US Special Forces: The Other within the Self

Introduction

In their 2014 article, Jack Holland and Lee Jarvis point to the development and rise of critical constructivist work on terrorism (Holland and Jarvis 2014). These works understand terrorism as something socially constructed through discourse; that our understanding of terrorists and terrorism is constituted discursively (Holland and Jarvis 2014; Holland 2013; Jarvis 2009a; Hulsse and Spencer 2008; Winkler 2006; Jackson 2005). Holland and Jarvis argue that this discursive turn "opens new space for the entrance of new materials, methodologies and questions into terrorism research" (Holland and Jarvis 2014: 189). This paper represents an attempt to contribute to this literature by adding some new materials and questions about the discursive understanding of terrorism. A considerable amount of the work in this area to date has focused primarily on the diverse but very public discourse around terrorism (Holland 2013; Jarvis 2011; Spencer 2010; Jackson 2008; Jackson 2005). This paper does not deny that this is an important task nor that these works do not offer insightful critiques of terrorism as discourse. However it will be argued here that that this does not give the full picture with regards to the American relationship with terrorism, despite the literature being "skewed towards the deconstruction of Western elite discourse" (Holland and Jarvis 2014: 189).

The paper highlights two primary reasons for this. Firstly, it agrees with Hulsse and Spencer's assertion that critical literature on terrorism has a "preoccupation with the terrorist actor" (Hulsse and Spencer 2008: 574). If there is a tendency to deconstruct Western elite discourses, it is also somewhat paradoxical to then try and focus on the terrorist actor's discourse. As Hulsse and Spencer point out, "What we make of the terrorist is what matters, not what he or she makes of him- or herself" (Hulsse and Spencer 2008: 576). If terrorism is a social construct, this attempt to understand "their points of view, their motivations, their thoughts, their feelings" (Jackson 2014: xi) risks moving the focus of research away from the fundamental claim of discourse based study, that it is out of the Western understandings of terrorism that the terrorist even exists in the first place. Of course, such a focus has its merits, as producing evidence of different narratives is one way of exposing the subjective narrative it is trying to question in the first place (Jackson 2014; Zulaika and Douglass 2008; Breen Smyth 2007; Gunning 2007; Jackson 2007), ultimately destabilising the narrative and offering an alternative to the dominant and potentially damaging understanding of terrorism (Jarvis 2009b; Oliverio 1998; Zulaika and Douglass 1996). However the representations of the terrorist in these alternative narratives are loaded with the same subjectivities which are formed in the same way as the Western dominant discourse is; how the terrorist may view themselves comes from an understanding

formed through different articulations of discourse, just in the same way the United States or any other country may understand themselves. Ken Booth (2008: 70) suggests that "there is no silver bullet to be delivered by Psychology identifying a discrete terrorist personality" yet this is exactly what an approach overly focused on the terrorist actor can potentially do. Richard Jackson for example, suggests his work allows a terrorist to have a "real voice" which allows a reader to understand the motivations behind their violence which is so demonised in popular Western security narratives (2014: xi). This real voice however, is as subjective as that of the Western dominant discourse on terrorism that he seeks to critique. If for example, the American representation of an Islamic terrorist is "false" due to discursive construction, then so by the same token so is the alternative narrative offered by the terrorist. This is not to say that such work has no value, as already pointed out above, it is rather to suggest that it can only go so far in explaining articulations of terrorism in foreign and security policies.

The second point of contention involves that focus on the very public discourse around terrorism. Again this is not without its merits, as such work is effective in exposing the very clear processes of othering which come from socially constructed understandings of terrorism (Holland 2013: Holland 2009: Jackson 2005) Concentrating on Presidential speeches can demonstrate the discursive construction of a terrorist as well as the self as being good, freedom-loving, peaceful, compassionate and dignified (Jackson 2005). Everything that the terrorist is not. There is a clear effort to highlight and expose the binary structures which form the discourse, an identification of signs which end up with one being on a more privileged side of the discourse enabling different possibilities for the actors involved (Holland 2013; Holland and Bentley 2013; Jackson 2005), building on previous work that has shown the existence of such binary discursive constructions (Weldes 1999; Campbell 1998; Doty 1993; Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Derrida 1982). The problem that this paper notes with regards to critical terrorism studies scholarship which focuses on elite speeches and rhetoric for its research material, is that it risks simplifying the Western, or more specifically in the case of the American relationship with terrorism, to a straightforward and simple good versus evil binary to the point where it is claimed that non-state violence is presented as totally illegitimate in American security discourse (Jackson 2014; Jackson 2008; Jackson 2005). Along with the discussed attempts to counter this narrative with views of how terrorists see themselves, this results in the United States being represented as a country which has a very one-dimensional relationship with terrorism and non-state violence. This paper instead will argue that this is not the case, rather that there are a series of binary constructions between the United States and terrorism, consistent with Laclau and Mouffe's idea of a proliferated discursive chain (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). This means taking a different approach to discourse found in the majority of critical literature on terrorism. This approach has mainly been used

in wider critical security studies and IR theory (Hansen 2006; Hansen and Waever 2002; Hansen 2000; Doty 1993; Campbell 1992).

A narrow analysis of public elite discourse, this paper suggests, fails to acknowledge the pervasive nature of all discourse. Instead it is suggested that "every object is constituted as an object of discourse" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 94). This leads the work to concur with the assertion of Hulsse and Spencer (2008):

> Hence, it is impossible to identify any single 'source' of this discourse. To assume that the terrorism discourse is an 'elite-led project' seems to overestimate the agency of actors. The political elite, like anyone else, is bound by discourses. What the elite perceives, believes, says and does is prestructured by discourses.

Presenting discourse in this way suggests that the political elite have somehow escaped the discursive field and are able to act as puppet masters who decide on which discourses they want their public to absorb. The view of the American self which will be presented in this paper will draw upon the idea that identities can be constructed through more ambiguous and complex systems of difference (Hansen 2006). This puts much less emphasis on political agents as actors who can change and transform a discourse for their own ends (Torfing 2005; Laclau and Mouffe 1985), but it should be noted that human agents in elite positions do of course have some effect on discursive structures (Hansen 2006; Waever 2002). This would not be to the extent though, that this paper would conclude that the War on Terror discursive structure is an "elite-led project" (Jackson 2005: 26). It would instead argue that the representations of terrorism found in the War on Terror come out of historical articulations of competing discursive narratives that are in an ongoing battle for dominance. This is due to a relational process of identity (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) formed out of numerous discursive friend/enemy relations that have existed in American history. Indeed the terrorist other cannot simply be created through an elite process of othering, rather the antagonistic other arises out competing discourses striving for objective totality (Laclau 2014; Mouffe 1993; Laclau and Mouffe 1985). To analyse these kinds of discursive systems and their competing nature, different discourse other than that of elites can be analysed. A careful linking of signs which may run through to elite discourse can draw different conclusions from a discourse analysis that has such a high-level focus. This may include the work of "the rather anonymous members of the bureaucracies" (Doty 1993: 303), texts not "written for public consumption" (Campbell 1992: 28) or the "low data" found in popular culture (Hulsse and Spencer 2008; Weldes 2006). This may in fact present the political elite as a "discourse-led project" (Hulsse and Spencer 2008: 579) as similar themes appear "in the rhetoric of partisan

speeches and statements" (Campbell 1992: 28) of Presidents, their staff, and officials in prominent positions.

US Special Forces

Following on from what has already been written, this paper seeks to contribute to the discursive work on terrorism by analysing the narratives that exist around the US Special Forces. As noted, this is an attempt to move the focus away from the terrorist actor and refocus it on the American self. Some critical literature on terrorism has suggested that the training of indigenous forces by the United States constitutes state terrorism (Blakeley 2010; Raphael 2010; Jackson 2009; Stokes 2005; Gareau 2004). This training is usually carried out by US Special Forces, therefore this is suggesting that they they are a branch of the US military involved in state terrorism. Despite this discussion the actual Special Forces themselves are rarely talked about, rather referenced as part of a wider picture of what constitutes state terrorism. Indeed as this is not the aim of the authors it is not unexpected. The more detailed critical analyses of special or unconventional warfare (McClintock 1992; McClintock 1991) do acknowledge that the "legitimation of terror was a common demoninator" between Special Forces doctrine (McClintock 1991: 130), in fact that the "special" type of warfare that was assigned to these elite forces was done to avoid "radical reappraisal" of the conventional American military establishment (McClintock 1991: 130). This kind of question is the type that this paper seeks to deal with and open up, the "how possible" (Doty 1993: 299) questions of how the Special Forces exist within the discursive security structure of the United States. Rather than some of the critiques mentioned, which offer a more material based criticism of the way that America uses its Special Forces for its given interests, the approach here allows an analysis of the conflicting narratives and identity issues that are at play in the American relationship with the unconventional element of its military.

As the title of this paper suggests, the main contention in this work will be that there is a process of othering that exists between elements of the United States security establishment and its military establishment, which falls on the privileged side of the binary discursive constructions, and America's own Special Operations Forces. This is similar to the othering that exists between the United States and terrorist actors which has been shown in other work (Holland 2013; Jackson 2005). In much the same the way that that antagonistic terrorist other threatens American security discourse, the Special Forces also act in a similar way. Indeed this has resulted in a "proliferation" of the discursive "chain of equivalence" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 131) between the United States and the terrorist other which is demonstrated by *Figure 1.1*:

Figure 1.1

Binary Structure

United States → Terrorist Other

Proliferated Binary Structure

United States → US Conventional Forces → US Special Forces → Terrorist Other

Figure 1.1 shows the proliferated chain of equivalence between the actors discussed. The point is to show clearly the more complicated relationship between the United States and terrorism in a discourse based work, which has not explored it in this manner. The paper will argue that this is a more unstable discursive structure requiring a greater discursive effort to maintain, which follows Laclau and Mouffe's argument that "the more unstable the social relations, the less successful will be any definite system of differences and the more points of antagonism will proliferate" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 117). This is the goal the work, to highlight the effect that this proliferation has had on the identity of the United States. This answers the call of Jackson (2009: 77) to offer an analysis which can act as a "critical destablization" of existing discourse on security and terrorism. Or as Jarvis (2009: 20) puts it:

> This commitment to otherness – other readings of terror, other responses to terror and, ultimately, other ways of life – I argue, offers the scholar of terrorism a genuine alternative to the ameliorative, problem-solving role characterizing the mainstream and first-face discussions alike.

This work then, offers an attempt to critically destabilize the American understanding of terrorism by focusing on the instability of the narrative within American security. The existence of an other within the American self- that being the Special Forces other, on the one hand provides a mantle for the United States to use unconventional methods and other forms of "Un-Amercian" warfare, while at the same time this other de-legitimises their own conventional narrative on terrorism and security, which shows that American identity is something fundamentally unstable like all identities in the social environment (Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

Given the pervasive nature of all discourse, a sufficient range of discursive representations should be looked at to achieve the goals of the paper. Therefore a selection of policy documents, security memorandums and political speeches will be examined to show the discursive representation of the

Special Forces and their work within the political establishment. As discourse is situated within a wider discursive field, alternative discourse can be examined to see how elite level discourse is reproduced or contested (Hansen 1996). The paper has chosen to do this in two ways. Firstly, by analysing the operational elements of the activities that the Special Forces carry out. An effective representation of this is the various Army Field Manuals that advise and teach soldiers who to engage in their activities. Of course, soldiers will have spent many months and years training before becoming experienced special operators, however these Field Manual represent a written example of the kind of work they are expected to carry out. As Charles Beckwith, the first commanding officer of Delta Force explained, "if it doesn't happen to be in the Field Manual, no matter how good an idea it is, it won't get done" (Beckwith and Knox 2000: 40). These manuals refer explicitly to the use of terror as a "legitimate tactic" (McClintock 1991: 133), directly contradicting the conventional American understanding of such tactics. The second element of the alternative discourse to be analysed here involves looking at the views of those within the US military and Special Forces community. There is a considerable body of literature which has conducted interviews with Special Forces officers and soldiers, as well as highlighting the problems and dissonance between them and their Conventional counterparts (McNab 2013; Finlan 2009; Litchfield 2010; Rieper 2010; Newton 2009; Beckwith and Knox 2000; Marquis 1997; Kelly 1995; Kelly 1992; Thompson 1988: Simpson 1983; Cohen 1978). This literature is wide-ranging and written for completely different purposes, whether it be for policy purposes, a journalistic account, an academic account, or an autobiographical account. However the literature mentioned, as well as other work, whether intended or not, provide accounts and discourse which represent the process of othering that is involved in the very existence of the Special Operations Forces. The challenge of this discourse analysis is to bring it together, linking it to the policy and operational discourse which ultimately construct identity where discursive signs are articulated to achieve stability (Hansen 2006). It is in this "web of signs" (Hansen 2006: 44) that the stabilising elements of the discourse exist. The further demand of a discourse analysis is show how these signs are "linked and juxtaposed" (Hansen 2006: 45) in a process of differentiation and othering, in the hope that this can highlight the instability of the discursive construction.

Who are the Special Forces and why are they "Special" in the first place?

The United States Special Forces are a branch of the US military who by very definition, require them to be different from their conventional counterparts. Current Commander of the United States Special Operations Command, General Joseph Votel (2015: 8), considers the Special Forces mission as:

If the environment is populated with potential adversaries who are adept at avoiding our conventional advantages, then we must be prepared to respond with appropriate tools... our ability to influence outcomes is not solely based on our aggregate military capability. Our success will increasingly be determined by our ability to respond with a range of capabilities... U.S. Special Operations Forces provide a portfolio of options to deal with complex security challenges. We are uniquely able to operate in a variety of environments to support strategic progress in achieving national security objectives.

This type of language demonstrates the unique character and nature of the Special Forces, who are considered to offer a different perspective and capability in dealing with conflict. As evidenced from the quote from General Votel, the need for the existence of this "unique" element of the military is dependent on enemies who are themselves pursuing unconventional methods and the inability of America's conventional superiority to deal with the threat. This is indeed similar to language used in the early 1960s, the time when the United States and its then new President began to more seriously consider its Special Forces capability (Fredrikson 2011; Southworth and Tanner 2002; Marquis 1997). A staff memorandum passed to President Kennedy by his National Security Advisor Walt Rostow in 1961 provides evidence of this:

In analyzing the "spectrum of activity" employed by the Communist Bloc in its aggression... US military planners observed that conventional military forces and particularly one bearing a "made in USA" stamp, did not offer an entirely effective response to even all of the various Communist techniques for employing force of arms (*Limited War: Part One*, cited in Rostow 1961: 24)

This process of othering, creating an external other who threatens the security of the United States, demanding a security response from them, is something that has been highlighted in critical literature before (Campbell 1993; Jackson 2005). However what these two passages also show, is that there has been a discursive proliferation within the ranks of the US military. The conventional element that was not capable of dealing with "various techniques" in a "variety of environments" back in the mid 20th century, is still not capable of that same thing in the current 21st century security environment. This therefore, demands an unconventional response, a "special" response from a different kind of force.

What does this different or special response involve? From the outset, the primary activity of US Special Forces has been unconventional warfare, which was what the Office of Strategic Services was set up for in 1942 (Fredrikson 2011; Marquis 1997; Thomspon 1992). Although not the Special

Forces per se, the mission of this organisation "laid the foundation for today's Special Forces, emphasizing training of foreign indigenous forces and regional orientation of American forces" (Marquis 1997: 9). Unconventional warfare is the activity which has always been at the heart of the this "special" side of the US military. As John Fredrikson explains, "Modern American special forces are a far cry from their historical antecedents, but threads of continuity persist in their tactical mastery of unconventional warfare" (Fredrikson 2011: viii). As this quote suggests, the range of operations assigned to the Special Forces has increased markedly since their inception, in fact the Army Special Forces now list "five primary missions" on their website. These are unconventional warfare, foreign internal defence, special reconnaissance, direct action and counter-terrorism (goarmy.com 2015). However it is unconventional warfare that has featured most throughout Special Forces history. The very language of the term signals a clear dissonance with the rest of the US military, as one can only be unconventional if they are not conventional. There are two sides of a discursive binary here, or to put it in Laclau and Mouffe's terms, "to be something is always not to be something else" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 115). If conventional warfare can be understood to follow "the established conventions" of military combat (Boon and Huq 2010: 377; Adams 1998: 1), whatever these are, then unconventional warfare must not follow such norms. The US Department of Defense defines it as:

> A broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, normally of long duration, predominantly conducted by indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized, trained, equipped, supported and directed in varying degrees by an external source. It includes guerrilla warfare and other direct offensive, low visibility, covert, or clandestine operations, as well as the indirect activities of subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities, and evasion and escape (quoted in Rothstein 2006: 6)

The US Army Special Operations Forces define it more simply as, "Operations conducted by, with, or through irregular forces in support of a resistance movement, an insurgency, or conventional military operations (Field Manual 3-05-130 2008: 1-2)." The two definitions give an indicator of what makes the Special Forces different from their conventional counterparts. They work covertly and evasively. They seek to subvert and leave little evidence that they were even involved. They also work closely with indigenous forces, using them to achieve their ends. Indeed Field Manual 3-05-130 states that this is the cornerstone of unconventional warfare; that it is conducted by, with or through surrogates. Without this, it becomes irregular warfare (Field Manual 3-05-130 2008). This is not overly relevant for the purpose of this paper, as regular/irregular warfare still works on the same binary construction as conventional/unconventional warfare. The point still being, that the Special

Forces do things differently.

The American Way of War

In the US Army Field Manual 3-24 on counterinsurgency, a doctrine which is partly understood to be the defensive counterpart of unconventional warfare (McClintock, 1992; McClintock 1991), it states that "in many ways, the conduct of COIN (counterinsurgency) is counterintuitive to the traditional US view of war" (Field Manual 3-24 2007: 47). It involves "a complex and often unfamiliar set of missions and considerations" (Field Manual 3-24 2007: 47). In his foreword to the manual, Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl highlights the paradoxical section beginning on page 47 as the "most notable", even that it turns "conventional military thinking on its head" (Nagl 2007: xvii). This manual was written to be distributed amongst the conventional forces of the US Army and Marine Corps, which is a far cry from Michael McClintock's assertion that in the 1960s, when the doctrine first originated, "the counterinsurgency specialists of the Special Forces by and large remained insulated from the conventional forces of the American military- and far away from the American public" (McClintock 1991: 127). It has taken some time for the alternative outlook of unconventional warfare and counterinsurgency to penetrate the traditional discursive structures of US security thinking.

A substantial amount of writing on the Special Forces, whether academic or accounts from soldiers themselves, detail examples of how the alternative outlook of special operations forces unsettled the conventional established units. Susan Marquis quotes General William Yarborough who recalls how "both Special Warfare and Special Forces were terms that raised many hackles among the conventional regulars" (Yarborough, quoted in Marquis 1997: 14). She notes how these forces have made conventional commanders "uncomfortable" and how there has even been a "mistrust" of them (Marquis 1997: 7). Linda Robinson also highlights how "uncomfortable" the US military were with unconventional warfare (2009: xii). Indeed that the military was "ambivalent" to the whole concept (Robinson 2009: xiv). Hans Halberstadt quotes a former Special Operator who describes the ill-feeling between the two sides, suggesting that upon formation of the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), more commonly known as the Green Berets, the unit was thought of as a "bastard child, unloved by anyone except the lunatic fringe (Halberstadt 2004: 118)." It "became home to every weirdo in the ranks, people who just refused to play the program designed by and for very conventional strategies and tactics (Halberstadt 2004: 119)." Beckwith too describes his difficulty in advancing his plans for a new Special Forces unit based on the British SAS, which were met with considerable institutional ambivalence. He claims that had he handed his report to certain Colonels

"it could have ended up in the trash can (Beckwith and Knox 2000: 44)", arguing his conventional superior "did not understand" (Beckwith and Knox2000: 47) his recommendations. Even when it did finally reach the head of the Army Special Forces, General Yarborough, it was recommended that the US Army did not need such a capability (Beckwith and Knox 2000). Eventually though, Delta Force was created, however this institutional resistance provides further evidence of the alternative outlooks on war of both elements of the US military. The process of othering is quite clear in this regard, as the self/other distinction is made between the Conventional and Special Forces. There is no objective reality of what war is, it "cannot be constituted outside any discursive condition of emergence (Laclau and Mouffe 1984: 96)." The two camps discussed in the US military have come to represent two competing narratives on war, and for long periods in US military history, the Special Forces approach appears to fall on the less privileged side of the discursive distinction. Contrast this with the approach of the Chinese during the Cold War as explained to President Kennedy by the US General Edward Lansdale:

> The Chinese Communists apparently do not make a distinction between conventional and unconventional warfare. Almost any part of their Army can be used for guerrilla activity temporarily, and then returned for conventional duties (Lansdale 1961)

For some reason or another, unlike the Chinese, the United States felt it very important to make a such a distinction. The "American way of war" is understood to be something different from the type of activities associated with the Special Forces. There are a plethora of discursive constructions which come together to form the American understanding of its self in war and the reasons the country goes to war. However focusing in on the material war-fighting style element, the American way of war is reflected by the following statement from President Eisenhower, speaking one year are the formation of the Green Berets:

> The defense capabilities of the United States are such that they could inflict terrible losses upon an aggressor- for me to say that the retaliation capabilities of the United States are so great that such an aggressor's land would be laid to waste- all this, while fact, is not the true expression of the purpose and hope of the United States (Eisenhower 1953)

The traditional American view of war is that if the country must, it has the capability to defeat an opponent through the use of overwhelming force. In the major conflicts it has been involved in, the United States has pursued a strategy where it seeks to crush its enemy. The goal has largely been to

overpower, overwhelm and overthrow (Tierney 2010; Weigley 1977). The statement from President Eisenhower demonstrates this. Although he asserts this is not the desire of his country, if it comes to a war, the United States will effectively annihilate its enemy through superior force of arms. Russell Weigley for example, charts the disagreement between the British and the Americans during the Second World War. While the British favoured a "peripheral" approach, based upon concentrating on North Africa and the Mediterranean fronts first, the Americans preferred a strategy known as "overlord", where they would invade northern Europe as "promptly as possible" as they believed "that the destruction of the enemy's armed forces ought to be first object of strategy, and that northern Europe was the best place to confront and destroy the German army (Weigley 1977: 334)." As President Truman (1945) articulated with regards to the war in Japan:

> The primary task facing the Nation today is to win the war in Japan- to win it completely and to win it as quickly as possible... The strategy in Europe was to have all the men that could be effectively deployed on land and sea to crush the German military machine in the shortest possible time. That is exactly what we plan to do in Japan.

This can also be seen in Vietnam. Despite the considerable Special Forces build-up over the intervening years between the two wars (Marquis 1997; Thompson 1988: Simpson 1983), the view of the American military, particularly in the early years of the conflict, was that the overwhelming conventional force would bring victory. Chester Cooper, who served as Deputy Director of the CIA until 1962, points out that the early American strategy of stationing large military units ready for conventional battle along the 17th parallel was "the kind of war a military officer would prefer to fight. (Cooper 1966)." It was only later in the war that "major changes were made (Cooper 1966)." This propensity of the US military to think of large scale conventional warfare as the best approach to conflict is in direct contrast with the approach taken by the Special Forces. As noted above, Field Manual 3-24 attempts to highlight some of the these "paradoxes" between the different narratives of war (Field Manual 3-24 2007: 47).These include, "sometimes the more force is used, the less effective it is", "sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction", "some of the best weapons do not shoot" and "if a tactic works this week, it might not work next week (Field Manual 3-24: 48-50)." Again, this is highlighting the dissonance between the two approaches, one represented by one element of the military, the other by a different force who are acting as an antagonism against the first.

Un-American

This antagonism has shown itself in a form of warfare that has been described as something acutely

"Un-American" (Robinson 2009: xv; Marquis 1997: 8; McClintock 1992: 430). This is emphasised by the statement given above from the counterinsurgency field manual which claims it to be "counterintuitive" to the American view of war. This type warfare is clandestine, covert and under the radar, indeed Army Special Forces have comes to be known as "the quiet professionals" (Hoe 2011; Southworth and Tanner 2002: 102). Field Manual 3-05-130, written in 2008, highlights that "in keeping with the clandestine and/or covert nature of historical UW operations, it has involved the conduct of classified surrogate operations" (Field Manual 3-05-130 2008: 1-3). The manual separates unconventional warfare from other activities such as foreign internal defence as it is not an "overt, direct method of assistance" (Field Manual 3-05-130 2008: 1-4). This of course is very unlike the popular notion of conventional warfare where brave American troops would meet their enemies in battle. Instead early field manuals talk about the need for "subversion against hostile states" (Field Manual 31-21 1961: 3), describing unconventional warfare as the "interrelated fields of guerrilla warfare, evasion and escape, and subversion" (Field Manual 31-21 1961: 251). In an unconventional warfare campaign the Special Forces soldier must be "prepared to train and assist selected and underground elements in the construction and use of sabotage devices and other techniques designed to harass the enemy" (Field Manual 31-20 1965: 272). A more recent manual describes Special Forces activities as "low-visibility operations of limited US involvement and may include subversion and sabotage" (Field Manual 3-05-20 2001 1-3). Some manuals even overtly prescribe the use of "terrorism" as an "instrument of power", describing it as a "classic technique" of unconventional warfare (Field Manual 3-05-130 2008: 1-1). It is also included as one the activities of irregular warfare (Field Manual 3-05-130 2008: 1-5). This is consistent with earlier manuals which even referred to "Terror Operations" (McClintock 1991: 133). McClintock notes that after the early 1960s, for the most part field manuals did not refer so explicitly to "terror"(McClintock 1991: 133), perhaps highlighting the beginning of a discursive effort to accommodate this "special" type of warfare into existing US security narratives.

To this point the paper has attempted to highlight two very distinct types of warfare in American security discourse. The first is traditional, conventional, overt and sits comfortably within the American understanding of itself as a brave and courageous nation who will overwhelm any enemy on the battlefield to protect its professed values such as freedom and democracy. The other type of warfare is unconventional, irregular, subversive, covert and sneaky, a style of fighting that is conducted in the shadows, often through surrogate forces, sabotaging and terrorising in denied areas. They are represented by two different branches of the US military. The Special Forces has no need even to exist without the need to use unconventional methods, something the conventional military were seen as unsuitable for. They practise a type of warfare that is more associated with the enemies

of the United States. As America's 2003 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* puts it:

> The enemy is terrorism—premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents. Those who employ terrorism, regardless of their specific secular or religious objectives, strive to subvert the rule of law and effect change through violence and fear (National Strategy for Combating Terrorism 2003: 1)

The link between the irregular activities and those of terrorists is evident in the language. Both act covertly or in a "clandestine" nature, in areas they should not legally be operating in, in order to "subvert" the system of that area. Much like the Special Forces, terrorists will "employ unconventional means to penetrate homeland defenses" (Quadrennial Defense Review 2006: 24). Indeed "in the post-September 11 world, irregular warfare has emerged as the dominant form of warfare confronting the United States" (Quadrennial Defense Review 2006: 36). The terrorist is an enemy "who plots in the shadows" (Bush Jr. 2005), "who hides in shadows and caves" (Bush Jr. 2001), who actively "tries to operate in the shadows" (Bush Jr. 2001). Operating "in the shadows" is what US Special Forces are famous for, working behind enemy lines without detection,   indeed it is openly stated that they operate in more than "80 countries worldwide" while only "supporting 10 named operations" (Votel 2015). As one Navy Seal puts it, "We're the dark matter. We're the force that orders the universe but can't be seen" (anonymous Navy Seal member of Joint Special Operations Command, cited in Niva 2013: 186). From the outset of their creation, special operations have been considered by the American establishment as necessarily covert. As explained to President Kennedy in December 1961, any "limited" or "unconventional" war effort would require "both a major CIA effort and substantial support from the US military establishment under conditions which do not permit overt US intervention" (*Limited War: Part One*, cited in Rostow 1961: 22).

Why so Covert?

Typically, Special Forces units are divided into two types. These are "white" units, whose existence is openly acknowledged by the US government, and "black" units, whose existence is not officially recognised (Jackson and Long 2009). Black units include Delta Force and SEAL Team 6, whose focus is mainly on direct action hostage rescue and kill or capture missions (Jackson and Long 2009; Beckwith and Knox 2000). There are also a whole host of obscure black units with much lower profiles operating from secretive military bases across the United States and beyond (Paglen 2010; Paglen 2009). White units include Army Rangers, Green Berets and other SEAL units (Jackson and

Long 2009; Marquis 1997). However despite this all Special Forces operations tend to remain classified and clandestine or covert (Jackson and Long 2009; McClintock 1992). Somewhat paradoxically, despite their more secretive status, black units have tended to get more publicity, perhaps due to their focus on direct action missions which have killed some of the United States' most high profile targets. Most famously, this includes the killing of Osama Bin Laden by SEAL Team 6 (Owen and Maurer 2012), which has been depicted in the Academy Award nominated film *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012). The killing of prominent ISIS figure Abu Sayyaf, in May 2015 after a Delta Force raid, also made global headlines (Dilanian 2015; Starr 2015). These types of audacious commando raids against some of America's most wanted men or to save US hostages have helped the Special Forces gain popularity and support from the US public, aided by their depiction in popular culture. *Zero Dark Thirty* is only one of a string of films which has storied Special Forces direct action capabilities. Hollywood blockbusters such as *Captain Phillips* (2013), *Lone Survivor* (2013), *Act of Valour* (2012), *Tears of the Sun* (2003), *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and *Navy SEALs* (1990) are just some examples of others. This has played a part in providing a discursive role for the Special Forces in US security. An elite unit, taking on high risk missions to kill a dangerous terrorist or save an American hostage, is an easy sell given existing discursive structures in US security such as those described by Jackson (2005) and Holland (2013).

What is not such an easy sell is the more mundane activities of the Special Forces, which despite their notoriety for direct action missions is carried out by black as well as white units (Jackson and Long 2009; Haney 2002). The training of indigenous forces for unconventional warfare, counter-insurgency and foreign internal defence are the primary missions of the majority of Special Forces units, particularly in the US Army. This involves "the quiet professionals" helping to instruct the material found in the above mentioned field manuals. In the case of unconventional warfare, this is the training of non-state armed groups who are fighting against a state government. Methods-wise, and in terms on their non-state status, such groups bare all the hallmarks of a terrorist group in the American understanding of the term. For example the FBI suggests terrorism is intended "to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping" (fbi.gov 2015). Of course this work does not intend to delve into the debate regarding definitions of terrorism. Rather what is presented here is an attempt to critically destabilise the established discursive structure in American security, therefore working the US establishment's own definitions is the logical step to take. Returning to the FBI definition then, this is exactly what the Special Forces operators working with indigenous non-state armed groups are attempting to do.

Hence the Special Forces have been handed the dirty tasks, the secret tasks that must remain covert for more reasons than simply those of national security. There is an identity crisis for the United States when it comes to these activities, and there is a need to have a certain type of group within itself to carry them out. Their "outsider" status within military circles only serves to highlight a material manifestation of the identity issues that their very existence causes for the American self. Looking again at the types of tasks that the Special Forces carry out, this is not at all surprising. A recent RAND report on the need for enhanced US special warfare employment to fill the missing "missing middle in US coercive options" (Madden *et. al* 2014: 1), also warns that American efforts may be undermined by "unacceptable partner behaviour" that may "transgress America's normative standards" (Madden *et al.* 2014: 3). Past unconventional warfare campaigns have seen abuses that would surely transgress America's normative standards, unsurprisingly leading to charges of state terrorism (Blakeley 2010; Raphael 2010; Gareau 2004). In Nicaragua during the 1980s the Contra insurgents were known to attack the civilian population, including incidents resulting in the deaths of children (Parker and Howard 1988; Griffin-Nolan 1987; Broady 1985). Famously covertly funded by the US Reagan administration, the Contras were also trained by Delta and Green Beret operatives (Haney 2002; Sklar 1988; Marshall and Hunter 1987; Rosset 1986). In the years prior to the intervention of NATO forces in Kosovo in 1999, it has also been suggested that the Army Green Berets were involved in the training of the Kosovo Liberation Army (Ganser 2005; Jennings 2001). This was a group who prior to the air campaign, were being described by the US Special Envoy to Kosovo as "without any question, a terrorist group" (Gelbard 1998), and had been involved in attacks against police and civilians (Lutz and Lutz 2013; Ganser 2005). Whatever the status of the KLA in US security went on to be, it was the Special Forces who were tasked to deal with them at a time when their "terrorist" status was far from clear.

Different Values for a Different Service

As already noted, US Army Special Forces have encountered considerable institutional antipathy since their formation (Robinson 2009; Jackson and Long 2009; Adams 2001; Beckwith and Knox 2000 Marquis 1997; McClintock 1992; McClintock 1991). It is suggested in this paper that this is in part down to the discursive pressure that their activities put on existing narratives in US security. Given this, it is unsurprising to find that they see themselves as different, with their own unique identity within the military establishment. Maja Zehfuss (2007: 61) suggests that the US Marines in Evan Wright's *Generation Kill* (2005) have "multiple visions" of themselves. Upon mistakenly killing a shepherd boy in Iraq, they struggle to reconcile their "inner warrior" identity to that of their "nice civilian" self. The question of who they are is challenged by their actions (Zehfuss 2007: 62).

The Special Forces have found discursive mechanisms within the American self to reconcile their actions with their identities, despite many of these actions falling outside of the idea of the American way of war.

As highlighted above, Field Manual 31-05-130 describes terrorism as a "classic technique" of unconventional warfare. However the following passage can be found later in the manual:

> After the attacks on 11 September 2001, the United States learned firsthand the serious threat it faces from terrorists and from states supporting them. The terrorists who performed these attack had no respect for human life or state borders. Terrorists threaten not only Americans but also all people who believe in freedom and democracy. They are the enemy of all civilized states (FM 31-05-130: A-12)

Despite advocating terrorism and related tactics for the Special Forces, this passage would suggest that using terrorism doesn't make a "terrorist" in the Special Forces' understanding of the term. Similarly to the terrorist, American special operations have had "no respect" for state borders, as operating in 80 countries worldwide would suggest. Trevor Paglan's examination of the Pentagon's black project patches details claims of "no country too sovereign" (Paglan 2010: 135) and "you can run.." (Paglan 2010: 145). Methods are very much a secondary concern in the identity of the Special Forces, the commitment to "freedom" is the crucial nodal point to which their identity becomes partially stabilised in the discursive chain. For Laclau and Mouffe, a nodal point is a "privileged discursive point" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 102) helping to construct "a knot of definite meanings"(Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 8; Laclau 2005). This paper suggests that the involvement of the Special Forces in unconventional methods has manifested itself in the kind of rivalry with the Conventional Forces that has been talked about already. However, it is the idea of "freedom" that helps them, and the non-state armed groups that they work with, achieve a more privileged position in the chain of equivalence, as demonstrated earlier in *Figure 1.1*.

US Special Forces' identity is built upon a discursive construction that they are protectors of freedom. This is not unlike the conventional units of the American military, yet it is contested here that this is much more important for the Special Forces, given their identity also rests on the use of unconventional and "un-American" methods. This is no more exemplified than by the Latin motto of Army Special Forces, "De Oppressor Liber" which means "to free the oppressed" (goarmy.com 2015). As other critical discourse based work on US security has highlighted, representations of American freedom are powerful in US security (Jackson 2005; Campbell 1992). This paper agrees,

suggesting it is the central nodal point in anchoring the Special Forces meta-narrative within existing American security representations, giving a more multi-layered understanding of another powerful nodal point, terrorism. Rather than a simple evil, terrorism attached to freedom is legitimate in this narrative.

As suggested by some critical writers on terrorism, the training of indigenous forces by the US Special Forces and the CIA constitutes state terrorism and forms part of America's attempts to secure its global primacy (Blakeley 2010; Raphael 2010; Stokes 2005; Gareau 2004). It is part of a coercive form of statecraft which is central to protecting US capitalist interests and open market economies. Whether this is true or not, the use of the freedom signifier has been central in discursive constructions around Special Forces activities in this area. This paper has already alluded to the training of the Nicaraguan Contras by Delta Force and Green Berets, which was part of a wider CIA programme. The manual used to train the group in "guerrilla operations" is both explicit in supporting the use of terror tactics, but also the use of the freedom signifier (Contra Manual 1983). While stating the "if the terror does not become explicit, positive results can be expected" (Contra Manual: 21), it reminds the reader that any action by the "Freedom Commandos" (Contra Manual: 3) must involved a force "determined to win freedom" (Contra Manual: 11). The Contras were advised to continually remind the people that they were "fighting for the freedom of Nicaragua" (Contra Manual: 23) and how the democratically elected government had "promised freedom and gave slavery" (Contra Manual: 62).

The Special Forces' own manuals bare similar discourse. One 2006 manual acknowledges that "SO (Special Operations) missions may require unorthodox approaches" (Field Manual 3-05 2006: 1-6), however "ARSOF (Army Special Operations Forces) are, and will be for the near future, continuously engaged against terrorists whose goal is the destruction of American freedoms and the American way of life" (Field Manual 3-05 2006: 1-1). These "American principles of democracy, freedom, tolerance, and opportunity inspire people throughout the world" according to the 2008 unconventional warfare manual (Field Manual 3-05-130 2008: A-13). It also goes on to suggest that the United States can "offer people throughout the world a positive vision of hope and opportunity that is rooted in America's belief in freedom, justice, opportunity, and respect for all" (Field Manual 3-05-130 2008: B-14). It is these kind of subjectivities that are central to the representation of the Special Forces. They do things that are "un-American", but this stems from a "whatever it takes" mentality to protect US principles such as freedom, democracy and liberty. As President Kennedy, who was instrumental in increasing the prominence of Special Forces missions (Tallion 2001; Adams 1998; Marquis 1997: McClintock 1992), put it, if "freedom is to be saved...it requires a wholly

different kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of force..and a wholly different kind of training" (Kennedy 1962). He marked out the green beret of the Army Special Forces as "a symbol of excellence, a badge of courage, a mark of distinction in the fight for freedom" (Kennedy, quoted in Pushies 2001: 59; Prados 2006: 288). Of course, such constructions are important for almost all elements of the US military, however given the discursive strain the activities of the Special Forces put on other American security meta-narratives, it becomes even more important for them.

Conclusion: A Terrorist Within?

By looking at the role of US Special Forces within existing narratives in American security this paper has tried to contribute to critical debates on terrorism and state terrorism. It has done this by focusing discursively on the activities of Special Forces whose methods, and the methods of the non-state armed groups that they work with through the doctrine of unconventional warfare, can be described as methods grounded in terrorism. The work has attempted to highlight the dissonance that these methods create between the unconventional and special warfare doctrines of the Special Forces and traditional American approaches to warfare. Using a theoretical framework grounded in the Discourse Theory of Laclau and Mouffe, it has been argued that this dissonance has resulted in a proliferation of the discursive chain of equivalence between the United States and the terrorist other who it forms its identity against as argued by some critical scholars (Holland 2013; Jackson 2005). This has led to to the argument that the United States has a multi-layered relationship with terrorism than it has been suggested by other work.

US Special Forces, it has been argued, have found themselves somewhere between the United States and the terrorist other on this discursive chain of equivalence. Since their creation, they have encountered much institutional antipathy and resistance within the US military establishment, as highlighted by various scholars who have studied the subject from a both a pro-Special Operations and Critical point of view (Adams 1998; Marquis 1997; McClintock 1992; McClintock 1991). It is suggested here that this is in part at least, down to the "different kind of war" (Marquis 1997: 264) that they fight, which is inherently uncomfortable for the established identity of the United States. However, following Laclau and Mouffe, this work argues that identity can never be completely fixed or objective, discursive flexibility has found a role for the Special Forces within existing security structures. This revolves around a mystique that has been created for these "elite" warriors, who operate covertly and below the radar to protect American security interests. Any publicity that they do receive often focuses on their direct action capabilities which sit more comfortably alongside traditional American views on war. Often though, this is a misrepresentation of the wider activities of

the Special Forces, whose actions "often involve more training of other forces than fighting" (Marquis 1997: 264). This, added with a focus on the "whatever it takes" mentality to defend "freedom" has seen the focus taken off their questionable methods, which even in the American understanding, involve using terrorism to fight terrorism, which is supposed to be the enemy of the United States. Therefore the overall contribution of the paper is quite clear. It has been an attempt to critically destabilise existing dominant narratives on terrorism and what constitutes state terrorism by focusing on a group within the American security structure whose whole *raison d'etre* is to engulf itself in the methods of the enemies of the United States. In effect, US Special Forces represent a narrative of subversion, sabotage, guerrilla warfare and terrorism within the American self.

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