



U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF): Background and Issues for Congress

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Summary

Special Operations Forces (SOF) play a significant role in U.S. military operations, and the Administration has given U.S. SOF greater responsibility for planning and conducting worldwide counterterrorism operations. U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) has close to 60,000 active duty, National Guard, and reserve personnel from all four services and Department of Defense (DOD) civilians assigned to its headquarters, its four components, and one sub-unified command. The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) directs increases in SOF force structure, particularly in terms of increasing enabling units and rotary and fixed-wing SOF aviation assets and units.

Admiral William McRaven is the new USSOCOM commander. Admiral McRaven's concerns include impacts on readiness as a result of high operational tempo for USSOCOM forces. High operational tempo is having a negative impact on language and cultural training and also has made it difficult for SOF personnel to attend requisite schools and training that are necessary to maintain proficiency in a variety of areas. In addition, a lack of access to U.S. based rotary/tilt wing aircraft needed to train air crews and SOF ground forces is also having a detrimental impact on training.

USSOCOM's FY2012 Budget Request is \$10.5 billion—with \$7.2 billion in the baseline budget and \$3.3 billion in the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) budget, representing an increase of 7% over the FY2011 Budget Request of \$9.8 billion.

The National Defense Authorization Act for FY2012 (P.L. 112-81) authorized \$10.4 billion for USSOCOM and contained a number of provisions. The provisions include a review of USSOCOM's dry combat submersible programs; a prohibition on obligating funds for aviation foreign internal defense programs; establishment of an annual requirement for enabling forces; a study of SOF training ranges; re-designation of military information support operations; and a study on USSOCOM sub-unified command structure. The FY2012 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Act (P.L. 112-74) includes reductions in funding for aviation foreign internal defense aircraft and equipment and requires cost estimates for USSOCOM undersea mobility projects.

On January 5, 2012, the Administration unveiled its new strategic guidance refocusing U.S. strategic efforts to the Pacific and the Middle East and, at the same time, proposing significant cuts to ground forces. While there are presently few specifics known, this new strategic direction has the potential to significantly impact U.S. SOF. Of potential concern to Congress is that with fewer general purpose forces, SOF operational tempo might increase. While DOD maintains that it is willing to increase its investment in SOF, there are limitations on expansion because of stringent qualification and training standards. In addition, little is known about how SOF would be employed under this new strategy and if it even has the ability to take on new mission requirements.

The further downsizing of ground forces (Army and Marines) also brings up concerns that the services might be hard-pressed to establish and dedicate enabling units needed by USSOCOM while at the same time adequately supporting general purpose forces. An examination of proposed force structure in relation to anticipated requirements for enabling forces could prove useful to Congress. This report will be updated.

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Background

Overview

Special Operations Forces (SOF) are elite military units with special training and equipment that can infiltrate into hostile territory through land, sea, or air to conduct a variety of operations, many of them classified. SOF personnel undergo rigorous selection and lengthy specialized training. The U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) oversees the training, doctrine, and equipping of all U.S. SOF units.

Command Structures and Components

In 1986 Congress, concerned about the status of SOF within overall U.S. defense planning, passed measures (P.L. 99-661) to strengthen special operations' position within the defense community. These actions included the establishment of USSOCOM as a new unified command. USSOCOM is headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL. The commander of USSOCOM is a four-star officer who may be from any military service. Navy Admiral William H. McRaven is the current commander of USSOCOM. The USSOCOM commander reports directly to the Secretary of Defense, although an Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD/SOLIC) provides immediate civilian oversight over many USSOCOM activities.¹

USSOCOM has about 60,000 active duty, National Guard, and reserve personnel from all four services and Department of Defense (DOD) civilians assigned to its headquarters, its four components, and one sub-unified command.² USSOCOM's components are the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC); the Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM); the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC); and the Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC). The Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) is a USSOCOM sub-unified command. Additional command and control responsibilities are vested in Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs). TSOCs are theater-specific special operational headquarters elements designed to support a Geographical Combatant Commander's special operations logistics, planning, and operational control requirements, and are normally commanded by a general officer.³

¹ For a detailed description of ASD/SOLIC responsibilities, see <http://policy.defense.gov/solic/>.

² Information in this section is from "United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012," USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012. DOD defines a sub-unified command as a command established by commanders of unified commands, when so authorized through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to conduct operations on a continuing basis in accordance with the criteria set forth for unified commands. A subordinate unified command may be established on an area or functional basis. Commanders of subordinate unified commands have functions and responsibilities similar to those of the commanders of unified commands and exercise operational control of assigned commands and forces within the assigned joint operations area.

³"United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012," USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012, p. 22.

Expanded USSOCOM Responsibilities

In addition to Title 10 authorities and responsibilities, USSOCOM has been given additional responsibilities. In the 2004 Unified Command Plan, USSOCOM was given the responsibility for synchronizing DOD plans against global terrorist networks and, as directed, conducting global operations against those networks.⁴ In this regard, USSOCOM “receives, reviews, coordinates and prioritizes all DOD plans that support the global campaign against terror, and then makes recommendations to the Joint Staff regarding force and resource allocations to meet global requirements.”⁵ In October 2008, USSOCOM was designated as the DOD proponent for Security Force Assistance (SFA).⁶ In this role, USSOCOM will perform a synchronizing function in global training and assistance planning similar to the previously described role of planning against terrorist networks. In addition, USSOCOM is now DOD’s lead for countering threat financing, working with the U.S. Treasury and Justice Departments on means to identify and disrupt terrorist financing efforts.

Army Special Operations Forces

U.S. Army SOF (ARSOF) includes approximately 28,500 soldiers from the Active Army, National Guard, and Army Reserve organized into Special Forces, Ranger, and special operations aviation units, along with civil affairs units, military information units, and special operations support units. ARSOF Headquarters and other resources, such as the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, are located at Fort Bragg, NC. Five active Special Forces (SF) Groups (Airborne),⁷ consisting of about 1,400 soldiers each, are stationed at Fort Bragg and at Fort Lewis, WA; Fort Campbell, KY; Fort Carson, CO; and Eglin Air Force Base, FL. Special Forces soldiers—also known as the Green Berets—are trained in various skills, including foreign languages, that allow teams to operate independently throughout the world. In December 2005, the 528th Sustainment Brigade (Special Operations) (Airborne) was activated at Ft. Bragg, NC, to provide combat service support and medical support to Army special operations forces.⁸

In FY2008, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) began to increase the total number of Army Special Forces battalions from 15 to 20, with one battalion being allocated to each active Special Forces Group. In August 2008, the Army stood up the first of these new battalions—the 4th Battalion, 5th Special Forces Groups (Airborne)—at Fort Campbell, KY.⁹ The Army expects that the last of these new Special Forces battalions will be operational by FY2013.¹⁰ Two Army National Guard Special Forces groups are headquartered in Utah and

⁴ “Fact Book: United States Special Operations Command,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, February 2011, p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Information in this section is from testimony given by Admiral Eric T. Olson, Commander, U.S. SOCOM, to the House Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee on the Fiscal Year 2010 National Defense Authorization Budget Request for the U.S. Special Operations Command, June 4, 2009. For a more in-depth treatment of Security Force Assistance, see CRS Report R41817, *Building the Capacity of Partner States Through Security Force Assistance*, by Thomas K. Livingston.

⁷ Airborne refers to “personnel, troops especially trained to effect, following transport by air, an assault debarkation, either by parachuting or touchdown.” Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, 12 April 2001, (As Amended Through 31 July 2010).

⁸ “United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012, p. 14 .

⁹ Sean D. Naylor, “Special Forces Expands,” *Army Times*, August 11, 2008.

¹⁰ Association of the United States Army, “U.S. Army Special Operations Forces: Integral to the Army and the Joint (continued...)”

Alabama. An elite airborne light infantry unit specializing in direct action operations,¹¹ the 75th Ranger Regiment, is headquartered at Fort Benning, GA, and consists of three battalions and a regimental special troops battalion that provides support to the three Ranger Battalions. Army special operations aviation units, including the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) (SOAR), headquartered at Fort Campbell, KY, feature pilots trained to fly the most sophisticated Army rotary-wing aircraft in the harshest environments, day or night, and in adverse weather.

Some of the most frequently deployed SOF assets are civil affairs (CA) units, which provide experts in every area of civil government to help administer civilian affairs in operational theaters. The 95th Civil Affairs Brigade (Airborne) is the only active CA unit; all other CA units reside in the Reserves and are affiliated with conventional Army units. Military Information Support Operations (formerly known as psychological operations) units disseminate information to large foreign audiences through mass media. Two active duty Military Information Support Groups (MISG)—the 4th Military Information Support Group (MISG) (Airborne), and 8th Military Information Support Group (MISG) (Airborne)—are stationed at Fort Bragg, and their subordinate units are aligned with Geographic Combatant Commands.

U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command Established¹²

On March 25, 2011, the U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command (USASOAC) was activated at Ft. Bragg, NC. Commanded by a U.S. Army Aviation brigadier general, USASOAC will command the 160th SOAR and other affiliated Army Special Operations Aviation organizations. USASOAC is intended to decrease the burden on the 160th SOAR commander (an Army colonel) so he can focus on warfighting functions as well as provide general officer representation at USASOC. In this role, the commander of USASOAC supposedly can better represent Army Special Operations aviation needs and requirements and have a greater influence on decisions affecting Army Special Operations Aviation.

Air Force Special Operations Forces¹³

The Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) is one of the Air Force's 10 major commands with over 12,000 active duty personnel and over 16,000 personnel when civilians, Guard, and Reserve personnel and units are included. While administrative control of AFSOC is overseen by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF), operational control is managed by the USSOCOM commander. AFSOC units operate out of four major continental United States

(...continued)

Force,” *Torchbearer National Security Report*, March 2010, p. 3.

¹¹ Direct action operations are short-duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments, as well as employing specialized military capabilities to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover, or damage designated targets. Direct action differs from conventional offensive actions in the level of physical and political risk, operational techniques, and the degree of discriminate and precise use of force to achieve specific objectives.

¹² Michael Hoffman, “Interview: Brig. Gen. Kevin Mangum,” *Defense News*, May 2, 2011, and U.S. Army Special Operations Command Fact Sheet, May 2011.

¹³ Information in this section is from Lt Gen Wurster's presentation to the Air Force Association, September 14 2010. http://www.afa.org/events/conference/2010/scripts/Wurster_9-14.pdf and “United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012, p. 18.

(CONUS) locations and two overseas locations. The headquarters for AFSOC, the first Special Operations Wing (1st SOW), and the 720th Special Tactics Group are located at Hurlburt Field, FL. The 27th SOW is at Cannon AFB, NM. The 352nd and 353rd Special Operations Groups provide forward presence in Europe (RAF Mildenhall, England) and in the Pacific (Kadena Air Base, Japan), respectively. The Air National Guard's 193rd SOW at Harrisburg, PA, and the Air Force Reserve Command's 919th SOW at Duke Field, FL, complete AFSOC's major units. A training center, the U.S. Air Force Special Operations School and Training Center (AFSOTC), was recently established and is located at Hurlburt Field. AFSOC conducts the majority of its specialized flight training through an arrangement with Air Education and Training Command (AETC) via the 550th SOW at Kirtland AFB, NM. AFSOC's four active-duty flying units are composed of more than 100 fixed and rotary-wing aircraft.

In March 2009, Headquarters AFSOC declared initial operational capability (IOC)¹⁴ for the CV-22.¹⁵ USSOCOM plans for all 50 CV-22s to be delivered to AFSOC by 2015.¹⁶ Since 2009, AFSOC has completed three overseas deployments, to Central America, Africa, and Iraq, and continues to be engaged currently in overseas contingency operations. Despite critical reviews of the aircraft, AFSOC considers the CV-22 "central to our future."¹⁷ AFSOC operates a diverse fleet of modified aircraft. Of 12 major design series aircraft, 7 are variants of the C-130, the average age of some of which is over 40 years old, dating from the Vietnam era. Because of the age of the fleet, AFSOC considers recapitalization one of its top priorities.

AFSOC's Special Tactics experts include Combat Controllers, Pararescue Jumpers, Special Operations Weather Teams, and Tactical Air Control Party (TACPs). As a collective group, they are known as Special Tactics and have also been referred to as "Battlefield Airmen." Their basic role is to provide an interface between air and ground forces, and these airmen have highly developed skill sets. Usually embedded with Army, Navy, or Marine SOF units, they provide control of air fire support, medical and rescue expertise, or weather support, depending on the mission requirements.

As directed in the 2010 QDR, AFSOC plans to increase aviation advisory manpower and resources resident in the 6th Special Operations Squadron (SOS). The 6th SOS's mission is to assess, train, and advise partner nation aviation units with the intent to raise their capability and capacity to interdict threats to their nation. The 6th SOS provides aviation expertise to U.S. foreign internal defense (FID) missions.

Naval Special Operations Forces¹⁸

The Naval Special Warfare Command (NSWC) consists of approximately 8,900 personnel, including more than 2,400 active-duty Special Warfare Operators, known as SEALs; 700 Special

¹⁴ According to DOD IOC is attained when some units and/or organizations in the force structure scheduled to receive a system 1) have received it and 2) have the ability to employ and maintain it.

¹⁵ The CV-22 is the special operations version of the V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft used by the Marine Corps.

¹⁶ USSOCOM Acquisitions and Logistics office, <http://www.socom.mil/soal/Pages/FixedWing.aspx>.

¹⁷ For further detailed reporting on the V-22 program, see CRS Report RL31384, *V-22 Osprey Tilt-Rotor Aircraft: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Jeremiah Gertler.

¹⁸ Information in this section is from Naval Special Warfare Command website, <http://www.public.navy.mil/nsw/pages/Mission.aspx>, accessed January 6, 2012, and "United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012," USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012, pp. 16-17.

Warfare Boat Operators, known as Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewmen (SWCC); 700 reserve personnel; 4,100 support personnel; and more than 1,100 civilians. NSWC is organized around 10 SEAL Teams, 2 SEAL Delivery Vehicle (SDV) Teams, and 3 Special Boat Teams. SEAL Teams consist of six SEAL platoons each, consisting of 2 officers and 16 enlisted personnel. The major operational components of NSWC include Naval Special Warfare Groups One, Three, and Eleven, stationed in Coronado, CA, and Naval Special Warfare Groups Two, Four, and Ten and the Naval Special Warfare Development Group in Little Creek, VA. These components deploy SEAL Teams, SEAL Delivery Vehicle Teams, and Special Boat Teams worldwide to meet the training, exercise, contingency, and wartime requirements of theater commanders. Because SEALs are considered experts in special reconnaissance and direct action missions—primary counterterrorism skills—NSWC is viewed as well postured to fight a globally dispersed enemy ashore or afloat. NSWC forces can operate in small groups and have the ability to quickly deploy from Navy ships, submarines and aircraft, overseas bases, and forward-based units.

Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) ¹⁹

On November 1, 2005, DOD announced the creation of the Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) as a component of USSOCOM. MARSOC consists of three subordinate units: the Marine Special Operations Regiment, which includes 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Marine Special Operations Battalions; the Marine Special Operations Support Group; the Marine Special Operations Intelligence Battalion; and the Marine Special Operations School. MARSOC Headquarters, the 2nd and 3rd Marine Special Operations Battalions, the Marine Special Operations School, and the Marine Special Operations Support Group and the Marine Special Operations Intelligence Battalion are stationed at Camp Lejeune, NC. The 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion is stationed at Camp Pendleton, CA. MARSOC forces have been deployed worldwide to conduct a full range of special operations activities. MARSOC missions include direct action, special reconnaissance, foreign internal defense, counterterrorism, information operations, and unconventional warfare. MARSOC currently has approximately 2,600 personnel assigned.

Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC)

According to DOD, JSOC “provides a joint headquarters to study special operations requirements, ensures interoperability and equipment standardization, develops joint special operations plans and tactics, and conducts joint special operations exercises and training.”²⁰ While not officially acknowledged by DOD or USSOCOM, JSOC, which is headquartered at Pope Air Force Base, NC, is widely believed to command and control what are described as the military’s special missions units—the Army’s Delta Force, the Navy’s SEAL Team Six, the 75th Ranger Regiment, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, and the Air Force’s 24th Special Tactics Squadron.²¹ JSOC’s primary mission is believed to be identifying and destroying terrorists and terror cells worldwide.

¹⁹ Information in this section is from “United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012, pp. 20-21.

²⁰“United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012, p. 22.

²¹ Jennifer D. Kibbe, “The Rise of the Shadow Warriors,” *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 83, Number 2, March/April 2004 and Sean D. Naylor, “JSOC to Become Three-Star Command,” *Army Times*, February 13, 2006.

A news release by the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) News Service which named Vice Admiral William McRaven as Admiral Olson's successor seemingly adds credibility to press reports about JSOC's alleged counterterrorism mission. The USASOC press release notes: "McRaven, a former commander of SEAL Team 3 and Special Operations Command Europe, is the commander of the Joint Special Operations Command. As such, he has led the command as it 'ruthlessly and effectively [took] the fight to America's most dangerous and vicious enemies,' Gates said."²² Reports have also speculated about JSOC's role in the mission to eliminate Osama bin Laden.²³

NATO Special Operations Headquarters²⁴

In May 2010, NATO established the NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ), which is commanded by U.S. Air Force Lieutenant General Frank Kisner, who had previously commanded U.S. Special Operations Command—Europe (SOCEUR). The NSHQ is envisioned to serve as the core of a combined joint force special operations component command, which would be the proponent for planning, training, doctrine, equipping, and evaluating NATO special operations forces from 22 countries. The NSHQ is located with the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Mons, Belgium, and will consist of about 150 NATO personnel.

Organizational and Budgetary Issues

2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report SOF-Related Directives²⁵

The 2010 QDR contains a number of SOF-related directives pertaining to personnel, organizations, and equipment. These include the following:

- To increase key enabling assets²⁶ for special operations forces.
- To maintain approximately 660 special operations teams;²⁷ 3 Ranger battalions; and 165 tilt-rotor/fixed-wing mobility and fire support primary mission aircraft.
- The Army and USSOCOM will add a company of upgraded cargo helicopters (MH-47G) to the Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment.

²² U.S. Army Special Operations Command News Service, "Gates Nominates McRaven, Thurman for Senior Posts," Release Number: 110303-02, March 3, 2011, <http://www.soc.mil/UNS/Releases/2011/March/110303-02.html>.

²³ Marc Ambinder, "The Secret Team That Killed Bin Laden," *National Journal*, May 2, 2011 and David Ignatius, "How the U.S. Found and Finished Bin Laden," *The Washington Post*, May 2, 2011.

²⁴ Information in this section is taken from Carlo Muñoz, "SOCEUR Chief Pegged: Air Force Two-Star to Head Up New NATO Special Ops Headquarters," *Inside the Air Force*, May 28, 2010 and NATO Fact Sheet, "NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ)," accessed from <http://www.NATO.int> on July 1, 2010.

²⁵ Information in this section is from Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review Report, February 2010.

²⁶ Enabling assets are a variety of conventional military units that are assigned to support special operations forces.

²⁷ These teams include Army Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha (ODA) teams; Navy Sea, Air, and Land (SEAL) platoons; Marine special operations teams, Air Force special tactics teams; and operational aviation detachments.

- The Navy will dedicate two helicopter squadrons for direct support to naval special warfare units.
- To increase civil affairs capacity organic to USSOCOM.
- Starting in FY2012, purchase light, fixed-wing aircraft to enable the Air Force's 6th Special Operations squadron to engage partner nations for whose air forces such aircraft might be appropriate, as well as acquiring two non-U.S. helicopters to support these efforts.

The significance of these directives is that they serve as definitive goals for USSOCOM growth and systems acquisition as well as directing how the services will support USSOCOM.

FY2012 USSOCOM Defense Authorization Request and Posture Hearings²⁸

In early March 2011, USSOCOM Commander Admiral Eric T. Olson testified to the Senate and House Armed Service Committees and, in addition to discussing budgetary requirements, also provided an update of the current state of U.S. SOF. Key points emphasized by Admiral Olson included the following:

- USSOCOM totals close to about 60,000 people, about 20,000 of whom are career members of SOF, meaning those who have been selected, trained, and qualified as SOF operators.
- Since September 11, 2001, USSOCOM manpower has nearly doubled, the budget nearly tripled, and overseas deployments have quadrupled. As an example, Admiral Olson noted that as 100,000 U.S. troops came out of Iraq, fewer than 1,000 were from SOF, and at the same time there was a requirement to move about 1,500 SOF to Afghanistan. As a result of this high demand for SOF, Admiral Olson stated that SOF is “fraying around the edges” and “showing signs of wear” but still remains a fundamentally strong and sound force.
- Admiral Olson further noted a slight increase in mid-career special operations troops with 8 to 10 years of service opting to leave the service.
- One of the key actions that USSOCOM is taking is to get SOF more “days at home” and predictability, and part of that effort is trying to relieve SOF members of jobs or responsibilities that can be done by other individuals or units.
- One problem that USSOCOM faces that contributes to fewer “days at home” for SOF personnel is the lack of readily available, local ranges so that SOF can conduct pre-deployment training. Such a lack of local ranges means SOF operators have to “travel to train,” which further increases their time away from home.

²⁸ CQ Congressional Transcripts, Senate Armed Services Committee Holds Hearings on the Fiscal 2012 Defense Authorization Requests for the U.S. Special Operations Command and the U.S. Central Command, March 1, 2011 and Posture Statement of Admiral Eric T. Olson, USN, Commander, United States Special Operations Command Before the 112th Congress House Armed Services Committee March 3, 2011.

- USSOCOM is also developing a force generation system that will better interface with the services' force generation systems, which is intended to provide better, more optimized force packages to the Geographic Combatant Commanders.
- Section 1208 authority (Section 1208 of P.L. 108-375, the FY2005 National Defense Authorization Act) provides authority and funds for U.S. SOF to train and equip regular and irregular indigenous forces to conduct counterterrorism operations. Section 1208 is considered a key tool in combating terrorism and is directly responsible for a number of highly successful counter-terror operations.
- Regarding equipment, USSOCOM is fielding the first of 72 planned MH-60M helicopters; is on the path to recapitalize the gunship fleet with AC-130J models; and the MC-130J program is on track to replace aging MC-130Es and MC-130Ps. USSOCOM plans to award a competitive prototype contract later this year for the Combatant Craft- Medium (CCM) to replace the Special Warfare Rigid Hull Inflatable Boat (RHIB) and has also realigned funds from cancelled programs to fund the development of a family of Dry Submersibles that can be launched from surface ships or specialized submarines.

Admiral McRaven's Confirmation Hearing²⁹

On June 28, 2011, then Vice Admiral (VADM) William H. McRaven appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee at a confirmation hearing for the position of commander, USSOCOM. VADM McRaven provided the committee his views on a variety of issues.

- Major Challenges and Priorities: VADM McRaven cited Admiral Olson's 2011 Posture Statement and suggested that he agreed with what Admiral Olson had presented in March 2011 as USSOCOM's major challenges and priorities.
- VADM McRaven noted that "the current and future demand for SOF capabilities and foundational activities will exceed force deployment capability. SOCOM infrastructure and readiness accounts have not kept pace with SOF growth or demand. Current operations will pressure development and limit required modernization and recapitalization efforts."³⁰
- When asked about what would be the most effective way the United States could advance counter terrorism in Yemen, VADM McRaven noted the effectiveness of International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds and Military Assistance funding in training and equipping Yemeni counterterrorism forces. In addition, continued SOF engagement with Yemeni counterterrorism forces was deemed essential.³¹
- In terms of readiness and operational tempo (OPTEMPO), VADM McRaven stated that high operational tempo has impacted readiness. Because the vast majority of SOF operations have taken place in the U.S. Central Command

²⁹ Information in this section is taken from the written testimony of Vice Admiral William H. McRaven, USN, Commander Designate, U.S. Special Operations Command to the Senate Armed Services Committee, June 28, 2011.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

³¹ Ibid., pp 18-19.

(USCENTCOM) area of operations, “language proficiency and cultural awareness for other Geographic Combatant Commands have suffered.”³²

- The inability to attend school and advanced training that is normally required for SOF personnel was also attributed to the high OPTEMPO. “Examples include reduced time for classroom language training/proficiency for all SOF; advanced Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) School; lack of fixed wing aircraft for live ordnance drops needed to train Joint Tactical Air Controllers; lack of vertical lift capability to train SOF ground forces and aircrew proficiency; lack of fixed wing refueling aircraft for helicopter in-flight refueling and ships available to conduct deck landing qualifications. Insufficient availability of non-SOF ranges to support SOF training is a significant issue.”³³
- A lack of U.S.-based rotary/tilt wing aircraft for aircrew qualification/proficiency and for SOF ground forces training. Many of these systems are either deployed or in depot-level maintenance.³⁴

FY2012 USSOCOM Budget Request

USSOCOM’s FY2012 Budget Request is \$10.5 billion—with \$7.2 billion in the baseline budget and \$3.3 billion in the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) budget.³⁵ This represents an increase of 7% over the FY2011 Budget Request of \$9.8 billion. USSOCOM has long maintained that it represents about 2% of the Department of Defense budget and provides maximum operational impact for a limited investment. Another one of USSOCOM’s perceived benefits is that its components take proven, service-common equipment and modify it with SOF funding for special operations-unique capabilities.

Shifting the USSOCOM Annual Funding Request to the Base Budget

USSOCOM is reportedly transitioning its annual budget request over the course of the next few years from Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding to the annual base budget.³⁶ USSOCOM is said to receive about one-third of its funding through OCO funding, which is reportedly the most OCO funding within DOD. This move to the annual base budget is in keeping with congressional intent for the majority of DOD funding to be in the annual budget and facilitates greater congressional oversight of the USSOCOM budget.

³² Ibid., p. 30.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Information in this section is from the United States Special Operations Command FY2012 Budget Estimates, February 2011 and Posture Statement of Admiral Eric T. Olson, USN, Commander, United States Special Operations Command Before the 112th Congress House Armed Services Committee March 3, 2011.

³⁶ Marcus Weisgerber, “U.S. Special Forces Shifting Funding Out of War Accounts,” *Defense News*, April 4, 2011.

FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act

National Defense Authorization Act for FY2012 (H.R. 1540; P.L. 112-81)³⁷

The FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 112-81) authorized \$10.4 billion for USSOCOM and included the following provisions:

- **Section 144:** Requires the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics (USD AT&L) to review USSOCOM's dry combat submersible programs³⁸ and determine the appropriate acquisition category for these programs before they enter the Engineering and Manufacturing Development (EMD) phase.
- **Section 142:** Prohibits the commander of USSOCOM from expending more than 50% of the funds available for the aviation foreign internal defense program until DOD provides the congressional defense committees with a report outlining the program's goals, requirements, and acquisition strategy.
- **Section 904:** Requires USSOCOM and the services to reach annual agreements on the process by which general purpose enabling capabilities can be dedicated to support special operations missions.
- **Section 344:** Requires commander USSOCOM to conduct a study on the ability of existing training ranges used by SOF, including military operating area airspace and special use airspace, to support the full spectrum of missions and operations assigned to SOF.
- **Section 1086:** Re-designates "psychological operations" as "military information support operations" in Title 10, United States Code, to conform to DOD usage.
- **Section 952:** The Secretary of Defense is required no later than March 12, 2012, to submit a report to the congressional defense committees studying USSOCOM sub-unified command structure. This study should include recommendations to revise the current command structure to better support development and deployment of joint special operations forces and capabilities.

The FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act also contained the following related provisions:

- **Section 1031:** The Secretary of Defense is required to provide the congressional defense committees with quarterly briefings outlining DOD counterterrorism operations and related activities involving special operations forces. These briefings are to include a global update on activities by geographic combatant

³⁷Press Release, U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, "Senate Armed Services Committee "Senate Armed Services Committee Completes Conference of National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012, December 12, 2011 and Congressional Record, Conference Report on H.R. 1540, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012, December 12, 2011, pp. H8356 – H8702.

³⁸ These programs include the Dry Combat Submersible-Light program; the Dry Combat Submersible-Medium program; the Next-Generation Submarine Shelter program; and any new submersible developed under USSOCOM's Undersea Mobility Acquisition Program, henceforth.

command, overview of authorities and legal issues to include limitations, and other matters deemed appropriate.

- **Section 1203:** Provides an extension and expansion of authority for support of special operations to combat terrorism (P.L. 108-375; 118Stat. 2086 and P.L. 111-383; 124 Stat.4385) increasing authorized funding from \$45 million to \$50 million.

Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2012 (H.R. 2055; P.L. 112-74)³⁹

The FY2012 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act contained the following USSOCOM-related provisions:

- **Special Operations Command Aviation Foreign Internal Defense (AvFID):** While aware that a review of the USSOCOM Aviation Foreign Internal Defense mission is ongoing, Congress believes that the rapid expansion of this program as proposed in the FY2012 Budget Request must be tempered. Therefore Congress directs that procurement of AvFID fixed-wing aircraft is reduced by \$45 million; AvFID rotary-wing aircraft simulator by \$10 million; and \$17.6 million for operations and maintenance for aircraft that will not be delivered until FY2013. Two AvFID rotary-wing and associated support equipment are fully funded under this act. In addition, no funds provided for fixed-wing AvFID are to be obligated until 30 days after submission of a report to the congressional defense committees describing how the funds will be used to support the AvFID program and non-standard aviation missions.
- **Special Operations Command Undersea Mobility Concepts:** Congress noted that the FY2012 Budget Request included \$92.2 million for several programs that are designed to fill the capability gap left by the cancellation of the Advanced SEAL Delivery System and its successor, the Joint Multi-Mission Submersible. Unobligated prior year appropriations, combined with funds provided in the DOD Appropriations Act for 2012, would allow USSOCOM to award several commercial contracts to develop a family of systems to meet this capability gap. Therefore, Congress directs commander, USSOCOM to provide separate cost estimates for Technology Development and Engineering and manufacturing Development phases for each project that support Undersea Mobility, as well as estimated procurement costs, with the FY2013 Budget Request.

³⁹ Conference Report to Accompany H.R. 2055, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, December 15, 2011, p 670 and p. 729 and Congressional Record, December 15, 2011, p. H9307 and H9373.

Possible Issues for Congress

New Strategic Guidance and SOF

On January 5, 2012, President Obama, Secretary of Defense Panetta, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dempsey publically unveiled new strategic guidance that not only rebalances U.S. strategic posture towards Asia and the Middle East but also will result in a “smaller and leaner” U.S. military.⁴⁰ During this unveiling, Secretary Panetta noted the following:

As we reduce the overall defense budget, we will protect, and in some cases increase, our investments in special operations forces, in new technologies like (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance), and unmanned systems, in space—and, in particular, in cyberspace—capabilities, and also our capacity to quickly mobilize if necessary.⁴¹

While specific details on force structure cuts have not yet been made public, there has been a great deal of speculation that the Army and Marines will undergo significant downsizing over the next decade. With fewer general purpose forces available and USSOCOM’s self-imposed growth limitations to preserve the quality of the force, U.S. SOF might find its operational tempo increased. There are also aspects of this new strategic guidance that require further explanation. For example, defense officials offer that a reliance on smaller teams operating in innovative ways will be a central tenet of this new strategy.⁴² This seemingly suggests an expanded role for U.S. SOF although few details have been made available. While DOD has indicated a willingness to increase its investment in SOF, there are limitations on how much SOF can expand due to the stringent standards—particularly for operators—and long training lead times required for most special operations specialties. As part of continued debate on the new strategic guidance, it might prove useful to examine the question of how DOD envisions employing SOF under this new strategy, SOF’s capacity for expansion, and SOF’s ability to take on new mission requirements as general purpose forces are drawn down.

Impact of Army and Marine Corps Downsizing on Enabling Units⁴³

On January 6, 2011, then Secretary of Defense Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen announced that starting in FY2015, the Army would decrease its permanently authorized endstrength by 27,000 soldiers and the Marines would lose anywhere between 15,000 and 20,000 Marines. The Administration’s January 5, 2012, issuance of new strategic guidance suggests additional downsizing for ground forces over and above those directed in 2011 by Secretary Gates. While Congress has directed that USSOCOM and the services to agree on an annual basis on how enabling forces will be dedicated to USSOCOM, there are factors that might adversely impact the provision of enabling forces. Because

⁴⁰ DOD News Release, “Statement as Prepared by Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta on the Defense Strategic Guidance,” No. 009-12, January 5, 2012.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ U.S. Department of Defense News Transcript, “DOD News Briefing with Secretary Gates and Adm. Mike Mullen from the Pentagon” January 6, 2011. <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4747> and DOD News Release, “Statement as Prepared by Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta on the Defense Strategic Guidance,” No. 009-12, January 5, 2012.

USSOCOM draws its operators and support troops from the services (primarily from the non-commissioned officer [NCO] and junior officer ranks), USSOCOM will have a smaller force pool from which to draw its members, including some members that would be assigned to organic USSOCOM enabling units. Also, in light of anticipated ground force cuts, the services might be hard-pressed to establish and dedicate enabling units to support USSOCOM while at the same time providing support in kind to general purpose forces. As part of ground force reductions and the likely expansion of SOF missions and responsibilities, an examination of anticipated USSOCOM enabling force requirements in relation to proposed force structure could prove beneficial not only for mission planning purposes but also in terms of future resource investments.

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