

As the Commander of the United States Special Operations Command, I am becoming increasingly concerned about how former members of the special operations community are using their "celebrity" status to advance their personal or professional agendas.

While as retired or former service members, they are well within their rights to advocate for certain causes or write books about their adventures, it is disappointing when these actions either attempt to represent the broader SOF community, or expose sensitive information that could theaten the lives of their fellow warriors.

Few senior SOF officers have benefited more from reading about the exploits of our legendary heroes than I. My thesis at the Naval Postgraduate School was based on a rigorous examination of the available literature, without which I could never have written my book on "The Theory of Special Operations."

Most of these books were wonderful accounts of courage, leadership, tough decision making, and martial skill all of which benefited me as I tried to understand of our past and how it could affect missions in the future.

Movies that portray the heroics of service members are also well worth watching and often provide the public insights into life in special operations or the service that can't be garnered anywhere else.

Personally, I was motivated to join special operations after watching the movie, "The Green Berets", starring John Wayne. To this day my Army brethren still wonder where I went wrong...

Countless stories have been told through the medium of film that needed to be told and I am thankful that they were.

However, there is, in my opinion, a distinct line between recounting a story for the purposes of education or entertainment and telling a story that exposes sensitive activities just to garner greater readership and personal profit.

Every member of the Special Operations Community with a security clearance signed a non-disclosure agreement that was binding during and after service in the military. If the US Special Operations Command finds that an active duty, retired or former service member violated that agreement and that exposure of information was detrimental to the safety of U.S. forces, then we will pursue every option available to hold members accountable, including criminal prosecution where appropriate.

As current or former members of our special operations community, authors have a moral obligation, and a legal duty, to submit their works for pre-publication security review. We are fully prepared to work with any author who is looking to tell his story and wants a straightforward assessment of the potential security impacts of their work.

I am also concerned about the growing trend of using the special operations "brand," our seal, symbols and unit names, as part of any political or special interest campaign. Let me be completely clear on this issue: USSOCOM does not endorse any political viewpoint, opinion or special interest.

I encourage, strongly encourage active participation in our political process by both active duty SOF personnel, where it is appropriate under the ethics rules and retired members of the SOF community.

However, when a group brands itself as Special Operations for the purpose of pushing a specific agenda, then they have misrepresented the entire nature of SOF and life in the military.

Our promise to the American people is that we, the military, are nonpartisan, apolitical and will serve the President of the United States regardless of his political party. By attaching a Special Operation's moniker or a unit or service name to a political agenda, those individuals have now violated the most basic of our military principles. As private citizens, they should voice their concerns from the highest hilltop, but as former special operations warriors, when they claim to represent a broader SOF constituency, they do a disservice to all of their SOF teammates who serve quietly and respectfully in support of this great Nation.

Our reputation with the American people is as high as it has ever been. The sacrifices of our men and women down range have earned us that respect. Let us not diminish that respect by using our service in special operations to benefit a few at the expense of the many.