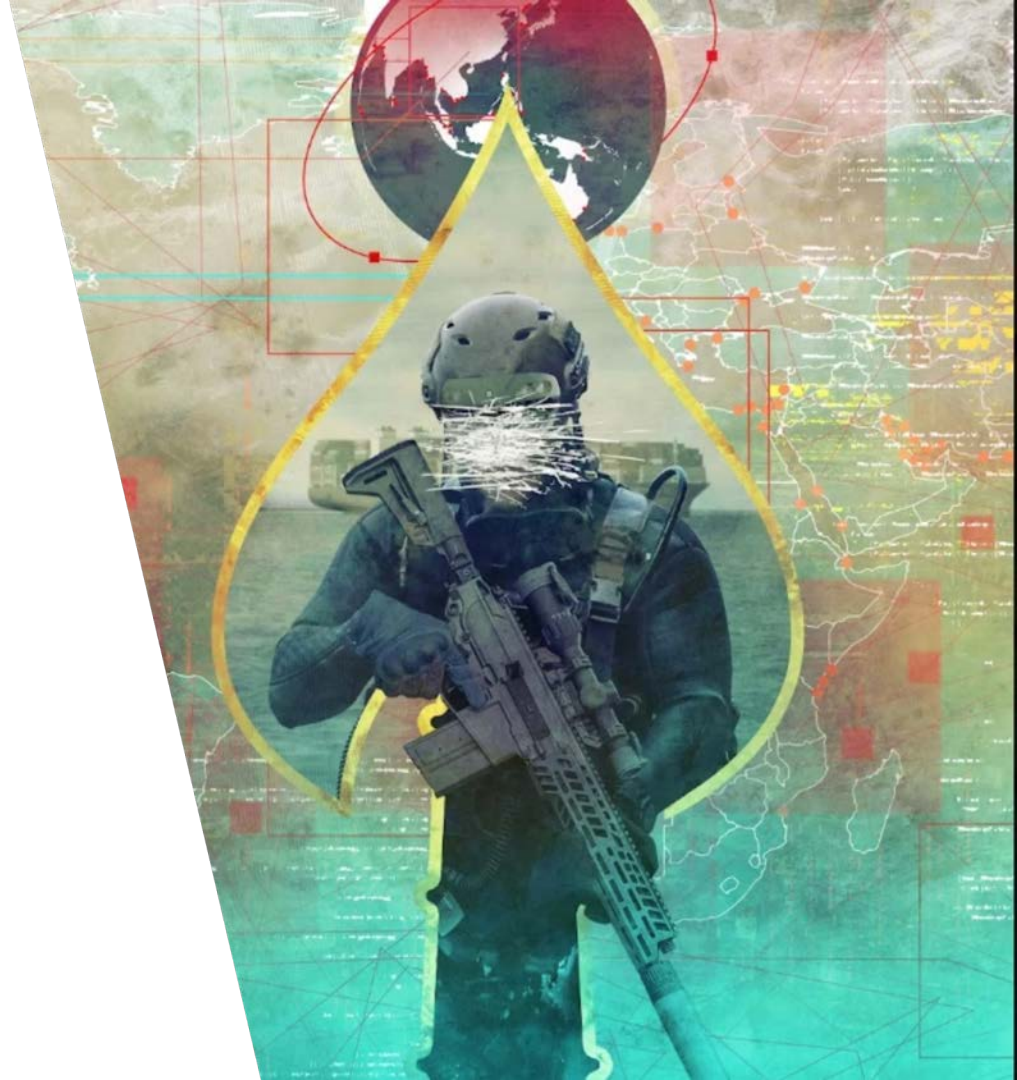
Envisioning the Future of SOF Warfare

Useful Fiction & the Road to 2030

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WWW.USEFUL-FICTION.COM



THE APPROACH

Two Lenses on the Future



Nonfiction Analysis — Grounded in real-world trends, open-source research, and strategic assessments of the emerging global operating environment.



Useful Fiction — Imagined but anchored in reality, designed to be entertaining, informative, and even inspirational for those preparing for the future fight.

SOCOM asked us to apply both approaches to build a scenario that draws upon real-world trends. What we built is a story called *Operation Lock-In*, available on the JSOU website.





Three Forces Converging

The central question: **What happens when these three things come together?**

1

New Global Trends & Technologies

Emerging capabilities, contested domains, and the shifting nature of the global operating environment into the 2030s.

2

Adversary Concepts of Warfare

The doctrinal, strategic, and tactical theories of victory held by America's great power competitors.

3

The Unique Capabilities of SOCOM

The SOF Truths — from the primacy of people to the generational value of relationships and non-SOF partnerships.

New Global Trends & Technologies

While futures are hard to predict, we can anchor ourselves in certain realities shaping SOCOM's missions in the 2030s.

Expanded Mission Range

From partnership training and counterterrorism to projecting force worldwide — holding nation-state adversary strategic targets at risk.

Contested Domains

Missions in jungles or subterranean environments shaped by outer space, cyberspace, and the electromagnetic spectrum.

Cognitive Battlespace

Algorithms shape cognition and perspectives faster than kinetic operations in a world of instant global connections.

Emergent Technologies

Next-generation AI, advanced sensing and mission management tools, and increasingly autonomous robotics employed by SOF and adversaries alike.

Redefined Operators

New skills requirements and ideal team compositions — even the meaning of victory must be re-examined.

Adversary Concepts of Warfare

Great power competition — reinforced by not just technology sharing, but a "learning complex" of doctrinal and tactical sharing between Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea — defines the highest-stakes challenge.

Civil-Military Fusion

Synergizing economic development and military modernization — sharing talent, resources, and innovations across defense and commercial enterprises in everything from big data to national defense mobilization.

Cognitive Warfare

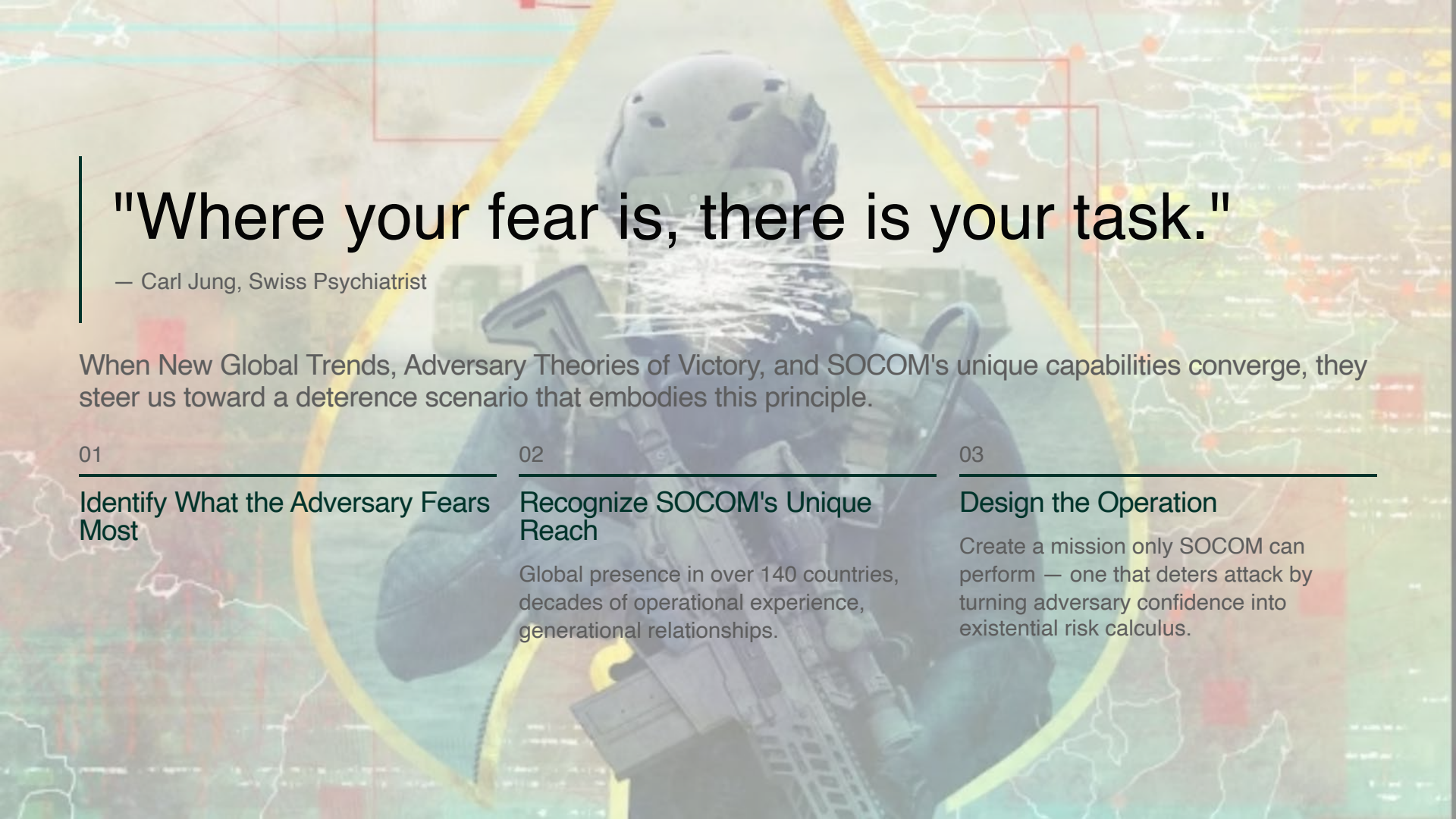
PLA doctrine aims to "capture the mind" — shaping adversary thoughts, perceptions, decisions, and actions. China places cognitive warfare on par with air, sea, and space domains, viewing it as key to victory without war.

Intelligentized Warfare

A network information system using AI, cloud computing, and big-data to fuse real-time battlefield awareness, precision strikes, and psychological operations into "dynamic kill networks" across domains.

Dissipative Warfare

Victory lies in maintaining order within one's own system while creating disorder within the adversary's — applicable to both strategic competition and direct combat.



"Where your fear is, there is your task."

— Carl Jung, Swiss Psychiatrist

When New Global Trends, Adversary Theories of Victory, and SOCOM's unique capabilities converge, they steer us toward a deterrence scenario that embodies this principle.

01

Identify What the Adversary Fears Most

02

Recognize SOCOM's Unique Reach

Global presence in over 140 countries, decades of operational experience, generational relationships.

03

Design the Operation

Create a mission only SOCOM can perform — one that deters attack by turning adversary confidence into existential risk calculus.

THE SCENARIO: ~2030

Operation Lock-In

U.S. intelligence has learned China is poised to launch a major military operation against a U.S. ally in the INDOPACOM region. What is devised in response is a plan designed not to defeat the attack — **but to deter it**, in a way that only SOCOM can perform.

The Opening Move



A SEAL team swims through Dar Es Salaam harbor, plants a limpet mine on a Chinese freighter carrying rare earth minerals. The mine carries a geographic tag — it detonates only if the ship moves, **locking in** the vessel.

The First Truly Global SOF Operation



The SOCOM commander watches from Tampa as hundreds of similarly audacious missions — led by SOF teams worldwide — lock in targets with strategic or personal value to PLA and CCP leaders.

The Target Set



Each target selected for direct or indirect effect on China's military and civilian supply chains, its defense industrial base, or the political and financial toll on its leaders, their closest supporters, and their families.

The Strategic Logic

"You fight your way, and I'll fight my way." —MAO ZEDONG

Operation Lock-In envisions the operational creation of a dark mirror of China's own strategic concepts — turned against the vulnerabilities that matter most.

What Our Scenario Strikes

Military-Civil Fusion

Striking vulnerabilities in China's integrated defense-commercial supply chains and strategic autonomy.

Systemic Interests and Function

Targeting the CCP's both personal and deepest commitment — the maintenance of internal order and legitimacy.

Geography as Constraint

Demonstrating that despite home-court advantage, China simply cannot escape its geography.

The Cognitive Warfare Blow

The most powerful effect of *Operation Lock-In* is not kinetic — it is psychological. By hitting PLA and CCP leaders when and where they are most personally invested, *Lock-In* delivers a massive cognitive warfare strike.

The confidence one needs to *start* a war is transformed into a fear that war would create risks that outweigh any possible gain.



The goal is deterrence achieved through the logic the adversary itself wrote — a direct application of dissipative warfare and cognitive domain theory turned in reverse.

FORCE THREE

What Only SOCOM Can Do

No other nation — including China — possesses the combination of capabilities that make an operation like *Lock-In* conceivable, let alone executable.



Global Presence — Active in over 140 countries, with reach no other force can match.



Operational Experience — Decades of continuous combat and irregular warfare at the highest levels.



Generational Relationships — Personal and professional bonds built over generations with partners worldwide.

Other militaries believe they have comparable skill. None combine all three. This is the irreplaceable foundation of SOCOM's strategic value — and the reason *Operation Lock-In* is a mission only the SOF community could execute.



Turning Fiction Into Reality

Useful Fiction is not just entertainment.

Operation Lock-In was designed to be **informative and inspirational**, envisioning not just new tech in war, but the kind of mission only SOCOM can accomplish.

The Central Question for the Real World

How does SOCOM take the scenario envisioned in *Operation Lock-In* — the global reach, the cognitive warfare, the precision targeting of adversary vulnerabilities — and build the doctrine, training, technology, and relationships to make it possible?

- ✔ *Operation Lock-In* is available on the **JSOU website**. Read the full story — and consider how the future it imagines might become the mission SOCOM is called to execute.

