

Western and Eastern Ways of Special Warfare: The Strategic History of Special Operations from Western and Eastern Sources

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Abstract : Special operations were supposedly a new way of irregular warfare that was officially formed during World War 2. For example, the famous British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and the Americans' Office for Strategic Services (OSS) – the forerunners of modern day CIA were born in World War 2. These special operations units were tasked with the conduct of sabotage and subversion activities behind enemy lines, placing great importance in forming Fifth Column activities and supporting resistance movements. This pointed to a paradoxical argument that modern day special operations is a product of Western modern military innovation but utilizing Eastern ways of 'ungentlemanly' warfare. This thesis is superfluous as special operations had been well practised by both ancient Western empires such as the Greeks and Romans, and around the same time in the East, such as in China, and Japan. This paper will describe the practice of special operations, first from the Western military history of the Greeks during the Peloponnesian war. It will then highlight the similar practice of special operations by the Near Eastern Assassins and Eastern militaries by using examples from the Chinese and the Japanese. This paper propounds that special operations, or ways of warfare as a whole, has no cultural and geographical divide, but rather very similarly practiced by men from all over the world. Ideas of fighting, killing and ultimately winning a war have similar undertones – attempts to find ways to win economically and at the least time.

Keywords : special operations, strategic culture, ways of warfare, Sun Tzu, Frontinus

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