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Review of "'By, With, Through': A SOF Global Engagement Strategy" by Emily Spencer, ed.

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Emily Spencer, ed. *"By, With, Through": A SOF Global Engagement Strategy*. Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2014. Pp. vi + 220.

Two damning exigencies confront Canada, the United States, and other Western powers in their military engagements within the complex contemporary operating environment, both at home and abroad. First is the reluctance to commit national resources (human and material) to foreign missions, especially after the impasse in Iraq and Afghanistan; and second is the rise of transnational enemies which have defied national capabilities and boundaries. The twelve-chapter book, *"By, With, Through": A SOF Global Engagement Strategy*, edited by Emily Spencer, is a collection of essays that advances an historic but pragmatic strategy to mitigate these constraints, viz. working alongside global allied and partnered nations in a network of Special Operations Forces in order to ensure a secure and stable world. The goal of the "By, With, Through" approach is for Western nations to negotiate the ambiguities of the contemporary operating environment by means of working through allied nations (especially those without the necessary capabilities) while conducting operations, with or without those allies (p. iv). Military assistance and training by Western nations to these ill-equipped and ill-trained eventual allies therefore becomes a prerequisite in this approach.

In each chapter of the book, the contributors discuss specific and critical aspects of the "By, With, Through" strategy for a Global SOF (Special Operations Forces) Network. The Global SOF Network is not an entirely new idea, and has historically proven successful in a number of cases. Accordingly, Bernd Horn and Bill Knarr in Chapter One provide historical examples of Special Operations Forces leveraging partners' capacities and resources in a global SOF network to achieve success. In all these case studies, the SOF network proved cheaper and more effective as an enabler to national and international security and as a weapon system to minimise the impact of the enemies' attacks. As argued in the book, given the ambiguities of the contemporary operating environment, a proactive global SOF strategy can provide a high readiness, specialised, highly trained, technologically-enabled, discrete, fiscally effective, and culturally-attuned force to tackle partners' communal or potentially common adversaries.

The book also advocates the necessity of adopting operational doctrine in the human domain in order to effectively utilise SOF in resolving twenty-first century challenges. The human domain here refers to the totality of the physical, cultural, social and psychological environments that influence human behaviour. In Chapter Four for instance, Emily Spencer explores the unchanging nature of war and argues that, since war has always existed within the human domain, focusing on the basis of war is necessary to obtain viable solutions for both contemporary and future operating environments. Moreover, some key principles are outlined for the conduct of “By, With, Through” operations in the human domain, including but not limited to: being adaptable, creating common ground, critical thinking and building trust.

The choice of partners is indeed a very sensitive theme in the Global SOF Network due to the tensions between the strategic utility of partners as well as the risks associated with them. Thus five chapters of “*By, With, Through*” are dedicated to reflections on choosing partner states, each chapter concentrating on the respective author’s position. Chapter Five, for example, provides political guidance for “By, With, Through” missions, especially as it concerns the ethical issues, responsibilities and legal and policy constraints that affect the choice of partners. There is also a discussion on the dilemma of working with non-traditional partners as part of the Global SOF Network. David Last highlights what he terms “the four baskets” and cautions of collaborating with non-traditional partners (p. 107). The baskets include new partnerships with: regional leaders; global civil societies, corporate and criminal networks; domestic political authorities; as well as non-military knowledge networks. The moral responsibility and consequences of partnering with underdeveloped countries in the Global SOF Network, even though such partnerships are less expensive and less politically divisive, is not left untouched in this book.

Aside from the choice of partners, another challenge that may confront a Global SOF Network would be how to reconcile the national interests of all partnering nations into a single goal. Andrew Vivian provides what he calls “a heuristic pathway” to determining how SOF planners can allot duties to partnering states in a contemporary networked environment. Accordingly, SOF planners should first decide which nation is interested in the particular mission to be embarked upon then present respective plans that support individual nations’ objectives, find common ground among the respective strategies and identify gaps and overlaps in these operational strategies. Howard

Coombs emphasises the need for interdependent partnership between the Global SOF Network and other domestic defence and security agencies of partnering nations in the book's concluding essay.

It is not surprising that the contributors seem to stress Canada's and the United States' roles in the supposedly global SOF Network. This is because the book itself is based on the fourth annual SOF symposium, conducted jointly by the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command and the US Joint Special Operations University. Although there has been a recent swell of books on Special Operations Forces and their role in the so-called fourth generation of warfare, the clear articulation and historical zest of "*By, With, Through*" makes it stand out.¹

Apart from M.A. Hennessy's contribution in Chapter Nine, little attention is paid in the book to the challenge of deploying the Global SOF Network to quell internal insurrections in partnering nations. Due to the politically divisive nature of "Responsibility to Protect" operations, the Global SOF Network would likely find it difficult to unite on whether to deploy troops in favour of the government or to back rebels, especially when the government is in serious breach of international humanitarian laws. If Syria was a (non-traditional) member of the Global SOF Network for instance, would the coalition have supported Assad's regime? As with most edited collections, the issue of overlapping content is noticeable in "*By, With, Through*". Richard Rubright's, M.A. Hennessy's, David Last's and Mark Moyar's chapters, for instance, all centre on the same issue of choosing partners. Nonetheless, this does not defeat the purpose of the book in any way.

The book is suitable for a global audience. I do not hesitate to recommend the text to military scholars, practitioners and strategists, especially in the global West; to all those who have an interest in a peaceful world; and even to those who are not because, as Trotsky said, you may not be interested in war but war is interested in you.

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¹ See, for example, Mark D. Boyatt, *Special Forces: A Unique National Asset* (Colorado: Outskirts Press, 2016); Mark Moyar, *Oppose Any Foe: The Rise of America's Special Operations Forces* (New York: Basic Books, 2017); Susan L. Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding U.S. Special Operations Forces* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1997); and Frank L. Jones, "Army SOF in Afghanistan: Learning the Right Lessons," *Joint Forces Quarterly* (Winter 2002/3): 16-22.