



Center for Strategic
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Assessments

T E S T I M O N Y

Special Operations Forces: Challenges and Opportunities

Testimony Before the

U.S. House of Representatives

House Committee on Armed Services

**Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and
Capabilities**

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March 3, 2009

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to share my views on the challenges and opportunities facing U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF).¹

SOF have figured prominently in U.S. military operations since 2001 and have become central to the implementation of U.S. national defense strategy with respect to the war against violent Islamist extremism, which is likely to be increasingly fought indirectly and in countries with which the United States is not at war. During the unconventional war against the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan in Operation Enduring Freedom, SOF played a pivotal role by integrating U.S. precision air power with the operations of irregular Afghan opposition forces to achieve rapid regime change and eliminate al Qaeda's primary sanctuary. Since the fall of the Taliban, SOF have played a critical role in training and advising elements of the Afghan National Army, providing personal security for senior Afghan officials, and capturing or killing scores of senior Taliban and al Qaeda leaders and lower-level operatives. They are now also actively engaged along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and training elements of Pakistan's Frontier Corps and Special Service Group. In the early phases of the war with Iraq, SOF again played a central role in a special operations-intensive campaign, providing the primary ground force element on two of three fronts, and performing a number of special reconnaissance, direct-action, and unconventional warfare missions in support of the conventional campaign. Over the past six years, they have been instrumental in training and advising Iraqi security forces, as well as in hunting down high-value al-Qaeda targets in Iraq. In the broader war against violent Islamist radicalism, to the extent their constrained capacity allows, SOF are building partner capacity, collecting intelligence, conducting counterterrorism operations and hunting high-value targets in multiple countries across several continents. In the Philippines, for example, SOF have led an indirect approach to counterinsurgency with great success. They have also sustained their key role in U.S. counternarcotics and counterinsurgency operations in Colombia and the Andean Ridge. The operations tempo currently being sustained by SOF is the highest in its history.

SOF face several challenges, as well as opportunities, in adapting to a future security environment that will likely be dominated by the continuation and possible intensification of violent Islamic radicalism, the potential rise of the People's Republic of China as a more aggressive political-military competitor of the United States, and the global proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), in particular nuclear weapons.²

¹ This statement is drawn from Robert Martinage, *Special Operations Forces—Future Challenges and Opportunity* (Washington, DC: CSBA, 2008).

² In addition to the potential threat posed by China, the U.S. military must also be prepared to confront the prospective rise of authoritarian capitalist states such as Russia. It is assumed here, however, that the latter challenge is in large part a lesser included case of the former. Similarly, it is assumed that a force postured to deal with these three challenges would be more than adequate for addressing the threat posed by regional powers. Andrew Krepinevich, Robert Martinage, and Bob Work, *The Challenges to US National Security* (Washington, DC: CSBA, 2008).

Defeating Violent Islamist Radicalism

There are two branches of violent Islamist radicalism today: heterodox Salafi-Takfiri groups within the Sunni Muslim community and “Khomeinist” Shiite groups that both strive to impose their brand of *sharia* justice on the entire world.³ Al Qaeda is an example of the former, while Iranian-backed Hezbollah is an archetype of the latter. Terrorist cells are active in more than 60 countries around the world. Moreover, there are radical Islamist insurgencies of varying stages underway in nearly a score of countries—most notably in Pakistan, Afghanistan, countries in the Maghreb and Horn of Africa, and Lebanon. The operating environment spans from Europe to the most underdeveloped parts of the world, and ranges from densely populated urban areas and mega-cities to remote mountains, deserts and jungles. For the United States, it encompasses permissive, semi-permissive, and non-permissive environments, as well as hostile or denied areas. The ability of U.S. allies and partners to address the threat ranges from sophisticated to almost non-existent, but even in the most capable partner areas (i.e., Europe), Islamist terrorist cells have repeatedly demonstrated their ability to operate.

To prevail in this war, the United States, along with its allies and partners, will need to conduct a sustained, multifaceted, global “smother campaign” to deny terrorists sanctuary whether in under-governed areas or state-controlled territory, sever the transnational links upon which they rely, impede recruitment and fundraising, track them down wherever they may be hiding and plotting, and disrupt their operations. *The United States cannot successfully wage this campaign alone.* It will be essential to build the security capabilities and capacities of as many partners—both nations and disaffected non-state actors—as possible. It will be necessary to put additional pressure on state sponsors of terrorism. The U.S. Government will also need to shore up weak or failing states to prevent them from becoming terrorist sanctuaries. Finally, for long-term success, it is imperative for the U.S. Government to engage more aggressively in the “war of ideas” to isolate the Salafi-Takfiri and Khomeinist extremists from the mainline Muslim community, divide these violent movements internally, and undermine their ideological appeal. In short, defeating violent Islamic extremism will require a multifaceted approach—one in which the military instrument will often be far less important than effective foreign assistance, public and private diplomacy, strategic communications, and covert action. That being said, SOF will need to be shaped, sized, and postured to:

- Conduct proactive, sustained “manhunting” and disruption operations globally;
- Build partner capacity in relevant ground, air, and maritime capabilities in scores of countries on a steady-state basis;
- Help generate persistent air and maritime surveillance and strike coverage over “under-governed” areas and relevant littoral zones; and
- Employ unconventional warfare against state sponsors of terrorism and transnational terrorist groups globally.

³ For an expanded discussion, see Robert Martinage, *The Global War on Terrorism: An Assessment* (Washington, DC: CSBA, 2007).

Conducting Manhunting and Disruption Operations Globally

In close cooperation with the other government agencies (primarily the CIA), SOF can help locate, track, and capture or kill terrorists and their leaders in hostile, state-controlled territory (e.g., Iran and Syria), under-governed areas (e.g., the tribal areas of Pakistan), and densely populated cities from Beirut to Mindanao. They can also be relied upon to interdict the movement of critical supplies and destroy terrorist infrastructure (e.g., training camps, communications, and weapon/supply caches). These operational tasks have two major implications for SOF posture. First and foremost, SOF will need to build and maintain a persistent, low-visibility ground presence in several known or suspected terrorist operating areas around the world, as well as in expansive, under-governed areas that are vulnerable to terrorist exploitation (e.g., the Trans-Sahara region of Africa, the Sulu/Sulawesi Seas littoral, and large swaths of Central Asia). Second, SOF will need to be prepared to conduct clandestine operations (most likely unconventional warfare) and support CIA-led covert activities against state sponsors of terrorism, including those armed with significant anti-access capabilities. An on-the-ground presence is essential not only for collecting tactical intelligence and developing local situational awareness, but also for supporting partner security forces and responding rapidly (either unilaterally or in a combined operation) if and when high-value terrorist targets are identified and located. Currently, however, over 80 percent of SOF capacity is allocated to just two countries: Iraq and Afghanistan. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has indicated that the SOF commitment to those countries will probably not decline significantly over the next several years, even as conventional forces withdraw from Iraq. As he remarked in May 2008:

The eventual drawdown in Iraq is not the end of the mission for our elite forces. Far from it. Even as our regular troops reduce their presence and are replaced by Iraqis, special operations force levels will remain fairly constant and be the connective tissue for the overall mission. They will be in Iraq and Afghanistan for an extended period of time—a force to hunt and kill terrorists, and also as a force to help train Iraqis and Afghans.⁴

The opportunity cost of that commitment, however, has been a significant reduction in SOF presence in other countries, including several terrorist “hot spots” in Africa, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. Admiral Eric Olson, commander of the Special Operations Command (SOCOM), summarized the unfortunate situation: “we’re going to fewer countries, staying for shorter periods of time, with smaller numbers of people than historically we have done.”⁵ This limited, episodic SOF presence outside of Iraq and Afghanistan is unacceptable strategically. Additional SOF capacity is needed, possibly beyond that called for in the 2006 QDR, to sustain a persistent, low-visibility ground presence in scores of areas *outside* of Iraq and Afghanistan.

⁴ Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense, Speech delivered at Special Operations Forces International Conference, Tampa, Florida, May 21, 2008.

⁵ AP, “SOCOM Says Forces Spread Thin,” May 6, 2006.

Building Partner Capacity

Given finite U.S. counterterrorism capacity, the impracticability of conducting American military (or even covert) operations in several relevant places around the world, and the political/diplomatic need to avoid the perception of a unilateral American war against Islam, it is essential to train, equip, and advise foreign security forces—including air and maritime forces, as well as ground forces—in as many countries as possible. If the United States is successful in this regard, more and more partner states will, in time, become fully capable of suppressing or eliminating terrorist threats within their own territory. Not only will this create the conditions for a gradual reduction in the U.S. military's commitment abroad, it could also facilitate more effective counterterrorism operations since these partners have unmatched advantages with respect to cultural intimacy and language proficiency.

Because of their foreign language skills, cultural expertise, and familiarity with a wide range of commonly used foreign weapons, the U.S. Army's Special Forces (SF) are the country's premier force for training, advising, and equipping foreign security forces. In addition, Marine Special Operations Command's (MARSOC) Marine Special Operations Advisor Group teams are developing specialized foreign internal defense-related skill sets and expertise. Elements of this mission, however, could and should be performed by general purpose forces, freeing up SOF for missions that exploit their "special" capabilities. With modest training and basic language instruction, for example, conventional Army and Marine Corps units could train and advise conventional military forces in basic counterinsurgency tactics, techniques, and procedures in partner states that are willing to accept what is likely to be a relatively large American "footprint" on their territory. In countries where the disclosure of U.S. military presence would be politically risky for the host nation, however, SOF will likely be relied upon for the foreign internal defense (FID) mission. Unfortunately, given falling favorable public views of the United States over the past several years, more and more states want to keep their involvement with the U.S. military as discreet as possible. Moreover, SOF will also be required for training and advising foreign special operations forces. In short, while the general purpose force may reduce the foreign internal defense workload for SOF at the margins, one should harbor no illusions that it will be possible (or desirable) for SOF to divest the bulk of the foreign internal defense mission; it will unquestionably remain a major operational focus for SOF in the years ahead.

As with creating a low-visibility network for global manhunting and disruption operations, the primary challenge associated with the closely linked requirement of building and leveraging partner capacity is a lack of available SOF force structure. While SOF conducted hundreds of FID missions in some fifty-six countries in 2007, they generally lasted only a few weeks and involved a relatively small number of personnel.⁶ With more than 80 percent of forward-deployed SOF tied down in Iraq and Afghanistan—and 99 percent of those forces committed to combat operations, Theater

⁶ Admiral Eric T. Olson, Commander, USSOCOM, "Posture of Special Operations Forces," Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 4, 2008, p 7; and ARSOF Presentation, "Named Operations, TSCP Events, and Embassy Support 01 Oct-29 Jul 08," July 29, 2008.

Security Cooperation Plan missions worldwide have fallen by about 50 percent.⁷ This major commitment to Central Command (CENTCOM) has not only dramatically reduced SOF's ability to support important activities in other areas, it has also had a detrimental effect on training for tasks that are not required for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan (e.g., military free fall and underwater combat operations), as well as on foreign language proficiency in languages spoken outside the CENTCOM area of responsibility.

Developing and maintaining a network for combating terrorism globally will likely require the capacity to conduct training and advisory activities on a steady-state basis in at least a score of high-priority countries and carry out more episodic training activities on a rotational basis in another twenty to forty countries. Meeting this challenge will require changes in the capabilities, capacities and postures of both SOF—especially within SF battalions and the Marine Special Operations Advisor Group—and ground general purpose forces.⁸ As will be discussed below, the imperative to ramp up SOF-led training and advisory efforts globally will not only require additional personnel, but also the realignment of existing capacity to focus more attention on the Muslim world. More proficiency will be needed in languages spoken in critical “front line” areas, most notably Arabic, Pashto, Farsi, Dari, Punjabi, Balochi, Bahasa, and Filipino. In addition, the train, advise, and equip mission must be embraced as a core general purpose forces mission not only by the Army and Marine Corps, but also by the Air Force and Navy.

Contributing to Persistent Reconnaissance-Strike Coverage over “Under-Governed” Areas and Littoral Zones

Airborne and naval platforms can contribute to the global combating terrorism network by providing persistent reconnaissance-strike coverage over “under-governed” areas and littoral zones that currently are or are likely to be exploited by terrorist groups. This air-maritime force should be shaped, sized, and postured to accomplish the following core tasks:

- Monitor ungoverned land areas, as well as littoral zones and maritime chokepoints, for suspicious activity;
- Locate, track, and strike time-sensitive, high-value targets, including those in defended/denied areas; and
- Enable U.S. and partner operations by providing actionable intelligence, communications links, and fire support, as needed.

Given that currently available unmanned combat air systems (UCAS) have significantly longer unrefueled range and mission endurance than manned surveillance

⁷ ARSOF Presentation, “Named Operations, TSCP Events, and Embassy Support 01 Oct-29 Jul 08,” July 29, 2008; GAO, *Special Operations Forces—Several Human Capital Challenges Must Be Addressed to Meet Expanded Role* (Washington, DC: GAO, 2006), pp. 29-35; and USSOCOM, *United States Special Operations Command History, 1987-2007*, p. 9.

⁸ This will also require new authorities regarding the countries in which U.S. military forces are allowed to operate (e.g., Indonesia), the types of forces (i.e., irregular as well as regular and paramilitary, including police, as well as military) they are allowed to operate with, and the scope of their operational relationships (i.e., equipping and combat advising, in addition to training).

platforms, they appear to be the preferred platform for providing wide-area, persistent, airborne surveillance and strike coverage. It may make sense to complement them with small, affordable, easy-to-operate manned aircraft that can be more easily acquired, flown, and maintained by U.S. partners. Meeting the need for dramatically increased maritime surveillance and strike/interdiction coverage in littoral zones will likely require a relatively large number of platforms to be permanently stationed at several regional operating bases or “fleet stations” around the world. While conventional military forces may shoulder most of this responsibility, SOF will have an important role to play.

Employing Unconventional Warfare against State Sponsors of Terrorism and Terrorist Groups

Unconventional warfare is defined here as operations conducted by, with, and through irregular forces against non-state actors or in support of resistances, insurgencies, and major combat operations. Irregular forces or surrogates can be controlled directly by U.S. forces in permissive environments or indirectly in hostile or politically sensitive environments. An important characteristic of unconventional warfare is that the involvement of the U.S. Government can, in theory, remain covert or at least plausibly deniable, as was the case with U.S. support of the mujahedeen in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Even when the involvement of the U.S. Government is overt, the footprint of the U.S. military is typically much smaller in comparison to conventional operations. During the first phase of Operation Enduring Freedom, for example, fewer than three hundred SOF operatives from several countries were on the ground in Afghanistan in the weeks leading up to the fall of Qandahar. In addition to training, organizing, and equipping indigenous forces (e.g., Northern, Southern, and Eastern Alliance factions), widely distributed SF units were very successful in locating and designating Al Qaeda/Taliban targets for precision attack. Operating with irregular Afghan forces, SOF operators used a variety of man-portable sensors, precision targeting systems, and communications equipment to find enemy targets and bring precision firepower to bear against them with tremendous effectiveness.

SOF’s ability to conduct small footprint unconventional warfare, to include regime change, provides U.S. policy makers with a valuable option in operations against hostile states. This is important because when dealing with hostile state-sponsors of terrorism, regime change may be the only assured means of ending their sponsorship. In Afghanistan, for example, the Taliban and al Qaeda were inextricably linked. Osama bin Laden provided the Taliban with significant funding, logistical assistance, and seasoned and loyal fighters who fought side-by-side with the Taliban against the Northern Alliance. In return, the Taliban provided him with sanctuary and operational support. In response to an ultimatum from President Bush, Mullah Mohammed Omar claimed to have no recourse but to offer protection to Afghanistan’s al Qaeda “guests” and absorb U.S. attacks. Iran is almost certain to be as intransigent with respect to terminating its support to Lebanese Hezbollah and, to a lesser extent, Shiite militias and “special groups” in Iraq.

As evidenced by the dramatic changes in Iraq over the past two years, unconventional warfare can also be a potent, cost-effective tool for attacking hostile *non-*

state actors such as Salafi-Takfiri and Khomeinist terrorist groups. The Al-Anbar model is potentially applicable to other areas of terrorist activity including those in the Levant, South Asia, Central Asia, the Maghreb, pan-Sahel, and Horn of Africa.

SOF unconventional warfare capabilities, especially in denied areas, almost atrophied out of existence in the decade following the end of the Cold War. Fortunately, since 2001, those skills have been resuscitated. Improving unconventional warfare capabilities will require additional investment in languages, area knowledge, advanced special operations training, clandestine infiltration capabilities, and low-signature support infrastructure. As will be discussed below, to ensure that unconventional warfare gets the attention it needs, it might also be necessary to create a sub-unified irregular or indirect warfare command within SOCOM to counterbalance institutionally the direct-action advocacy of JSOC.

Potential Rise of China as a Military Competitor

A critical question for U.S. defense strategists is: How will China exploit its growing economic strength and military power? Opinions in the national security community vary widely on this question and, in particular, on whether conflict with China is likely. China claims that it will rise peacefully; if that is the case, it will be in the national interest of United States to develop closer ties with China.⁹ It is certainly plausible, however, that future U.S.-Sino relations may be characterized more by competition and periodic conflict than sustained cooperation. To hedge against that possibility, however remote, the U.S. military will need to be shaped, sized, and postured differently than it is today. If done intelligently, these steps could dissuade China from investing in capabilities that threaten U.S. and allied interests in East Asia, improve crisis stability in the region, and deter future Chinese aggression. In the event that these U.S. efforts fail, however, there are at least three missions that SOF may be called upon to perform:

- Information operations focused on accessing “closed” communications and computer networks;
- Clandestine special reconnaissance missions to locate hidden or mobile high-value targets for precision attack during a major conventional operation; and
- Direct action against extremely important targets that cannot be disabled by other means during a major conventional operation.

Accessing “Closed” Networks

China has developed an extremely robust, internal fiber-optic network for military command, control, and communications. In all likelihood, it has several dedicated, stand-alone communications and computer networks that are not connected to commercial networks, and thus, are practically impossible to access remotely. Accordingly, SOF may be called upon to gain physical access to those networks—both in peacetime for intelligence collection purposes and in wartime to spoof, exploit, or disable them.

⁹ Zheng Bijian, “China’s ‘Peaceful Rise’ to Great-Power Status,” *Foreign Affairs*, September-October 2005.

During peacetime, this mission would typically be assigned to the Central Intelligence Agency. However, in remote, difficult-to-access land areas, or for cables on the seabed, SOF could play an important role. During wartime, the network-access mission could become a core SOF responsibility, which would have several important implications for capability development and training. First, SOF would need to master the skills needed to tap into fiber-optic or other communication lines, as well as to “hack” into protected computer networks. This would likely require the creation of new information operations training programs, as well as the development and procurement of specialized network-access “tool kits.” It could even provide the impetus for the reshaping of the configuration of Special Mission Unit (SMU) troops, SF Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA)s, and SEAL Teams—expanding or reconfiguring them to include one or more information-operation specialists. Second, it highlights once again the requirement for a stealthy SOF insertion and exfiltration aircraft. Third, the potential scale of the wartime mission suggests that WARCUM’s current fleet of one, semi-operational Advanced SEAL Delivery System mini-submarine is wholly inadequate. Although flooded SEAL Delivery Vehicles could also be used to transport SEALs or other specially trained personnel clandestinely from submerged submarines to areas of interest in China’s littoral waters, they would be far less desirable operationally. Personnel that could come and go repeatedly from the warm and dry environment of the pressurized mini-submarine using a rapid lock-in/lock-out chamber would be much better able to perform the technically challenging and time-consuming tasks such as clandestinely exploiting fiber-optic cables or sensors on the cold sea floor. Future SOF mini-submarines, referred to now as Joint Multi-Mission Submersibles, could even be equipped with specialized equipment for manipulating undersea cables and sensor arrays.

Clandestine Special Reconnaissance and Direct-Action Missions

In the event of a military conflict with China, SOF would likely support conventional operations by finding and, in a more limited set of cases, attacking high-value targets. They might be relied upon, for example, to locate cruise and ballistic missile launcher “hide sites,” including in deep inland areas, as well as coastal anti-ship cruise missile and surface-to-air missile launchers. To avoid revealing their location, hidden SOF units would either provide the GPS coordinates of confirmed targets or laser-designate them for precision air and missile strikes launched from orbiting aircraft and offshore ships. In rare circumstances, however, SOF might be called upon to conduct direct-action missions against targets of high strategic or operational importance that could not be reliably or safely neutralized by other means—examples of the former could be a deep-underground command and control node or a super-hardened submarine pen; examples of the latter might be a WMD storage site or a critical target located in a densely populated area. JSOC’s SMUs might also be tasked with conducting “snatch and grab” operations such as rescuing and extracting imprisoned opposition leaders.

These are all “bread and butter” SOF tasks. During Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, for example, SOF routinely performed similar special reconnaissance and direct-action missions. The major difference, of course, is the extremely high-end threat environment in China. The implications for SOF echo those already mentioned—

the requirement for the development and fielding of a fleet of stealthy SOF transports to replace the aging and vulnerable MC-130 Combat Talons, and the need to field a larger Joint Multi-Mission Submersible fleet.

Proliferation of WMD

Preventing the spread and potential use of WMD, especially nuclear weapons, by state and non-state actors alike is likely to become an increasingly important—and increasingly difficult—national security challenge. SOF could potentially conduct unconventional warfare to bring about regime change in states aspiring to develop WMD. In rare circumstances, they might be called upon to undertake counterproliferation operations against critical WMD-related infrastructure that cannot be reliably and safely targeted by other means, including sites in denied, deep inland areas. SOF would likely also play a role in retaliatory attacks against state or non-state actors who employ WMD. Its primary contribution to the U.S. Government’s response to this challenge, however, will likely be in tracking down and rendering safe “loose” WMD material or devices.

The same globally distributed network of forward-deployed/forward-based SOF units that are conducting partner-capacity building, manhunting, and other missions associated with the war against Salafi-Takfiri/Khomeinist terrorist groups could simultaneously support the counter-proliferation mission. They could not only provide a valuable source of intelligence collection, but could also serve as an in-situ, highly responsive force to interdict the movement of WMD-related materiel over land or sea. The development and fielding of improved sensors for the stand-off detection of WMD-related materiel would be extremely beneficial operationally.

Only selected JSOC units are equipped and trained in the requisite tactics, techniques, and procedures for conducting “render safe” missions overseas. Accordingly, if the U.S. Government interdicted a device outside of the United States, JSOC would be called upon to disarm it. Given the prospective need for additional capacity in this area, the 2006 QDR called for an expansion in the “number of U.S. forces with advanced technical render-safe skills,” as well as an improvement in their “speed of response.”

Preparing SOF for Future Challenges and Opportunities

The operational implications of the future security environment sketched out above have important ramifications for the shape, size, and posture of SOF. The discussion that follows begins by highlighting a handful of SOCOM-wide organizational and policy changes that could help SOF address future challenges and exploit emerging opportunities. It then highlights specific high-priority areas for investment or reorientation for each of SOCOM’s subordinate commands.

In general, SOF will need to shift from an episodic deployment force to a persistent-presence force—with more forces forward, in more places, for longer periods of time. The fight against Salafi-Takfiri and Khomeinist terrorist groups will increasingly be fought outside of Iraq and Afghanistan in countries with which the United States is not at war. Consequently, the dominant modes of operation will be indirect, working with and through allies, and covert, conducting operations in which the involvement of the

U.S. Government is concealed. Accordingly, SOF will need to place increased emphasis not only upon unconventional warfare and foreign internal defense, but also upon working more closely with the CIA's National Clandestine Service. To hedge against the potential emergence of China as a more aggressive military competitor, SOF will need to acquire a few niche capabilities, such as a stealthy airlifter, and expand current capacity in a handful of areas, such as clandestine undersea SEAL delivery and support platforms. To prepare for a more proliferated world, the specialized search and "render safe" capabilities of JSOC's SMUs may need to be expanded beyond that directed by the 2006 QDR.

SOCOM-Wide Organizational and Policy Changes

Several organizational and policy changes within SOCOM could better prepare SOF for emerging operational and strategic challenges. Three initiatives are particularly important:

- Achieving an appropriate balance, in both strategy and resources, between direct and indirect approaches to special operations, which may necessitate the creation of a Joint Irregular Warfare Command (JIWC);
- Elevating the rank of selected Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs); and
- Forging a closer operational relationship between SOF and the CIA.

Establish a Joint Irregular Warfare Command (JIWC)

While the resources devoted to SOCOM's indirect capabilities have increased substantially since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the indirect warfare part of the portfolio (unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, civil affairs, and psychological operations or PSYOPS) is still under-represented bureaucratically. Over the past two decades, SOCOM has *never* been commanded by an SF officer. Conversely, every SOCOM commander has climbed the direct-action ladder and most have held at least one senior-level command in JSOC. Resentment within the indirect warfare community about the funding, flying hours, ammunition allowances, training, and promotion opportunities lavished upon JSOC's SMUs and associated units has ebbed and flowed over time but remains a perennial source of institutional tension.

This imbalance could be addressed by creating a three-star, sub-unified operational command under SOCOM focused on indirect warfare—a Joint Irregular Warfare Command (JIWC). As will be elaborated upon below, this command could be created by converting U.S. Army SF Command from a Title X administrative headquarters into an operational command focused on providing sustained unconventional warfare, FID, civil affairs, PSYOPS, and other support to regional combatant commanders. In addition to centralizing the management of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel, and facilities associated with these SOF tasks, the JIWC would also be better able to compete for resources and advocate indirect warfare strategies at the senior-most levels within SOCOM and DoD more broadly. The JIWC would not only serve as a needed counter-balance to the growing influence of JSOC within SOCOM, but also as a proponent for special operations

approaches to irregular warfare as alternatives to those promoted by general purpose forces.

Using U.S. Army Special Forces Command at Fort Bragg as the foundation, the JIWC would absorb all seven active and reserve Special Forces Groups, the JFK Special Warfare Center and School, as well as the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade and the 4th PSYOPS Group. The Marine component would include the Marine Special Operations Advisory Group and associated support assets. The Air Force component would be the 6th Special Operations Squadron, as well as additional lift and ISR support assets. The JIWC could be organized, staffed, and equipped to serve as a deployable, three-star command for conducting extended special-operations-intensive irregular warfare campaigns. It would also dovetail nicely with efforts to create indirect warfare career paths within SOCOM by providing more opportunities for individuals with that background to serve in senior positions.

Elevate the Rank of Theater Special Operations Commands

Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs) are subordinate unified commands that advise geographic combatant commanders (GCC) regarding SOF capabilities, integrate special operations into GCC plans, provide SOF units for operational taskings, and coordinate and support in-theater special operations activities. Since operations against Salafi-Takfiri/Khomeinist terrorists are likely to be special-operations intensive, it would be logical to consider elevating the rank of selected TSOC commands, and increasing the size of their staffs accordingly, to give the special operations community a stronger voice in GCC deliberations and more influence relative to general purpose force components. For example, given the high operations tempo of SOF in the Central and Pacific commands, Special Operations Command Central and Special Operations Command Pacific might be elevated to three-star commands.

Forge a Closer Relationship between SOCOM and the CIA

At its core, the war against Salafi-Takfiri/Khomeinist terrorist groups is an intelligence and special operations-intensive war. Getting this aspect of interagency organization right, and making full use of special authorities to wage the indirect and clandestine fight, is essential. This will entail not only integrating CIA capabilities with those of both “black” and “white” SOF, but regularly leveraging the CIA’s Title 50 foreign-intelligence authority for SOF operations through the flexible detailing of SOF personnel to the Agency. This could begin with the SMUs, which currently enjoy the closest relationship with the Agency, and be extended to Special Forces and SEALs. In addition to the operational advantages of such detailing, SOF would also benefit professionally from being exposed to the tradecraft of National Clandestine Service personnel. Conversely, selected CIA case officers should routinely participate in various SOF training programs to make them more “ruggedized” and proficient in using the latest SOF equipment. Finally, SOF and CIA personnel should not only be able to move back and forth from assignments in CIA stations and SOF ground units, but also to compete for selected mid-to-senior level leadership positions in either organization.

High-Priority Investments for SOCOM's Subordinate Commands

Although the 2006 QDR launched several important initiatives to better prepare SOF for the future security environment, it fell short in a number of areas. Looking across SOCOM's subordinate commands, the most critical shortfalls are within USASOC and AFSOC.

USASOC

It is imperative for the Army, and DoD more broadly, to make the ongoing expansion of active SF battalions a top priority over the next several years. To maximize the operational and strategic impact of this expansion, the orientation of the current five active Special Forces Group (SFG) headquarters should be changed to focus finite resources where they are most needed: the Muslim world and Asia. To close the wide and growing gap between the lift required to support SOF ground forces adequately and available capacity, expansion of the 160th SOAR must also be a top priority. Finally, given the importance of the “war of ideas” in the struggle against violent Islamic extremism, it would be prudent to invest in additional active-duty Civil Affairs and PSYOPS personnel.

Achieve 2006 QDR-Directed Active SF Battalion Growth

The number of active SF battalions is slated to increase by five, growing from fifteen in 2006 to twenty by 2013. The demand for SF battalions for the full array of missions associated with the ongoing war against Islamist terrorist groups, especially building partner capacity and conducting unconventional warfare, is almost certain to remain high and could increase significantly. Moreover, SF units also need to be prepared to conduct potentially large-scale unconventional warfare, information operations (such as network exploitation and denial), special reconnaissance, and direct-action operations against nuclear-armed states equipped with anti-access capabilities (e.g., China or Iran). The opportunity cost of concentrating roughly 80 percent of available SF capacity in Iraq and Afghanistan is that too few forces are available for critical operations in other parts of the world. The personnel tempo, or the amount of time the average operator spends away from home station, of SF is unprecedented; most units are deployed at least seven months out of every year. While these personnel tempo rates have not yet caused serious retention problems, they are not likely to be sustainable. The only way out of this conundrum is either to reduce the SF commitment to Iraq and Afghanistan dramatically or increase SF end-strength. Under current plans, one battalion will be added to each of the five active SFGs. To date, two new battalions have been created. By most accounts, however, standing up the three remaining battalions by 2013 without sacrificing quality will be challenging owing to the limited size of the recruitment pool, the still-high proportion of “wash-outs” from the assessment and training process, and anticipated difficulties in maintaining adequate retention because of growing competition from the private sector and family pressures stemming from high deployment rates.¹⁰ Meeting the 2013 objective, therefore, will require continued SOCOM attention on what it terms the

¹⁰ GAO, *Special Operations Forces—Several Human Capital Challenges Must Be Addressed to Meet Expanded Role* (Washington, DC: GAO, 2006); and Sean Naylor, “The Special Ops Stretch,” *Armed Forces Journal*, October 2006.

three “pillars” for growing the force: retention incentives, expansion of the training base, and improved recruiting.

Change the Regional Orientation of the Special Forces Groups

The respective geographic orientation of the current five active SFG headquarters is poorly aligned with emerging strategic challenges. Responsibility for Africa, a key region in the war against violent Islamic radicalism, is divided among the 3rd, 5th, and 10th SFGs. The 5th SFG not only has responsibility for the Middle East and Persian Gulf, but also Central Asia and the Horn of Africa. One option to better align force structure geographically would be to stand up two additional SFG headquarters, each comprising two to four active SF battalions (see Table 1 below), depending on the requirements of the region. Each SFG headquarters could provide the basis for a joint special operations task force (JSOTF). There is no reason, however, to allocate each SFG headquarters equivalent force structure; indeed to do so would be highly inefficient. The primary advantage of this approach is that, with seven active SFGs, it would be possible to assign one SFG to each of seven critical areas in the world: Central and South America, Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Horn of Africa, Iran and Central/South Asia, Southeast Asia, and China/Northeast Asia. This re-orientation would focus additional SF capacity where it is most needed: the Muslim World and Asia. It would also have the ancillary benefit of being more consistent with the regional organization of the CIA and State Department. The downside of this approach is that it would require a large number of headquarters slots to be filled, potentially draining manpower from combat units. As an alternative, one could retain the current five SFGs and use two SEAL Naval Special Warfare Groups (NSWGs) as the headquarters for two of seven JSOTFs. Given the prominence of the maritime environment in Southeast Asia, for example, it might make sense to assign responsibility for the region to a NSWG and staff it to serve as a JSOTF headquarters.

Table 1 – Re-orientation of Projected SF Force Structure

SFG Headquarters	Active Battalions	Primary Operational Focus
Central and South America	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counternarcotics and COIN operations in Colombia, the Andean Ridge, and the Tri-Border Region • UW (Cuba and possibly Venezuela)
Europe	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COIN/CT/FID (Balkans, Turkey, the Trans-Caucasus, and Azerbaijan) • CP (Russia)
Sub-Saharan Africa & Horn of Africa	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COIN/CT/FID/Transnational UW (West African littoral, Central Africa and the Pan Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and East African littoral and South Africa)
North Africa and Middle East	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COIN/CT/FID/Transnational UW (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Oman, and Yemen) • UW (Syria) • CP/Counter-WMD (Syria)
Iran & Central/South Asia	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COIN/CT/FID/Transnational UW (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India) • UW (Iran) • CP/Counter WMD (Iran, Pakistan)
China & Northeast Asia	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UW (China) • MCO (China, North Korea) • CP/Counter-WMD (China, North Korea)
Southeast Asia	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COIN/CT/FID/Transnational UW (Bangladesh, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Indonesia)
TOTAL	20	

Improve SF Proficiency in Relevant Foreign Languages

Currently, foreign-language proficiency within SF is skewed toward the Romance languages, Slavic languages, and German. While this mix is slowly changing, the overhang of the Cold War remains. Given the current and emerging strategic challenges facing the United States, more language proficiency will be needed in Chinese dialects (as well as in the languages of neighboring states such as Kazakhstan and Mongolia), as well as in languages spoken in critical “front line” areas in the war against Salafi-Takfiri/Khomeinist terrorists, most notably Arabic, Pashto, Farsi, Dari, Punjabi, Balochi, Bahasa, and Filipino. There are at least two options for expanding SF proficiency in relevant foreign languages that should be considered:

- Expand the number of slots at the Defense Language Institute and provide significant financial bonuses to SF who successfully complete a new course of instruction; and
- Increase targeted recruitment of native speakersthrough the 18-X program or other mechanisms.

Create a Second Ranger Regiment

With respect to the war against violent Islamist radicalism, U.S. Army Rangers could provide a rapid-response capability for medium- to large-scale, counter-insurgency contingencies or other situations that cannot be handled by forward-deployed/forward-stationed ODA, SEAL Teams, or Marine Special Operations Advisor Group/Marine Special Operations Battalion units in conjunction with host-nation forces. With significant direct-action capabilities, Rangers could provide a quick infusion of combat power until conventional ground forces arrive. As in Iraq and Afghanistan today, Rangers will also frequently be called upon to provide security for SMU operations. To support these operations, it might make sense to forward-station some Ranger elements (all are currently based in the continental United States). Among many other operational benefits, standing up a second Ranger regiment would provide additional high-end, site-seizure capacity, which could be important in “loose nuke” or other counter-WMD scenarios. If it were necessary, for example, to secure WMD-related material by force in a hostile location, JSOC’s SMUs would secure and remove the material itself, while Rangers would be critical for seizing an airfield for infiltration and exfiltration, securing the site, and maintaining perimeter security. By far the most important reason for expanding Ranger force structure, however, is the fact that it serves as a critical feeder organization for SF ODAs and SMUs. As the Downing Commission explained to Congress:

Rangers become the prime source of candidates after 3 years or 4 years in the Rangers to go in to regular Army special forces and into the Delta force. And so what it does is it gives you a better pool to draw from, or it gives you a larger pool, so that you could build those forces... The Delta force is probably 70 percent Rangers who have come out of either a Ranger special forces track or directly from a Ranger regiment to Delta.¹¹

To expand Army SF and JSOC, as directed by the 2006 QDR, it will be necessary to have a much larger recruitment base. Accordingly, DoD should consider gradually standing up an additional Ranger regiment. The 2006 QDR, which directed that a Ranger company be added to each of the three battalions of the 75th Ranger Regiment, in effect, created the force structure needed for one of the three battalions in a new regiment. In fact, USASOC is already considering reforming these newly created companies into a fourth battalion. The remaining two battalions and regimental headquarters might be formed by converting elements of an existing airborne brigade. The risk in creating an additional Ranger regiment, however, is that it would siphon off some of the most skilled and capable soldiers from the conventional Army, which is already struggling to maintain performance standards, especially within its non-commissioned officer corps. Increasing

¹¹ Downing, Testimony to House Armed Services Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats, and Capabilities, June 29, 2006, p. 22.

active-duty Army infantry, Ranger, and SF force structure *simultaneously* without sacrificing quality will likely prove a daunting challenge.

Increase SOF Rotary-Wing Capacity

The 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) operates AH/MH-6 Little Bird light helicopters, MH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, and MH-47E/G Chinook heavy assault helicopters. The Little Birds provide tactical assault capabilities for SMUs and Rangers; the MH-60s provide assault capabilities, as well as infiltration and exfiltration capabilities for SOF ground forces; and the MH-47s provide longer-range infiltration and exfiltration capabilities and high-altitude capabilities. These aircraft not only support JSOC, Army SF and Rangers, but also SEAL Teams and MARSOC units. The high operations tempo of SOF ground units in Iraq and Afghanistan has already overwhelmed the 160th SOAR's lift capacity. Over the past several years, conventional Army aviation units have routinely provided lift support for about two thirds of SOF ground units. In Afghanistan, nearly fifty percent of the lift requests to support Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan operations have been unmet in recent years, owing primarily to competing demand from JSOC's SMUs and conventional ground forces. Given the ongoing expansion of Army SF and SEAL force structure by one third, as well as the standing up of the Marine Special Operations Advisor Group and two Marine Special Operations Battalions under MARSOC, the demand for rotary-wing aviation is certain to expand. Simply put, more SOCOM-controlled helicopters will be needed to move and support these additional ground forces whether they are engaged in combat operations, building partner capacity, or training at their home stations. Supporting the new Global SOF Posture, which calls for one-quarter of the force to be deployed overseas on a steady-state basis, could further stretch already over-taxed 160th SOAR force structure.¹² It should be noted, moreover, that SOCOM's heavy reliance upon conventional Army aviation units in Iraq and Afghanistan was only possible because SOF were co-located with Army general purpose forces. That situation may be more the exception than the rule in future campaigns.

Ideally, there would be sufficient SOF-specific rotary wing capacity to support all SOF ground units. However, achieving that objective would require a tripling of current capacity and such an expansion is probably out of reach—due mainly to the time required to recruit and train SOAR flight crews. To reduce reliance on conventional rotary-wing units and accommodate the expanding number of SOF ground units, the 2009 QDR should direct the creation of at least two additional special operations helicopter battalions over the next five years. Given the altitude challenges and typical lift requirements for operations in Afghanistan, the top priority should be standing up a new MH-47 Chinook battalion. Depending on the extent to which the conventional Army is willing and able to provide aviation support to SOF ground forces, it may be necessary to

¹² Under the GSP concept, previously forward-stationed forces will be pulled back to CONUS. Army, Navy, Marine, and Air Force SOF will be formed into regionally tailored JSOGs that will rotate to their respective regional combatant command AORs on a 4:1 rotation. Each JSOG will have four elements: one deployed, one training jointly in pre-deployment, one in unit training, and one in reconstitution, having just returned home from deployment. While deployed, these units will conduct “presence with a purpose” missions such as partner capacity building and combined training exercises.

stand up an additional two battalions beyond 2014. To expand the 160th SOAR's capacity, it will be necessary to redouble ongoing efforts to recruit, assess, and train high-quality personnel to fly this specialized fleet of helicopters. More specifically, additional funding will be needed to increase the number of instructors and expand the limited training infrastructure currently available to the Special Operations Aviation Training Company (SOATC) in Fort Campbell, Kentucky. It will, of course, also be imperative to retain experienced SOAR pilots through aggressive use of retention incentives.

Recognizing that the 160th SOAR has had trouble meeting annual goals for graduating new MH-47 and MH-60 helicopter pilots, DoD should examine options for having the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps contribute to the special operations rotary-wing lift requirement. The Marine Corps, for example, operates a sizable fleet of CH-53 Super Stallions, some of which might be modified to support MARSOC. Similarly, the Navy operates a large fleet of SH-60 Seahawks and MH-53s, both of which could be easily modified to support SEAL and Special Boat Teams.

Expand Active-Duty Civil Affairs and PSYOPS Force Structure

The senior leadership of al Qaeda is keenly aware of the strategic importance of the “media war” in achieving strategic goals. In a letter to Mullah Mohammed Omar, for example, Osama bin Laden observed that propaganda is one of the jihadist's most powerful weapons. “It is obvious,” he says, “that the media war in this century is one of the strongest methods; in fact, its ratio may reach 90% of the total preparation for the battles.” In 2005, Ayman al-Zawahiri asserted that “we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media” and that the Salafi-Takfiri movement is “in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma.”¹³

SOCOM's Civil Affairs and PSYOPS units are on the front line of this battlefield. By providing social services and conducting other programs that build trust between U.S. Government and local populations, Civil Affairs units are critical not only for winning over the “hearts and minds” of Muslim populations, but also for building popular support for partner governments and U.S. policies around the world. These efforts help improve the internal security situation in partner states and shrink under-governed areas that could be exploited by terrorist or insurgent groups. PSYOPS are critical for creating and exploiting divisions within and among terrorist groups, discrediting Salafi-Takfiri and Khomeinist ideology and promoting credible, alternative Islamic voices, and isolating extremists from mainline, conservative Muslims.¹⁴ In what is likely to increasingly be an indirect war against Salafi-Takfiri/Khomeinist terrorist groups, Civil Affairs and PSYOPS will be essential for maintaining host-nation support for effective, long-term counterterrorism and counterinsurgency campaigns.

¹³ Osama bin Laden, Letter to Mullah Mohammed Omar, undated. Harmony database, AFGP-2002-600321, p. 2; and Letter from al-Zawahiri to Zarqawi, July 9, 2005. Available on-line at: http://www.dni.gov/letter_in_english.pdf.

¹⁴ For an expanded discussion of this topic, see: Martinage, *The Global War on Terrorism—An Assessment*, pp. 259-275.

Civil Affairs and PSYOPS units should routinely accompany SOF ground units involved in partner capacity building missions and, to a lesser extent, sustained manhunting operations in countries around the world. While they could augment SF cultural expertise, they would be especially useful for providing Rangers, SEALs, and selected MARSOC units with the cultural and linguistic expertise they lack. Although the 2006 QDR directed a major expansion in active-duty Civil Affairs and PSYOPS capacity, additional growth is necessary. The 95th Civil Affairs Brigade is slated to reach 900 personnel by 2011, but that figure includes a significant amount of administrative overhead, support staff, and planners. Only about 320 personnel will be assigned to on-the-ground Civil Affairs teams (80 troops per battalion). That number could easily be absorbed just in Iraq or Afghanistan. The projected capacity shortfall with respect to PSYOPS is similar in scale. To conduct global Civil Affairs operations in support of the war against violent Islamist radicalism, as well as counter-insurgency efforts more broadly, the 2009 QDR should direct a major expansion in active-duty Civil Affairs and PSYOPS capacity. A reasonable goal would be to field an additional Civil Affairs Brigade and PSYOPS Group for the CENTCOM, AFRICOM, and PACOM AORs—for a total of four Civil Affairs Brigades and four PSYOPS Groups.

NAVSPECWARCOM

In what is likely to be a protracted fight against Salafi-Takfiri and Khomeinist terrorist groups, SEAL Teams will be increasingly relied upon for widely distributed manhunting and other counterterrorism operations, as foreshadowed by current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. WARCOM, which has had difficulty recruiting enough qualified enlisted personnel to fill available slots in the SEAL training program for the past several years, will need to redouble its efforts to meet the 2006 QDR's direction to field two additional SEAL team equivalents by 2013. Beyond that, WARCOM's highest priority should be expanding undersea infiltration/exfiltration capacity.

Enhance the Foreign Internal Defense Capabilities of SEAL Teams and Special Boat Teams

WARCOM should take step to enhance the foreign internal defense capability of SEAL Teams, as well as Special Boat Teams, by more vigorously cultivating relevant language proficiency and cultural expertise. By training and advising their foreign counterparts, SEAL Team and Special Boat Team operators could make a larger contribution to the broader capacity-building mission.

Expand Special Boat Team and SEAL Delivery Vehicle Capacity

DoD should seriously consider significantly expanding Special Boat Team capacity to help provide persistent reconnaissance and interdiction coverage over littoral and riverine areas that are already or could be exploited by terrorists. Special Boat Teams could provide a very low-signature option for conducting coastal/riverine patrols in high-threat areas and interdicting suspicious ships. This counterterrorism presence could be leveraged for counternarcotics and counter-piracy operations, as well as to interdict the movement of nuclear or other sensitive WMD-related materials by sea if given the requisite intelligence cueing. Special Boat Teams could also train and advise foreign

maritime security forces. They might, for example, concentrate their effort on “training the trainers,” cultivating a cadre of well-trained partner-nation personnel with the skills needed to run their own maritime security training courses.

With respect to the potential military threat posed by China, SEAL Teams and SEAL Delivery Vehicle Teams could conduct myriad special reconnaissance, information operations, and direct-action missions in littoral areas. Clandestinely inserted by SEAL Delivery Vehicles or Joint Multi-Mission Submersibles, SEALs (or other U.S. Government personnel) could tap into or disrupt fiber-optic lines and sensors on the seafloor, plant beacons or limpet mines on high-value warships prior to the onset of hostilities, conduct underwater demolition operations against critical ports (including submarine pens that have been carved into the sides of mountains to reduce their vulnerability to air and missile attack) and supporting infrastructure, and conduct on- and off-shore intelligence collection, including locating time-sensitive, high-value targets such as anti-ship cruise missile launchers, air defense radars, and surface-to-air missile launchers hidden in China’s cluttered littoral landscape.

Given China’s maturing anti-access capabilities and the potential scale of this mission, WARCOT’s inventory of ten MK VIII SEAL Delivery Vehicles and one semi-operational Advanced SEAL Delivery System is almost certainly inadequate. The 2009 QDR should examine options for expanding WARCOT’s clandestine undersea mobility capacity. In addition to procuring additional MK VIII SEAL Delivery Vehicles (or a follow-on pressurized system) serious consideration should be given to developing and fielding the Joint Multi-Mission Submersible (JMMS). Unlike flooded SEAL Delivery Vehicles in which combat swimmers are exposed to water during transit, which can often be physically and mentally fatiguing, a pressurized JMMS mini-submarine would allow them to remain warm and dry, enhancing their tactical readiness. This factor, along with the increased submerged endurance of the JMMS relative to the flooded MK VIII SEAL Delivery Vehicles, would make it possible to insert SEALs from a host submarine from a much greater stand-off distance. Additional hulls will be needed to meet requirements for clandestine maritime infiltration and exfiltration. While more analysis is needed, it certainly would seem reasonable to equip WARCOT’s two SDV Teams with three vehicles each.

JSOC

DoD capacity for high-end counterterrorism, counter-proliferation, and direct-action operations in politically sensitive or denied areas is currently limited to JSOC’s SMUs. While there are limits on how quickly and how extensively JSOC capacity can be increased, the 2009 QDR should explicitly consider options for doing so.

During the course of the war against violent Salafi-Takfiri and Khomeinist terrorists, while the Army and Navy SMUs are likely to find themselves involved in continual intelligence-intensive, distributed, proactive counterterrorism operations (primarily global manhunting), they will still have to maintain operational readiness for *reactive* counterterrorism operations (e.g., responding to hostage-rescue situations). JSOC

will be hard-pressed to maintain a robust manhunting presence in both Iraq and Afghanistan without sacrificing readiness for reactive counterterrorism missions globally.

The capacity of both SMUs to conduct distributed counterterrorism operations will likely need to be increased over the coming decade. At a minimum, this will likely mean increasing human intelligence capacity (i.e., creating a human intelligence squadron within each SMU) and either creating additional operational squadrons or increasing the number of “shooters” within existing squadrons. The potential global diffusion of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction over the coming decades could dramatically increase demand for JSOC’s highly specialized “render safe” capability. Given the time it takes to train operators to locate, characterize, and disarm nuclear weapons or, more likely, improvised nuclear devices, it might be prudent to anticipate this potential demand and begin investing in additional capacity in this area now.

AFSOC

One of the critical shortfalls of the 2006 QDR is that it did not include an expansion in AFSOC’s fleet to accommodate the roughly one-third expansion in SOF ground forces. The small aging fleet cannot meet anticipated future demand without significant expansion. Most urgently, AFSOC must recapitalize its aging fleet of C-130 derivative aircraft, all of which are well beyond their planned service life. Unscheduled maintenance rates have ballooned and a significant portion of the fleet will likely be grounded in the next few years for safety reasons. This does not mean, however, that AFSOC should necessarily replace its fleet with variants of newer models of the C-130. Rather, as AFSOC has already started to investigate, it should also modify a range of smaller, more versatile aircraft such as the C-27 Spartan and even single- or dual-engine “civilian” aircraft to satisfy immediate to mid-term needs. DoD must also invest in a stealthy SOF transport to both conduct clandestine operations as part of the war against violent Islamist extremism and prepare for possible special operations against a future, more openly confrontational China armed with modern integrated air defenses. Currently, the vast majority of UCAS operated by AFSOC (and the Air Force more broadly) are concentrated in Iraq and Afghanistan. There is a clear need for additional UCAS capacity to provide persistent airborne surveillance-strike coverage over key terrorist operating areas. The need to train and advise foreign security forces in the use of air power warrants a major expansion of the 6th Special Operations Squadron. Finally, additional Special Tactics capacity is required to support proactive, sustained “manhunting” and disruption operations (both unilaterally and with U.S. partners), conduct overt unconventional warfare against state sponsors of terrorism and transnational terrorist groups globally, and prepare for potential high-end direct action missions against authoritarian capitalist states such as China or Russia, and nascent nuclear-armed states such as Iran.

All five of these investment areas should be high priorities. Realizing them, however, will pose different challenges. Recapitalizing and expanding the fixed-wing fleet, developing a stealthy transport, and expanding the UCAS fleet will require a sustained financial commitment by the Air Force and SOCOM. The primary obstacle to

expanding the 6th Special Operations Squadron and Special Tactics Group capacity is recruiting, training, and retaining highly skilled personnel.

Recapitalize and Expand AFSOC's Legacy Fixed-Wing Fleet

AFSOC's motley fleet of C-130 variants started showing its age about a decade ago. The MC-130P Combat Shadow and MC-130E Combat Talon I aircraft, for example, have an average age of over 40 years and the AC-130H gunship fleet is not far behind with an average age of 37 years. According to AFSOC commander Lieutenant General Donald Wurster, the surge in flight hours since 2001 has caused the amount of unscheduled maintenance time for this aging fleet to skyrocket by nearly 60 percent.¹⁵ As one AC-130 maintenance officer recently remarked, "we're flying the wings off them literally...These airframes are getting so old that we've got stuff breaking on them that has never broken before."¹⁶ The fact that the fleet comprises a small number of many different kinds of aircraft—all with unique parts—exacerbates this already daunting support challenge, which is made even more difficult (and costly) by the "vanishing vender" problem—several subcomponents are simply no longer available and cannot be easily replaced with newer models. As a stopgap measure, AFSOC is acquiring 12 MC-130W Combat Spear transport/refuelers, which are modified, refurbished variants of the conventional C-130H. AFSOC has expressed an interest in procuring an additional five MC-130Ws—for a total buy of 17.

To support the projected 2006 QDR growth in SOF ground combat units—five SF battalions, two SEAL Team equivalents, a Marine Special Operations Advisor Group, and two Marine Special Operations Battalions—AFSOC will need to increase its transport and gunship capacity significantly. This is especially true if a significant portion of the force is going to remain dedicated to steady-state global manhunting/disruption operations and partner-capacity building missions. The persistent forward presence needed to win the war against violent Islamic extremism will require not only routine ferrying of operators to and from their far-flung deployment areas and their home bases, but also intra-theater transport and resupply in geographically expansive areas of operations, as well as fire support for unilateral and combined combat operations in widely distributed locations. All of these tasks will put significant strain on the already-taxed AFSOC fixed-wing fleet.

SOCOM currently plans to modify 37 aircraft that the Air Force Combat Command is procuring to replace the HC-130 combat search and rescue aircraft, which will be sufficient to replace AFSOC's Combat Talon Is and Combat Shadows on a one-for-one basis. While this is a good step forward in terms of recapitalization, it will not significantly increase current capacity. According to General Wurster, AFSOC actually requires at least 61 of these new aircraft.¹⁷ That number is likely to grow higher. As

¹⁵Lieutenant General Donald Wurster, "AFSOC Update," speech/briefing at National Defense Industrial Association, 19th Annual SOLIC Symposium, February 13, 2008.

¹⁶ Comment by Captain James May as quoted in "Gunships Under Stress," *Air Force Magazine Daily Report eNewsletter*, March 14, 2008.

¹⁷ Major General Donald Wurster, then AFSOC Vice Commander, AFSOC—Challenges for the Long War," Speech at National Defense Industry Association SO/LIC Symposium and Exhibition, February 27,

AFSOC's director of plans and programs, Colonel Billy Montgomery, explained in 2007, "the 61 number...that was our requirement we believed a year ago. Since that time we've had another theater stand up with its mobility requirement."¹⁸

While drawing down the number of older aircraft and replacing them with some 60 or more newer C-130 variants is attractive from a maintenance perspective, serious consideration should be given to procuring a smaller number of modified C-130s and investing instead in significantly more variants of the more affordable C-27J Spartan transport (or similar aircraft), as well as single and dual-engine "civilian" aircraft. While the C-27 has less payload capacity than the C-130, it has nearly the same range and can go places that the C-130 cannot such as narrow, unimproved airstrips. More importantly, with a payload of 12,000 lbs or about 24 fully-loaded operators, modified C-27s could provide a more efficient means of shuttling individual ODAs, SEAL Teams, and other units back and forth to distant lands and routinely flying in required supplies. When it comes to small-unit transportation and logistics in places with limited infrastructure, bigger is not necessarily better. Equipped with a sensor suite, the C-27 could also serve as airborne surveillance platform; armed with a small cannon, it could serve as a small gunship, taking operational pressure off the AC-130 fleet.

Taking the small-aircraft logic a step further, it would make sense for AFSOC to expand its current fleet of small "civilian" aircraft. The 319th Special Operations Squadron is already flying modified, single-engine Pilatus Porter PC-12s in Iraq and Afghanistan, reportedly with fantastic results. With a payload capacity of nearly 3,000 lbs and the ability to land on short dirt/grass strips, it has proven to be an excellent means of intra-theater lift and support for SOF. In addition, these aircraft have an inherently low profile; as common civilian aircraft, they are much less conspicuous than hulking C-130s. While not covert, they can hide in plain sight. Accordingly, many countries might be more amenable to granting SOF access, especially those for which a blatantly overt U.S. military presence might be problematic politically. Moreover, at a unit cost of about \$4 million per aircraft, it would be possible to procure roughly 10 of them for the same price as a single C-130H/J variant.¹⁹ Given the anticipated scale of the transnational terrorist challenge, building to a fleet of 90 U-28A-class aircraft (e.g., Spanish CASA C-212, Cessna 17 or Piper Arrow) over the next several years would seem reasonable.

Aside from the opportunity cost of not investing in additional C-27J and U-28A-like aircraft as proposed above, the other drawback to a large buy of specialized C-130 variants is that it could easily crowd out investment in a follow-on family of stealthy SOF aircraft, which is urgently needed. Additional study is required to determine the most appropriate balance between recapitalization/expansion of current SOF support aircraft and development of future platforms, but a reasonable force-planning target might be:

2007; and Andrew Feickert, "U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF): Background and Issues for Congress," CRS Report RS21048, January 28, 2008, p. 3.

¹⁸ Amy Butler, "Growing Pains," *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, July 23, 2007, pp. 52-52.

¹⁹ AFSOC, U28A Fact Sheet, accessed on-line at: <http://www2.afsoc.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=226>.

- 12-17 MC-130W Combat Spear transport/refuelers, as planned;
- 42 variants of the HC-130 replacement (increase of five aircraft over baseline capacity);
- 20-30 modified versions of the C-27J Spartan, to include at least 10 mini-gunships; and
- 90 single- and dual-engine aircraft in the U-28A class.

As these aircraft are being fielded over the next decade, the mix could be adjusted to reflect actual operational requirements and employment experience.

Invest in a Stealthy SOF Transport

As modern integrated air defense systems diffuse over the next two decades, it will become increasingly difficult to conduct clandestine operations or to penetrate into denied areas with an acceptable level of risk using today's fleet of some three dozen MC-130E/H/W Combat Talon/Spear transports. The Air Force should begin immediate development of special operations aircraft that exploit stealth. Consistent with this recommendation, the 2006 QDR directed the Department to "enhance capabilities to support SOF insertion and extraction into *denied areas* from strategic distances."²⁰ Unsurprisingly, various "mission needs" documents for this type of aircraft have been circulating within AFSOC and SOCOM for fifteen years.²¹

The effectiveness of all of the tactics, techniques, and procedures that MC-130 aircraft rely upon today to avoid detection will wane significantly over the coming decades. Pre-mission flight planning to exploit terrain-masking opportunities and "thread the needle" through ever smaller coverage gaps in multi-static air defense networks will become increasingly difficult, especially against networks comprising mobile air-defense radars and passive sensors; low-level, nighttime flight will afford progressively less protection as sensor "floors" drop and long-range IR sensors are fielded in greater numbers; and the effectiveness of electronic countermeasures and "last ditch" self-protection systems (e.g., chaff, flares, and DIRCM-like systems) will erode substantially with the spread of more capable "end-game" sensors and onboard signal-processing systems for interceptor missiles. Aside from these limitations, it is also worth noting that traditional penetration tactics, techniques, and procedures are not universally applicable: there are many areas of the world where there are no terrain features or clutter in which to mask or hide an aircraft with signatures as large as the MC-130's. In short, the air defense threats that are expected to emerge over the next two decades will effectively preclude the current fleet of Combat Talons/Spears, even with all of the planned upgrades in electronic counter measures and self-protection systems, from clandestinely infiltrating, resupplying, and exfiltrating SOF in many areas of the world.

²⁰ Emphasis added. *2006 QDR Report*, p. 45.

²¹ Major General Richard Comer, "Strategic Directions for Special Operations' Fixed-Wing Capabilities," in Clark Murdock et al, *Special Operations Forces Aviation at the Crossroads* (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2007), p. 18.

To address this widening capability gap, the Air Force should begin immediate development of a stealthy SOF transport and strive to reach an IOC by 2020. While more analysis is needed to discern the optimal blend of performance characteristics for the M-X, the following would probably be reasonable goals: an operational range of over 4,500 nm, a payload of between 15,000 and 20,000 pounds, a speed in the high sub-sonic range, and service ceiling of at least 40,000 feet, preferably higher. Using low-observable design techniques and materials that are already in hand or under development as part of the Next Generation Bomber (NGB) program, it would be possible to reduce the RCS—as well as infrared, acoustic, and visual signatures—of the M-X well below that of the B-2. With that level of stealth, the M-X would, of course, be far more difficult to detect than the MC-130. What may be less obvious, however, is the synergistic relationship between stealth and traditional evasion tactics.

From a programmatic standpoint, the most daunting challenge in developing and fielding a stealthy SOF transport is the way SOCOM's MFP-11 process typically works. MFP-11 funding is used for research, development, testing, evaluation and acquisition costs associated with SOF-unique equipment and upgrades. In the case of fixed-wing aircraft, this almost always means that the Air Force pays for the development and procurement of the basic airframe and SOCOM pays for the SOF-unique modifications. As a practical matter, however, this means that AFSOC is locked into modifying whatever aircraft are already in service with the Air Force, such as the C-130. While in theory MFP-11 funds could be used to develop and acquire a stealthy transport from the ground up, because it is arguably "SOF unique," such an undertaking would not only overwhelm SOCOM's total budget, it would also be beyond the professional competence of SOCOM to manage such a complex, large-scale acquisition program. If AFSOC is going to acquire a stealthy transport, two high hurdles will have to be overcome: convincing the Air Force to fund the acquisition cost of the basic airframe (assuming a suitable one exists); and persuading SOCOM to allocate a major portion of its MFP-11 funding to the modification of that airframe.

The only hope at present for vaulting over those hurdles is the Air Force's NGB, which is slated to have an IOC in 2018 and could probably meet all the core performance parameters specified above for a stealthy SOF transport. While there would undoubtedly be some challenges involved (such as physically modifying the bomb bay (including pressurization and heating), reconfiguring the engines to support an altitude-flight speed envelope that is consistent with special operations freefall, and possibly changing the platform slightly to accommodate special operators and their equipment), it is technically feasible and within the realm of MFP-11 resourcing. The key to unlocking this future capability for AFSOC is for DoD to allocate additional funds to the Air Force for the procurement of more NGB airframes, which are likely to cost in the neighborhood of \$500 million per unit, and for SOCOM to fund what would be SOF-unique modifications of considerable magnitude. For the Air Force, this would be a win-win situation because the additional aircraft for AFSOC would lower the unit procurement cost for the entire program.

Although the top priority is for a stealthy SOF transport, a more survivable SOF refueler and gunship would also be desirable. The latter, for instance, could be armed with a retractable 120-mm mortar with laser-homing rounds, very small PGMs, or eventually, a solid-state, high-energy laser. It is sometimes argued that investing in stealth for a gunship is ill-advised because it has to operate at relatively low altitude to provide close-air support, making it vulnerable to visual and infrared detection. While the gunship would indeed be vulnerable for those reasons, it still would have to penetrate into denied airspace and survive against modern IADS during the ingress to and egress from the target area. Put another way, while some of the benefits of advanced stealth would certainly be diminished for the relatively short period of time while the gunship was actually engaged in fire support, stealth could be essential for getting to and from the area of operations.

While the development and fielding of a stealthy M-X will be expensive, the strategic benefits would be immense. A stealthy M-X would be invaluable for conducting time-sensitive counterterrorism, counterproliferation, unconventional warfare, and other clandestine operations against Salafi-Takfiri/Khomeinist terrorist groups in denied or politically sensitive areas of the world. Moreover, it would be very useful for conducting unconventional warfare, information operations, special reconnaissance, and direct action against future adversaries armed with advanced “anti-access” capabilities and possessing significant strategic depth (e.g., a more openly hostile China or Iran). A stealthy MX would, for example, provide the *only* practical option for inserting SOF to conduct special reconnaissance and direct action missions in the interior of China where known offensive space control sites, ballistic missile garrisons and hide sites, and other high-value targets are located.

Create Additional UCAS Squadrons

AFSOC clearly needs additional UCAS capacity to provide persistent airborne reconnaissance and strike coverage to support what is likely to be a global, protracted war against transnational terrorist groups. These aircraft could be used to monitor under-governed land areas, as well as littoral zones; to locate, track, and strike time-sensitive, high-value targets; and to enable U.S. and partner operations. Currently, SOCOM (mainly JSOC) reportedly requires approximately 30 UCAS combat air patrols for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.²² AFSOC’s 3rd Special Operations “Dragons” Squadron currently operates a fleet of 28 MQ-1 Predators. With a fleet of this size, it can sustain six combat air patrols. Plans are in place to expand AFSOC’s UCAS capacity to 10 combat air patrols over the next several years. Even at that level, however, available capacity would still fall far short of SOCOM’s 30 combat air patrol requirement for CENTCOM. AFSOC’s programmed UCAS fleet is clearly inadequate for global persistent presence. But how many UCAS orbits are enough? That is a difficult question, especially because there has been no clearly delineated division of labor, or allocation of roles and missions, between AFSOC and the Air Force with respect to UCAS operations.

²² Michael Hoffman, “Task Force to Get More UAVs into War Zones,” *Air Force Times*, April 26, 2008.

While this is an area that certainly merits additional study in the next QDR, a reasonable, long-term force-planning goal could be for AFSOC to stand up at least ten 16-aircraft squadrons, which could each be sub-divided into four 4-aircraft flights. Ten squadrons would be adequate to provide each active SFG and two NSWGs with a dedicated squadron, as well as provide two squadrons for JSOC/Rangers and one for MARSOC. With each squadron comprising four flights, it would be possible to provide dedicated support at the battalion level, if desired. Each active SF battalion, for example, could be supported with a 4-aircraft flight, which would be sufficient for one UCAS combat air patrol. In addition, if at some point a stealthy UCAS becomes available, it would be very desirable for SOCOM to procure at least one additional squadron, primarily to support JSOC operations. This proposed growth in AFSOC's UCAS capacity would require the procurement of at least 132 additional aircraft—or 33 MQ-1 Predator systems (each with four aircraft, a ground control station, a satellite link, and other support equipment). The total procurement cost would be around \$1.5 billion, which could be spread over several years. Even that manageable cost, however, might be significantly reduced by refurbishing and modifying the approximately 100 Air Force-operated MQ-1 Predators that are scheduled to be retired between 2011 and 2015 as the MQ-9 Reaper fleet builds up.

This discussion, however, raises another important question—should AFSOC shift to the MQ-9 Reaper as well—or at least field a mixed fleet of MQ-1 Predators and MQ-9 Reapers? The MQ-9, which is not dramatically more expensive and entered full-rate production in 2008, provides a number of capability improvements over the MQ-1, especially with respect to its potential for conducting precision strikes. It can fly over 20,000 feet higher (altitude ceiling of 50,000 feet), carry an internal sensor payload that is several hundred pounds heavier, cruise nearly three times as fast, and carry a much heavier external weapons payload (3,000 pounds). In the reconnaissance-strike role, while both the MQ-1 and MQ-9 have similar mission endurance (assuming the Reaper carries a standard weapons load and no external fuel tanks), the MQ-9 has significantly longer loiter time at radius because it cruises so much faster (200 knots versus 70 knots). Its endurance, moreover, can be increased significantly by mounting a pair of 1,000-lb, external fuel tanks to its “wet” inner pylons.²³ Since the MQ-9 Reaper system provides considerably more operational flexibility than the MQ-1 Predator (i.e., higher altitude, greater payload, faster cruising speed, and longer operational reach), the 2009 QDR should give serious consideration to investing in a mixed fleet of at least ten squadrons of MQ-1 Predators and MQ-9 Reapers for AFSOC. To take advantage of these air vehicles, it will also be necessary to expand the number of trained pilots, sensor operators, and mission coordinators in AFSOC well above current levels.

Expand 6th Special Operations Squadrons into a Full Irregular Warfare Wing

Currently U.S. capacity for aviation foreign internal defense, which resides almost exclusively within the 6th Special Operations Squadron, falls far short of demand. While the 6th Special Operations Squadron is in the process of doubling its capacity from 110 to

²³ The Reaper normally carries 4,000 lb of fuel. If drag were not a factor, the additional 2,000 lb of fuel would increase range by about 50 percent. The increased drag caused by the external tanks, however, would cause the actual range increase to be significantly less.

230 authorized advisors, that expansion is likely to be insufficient. A 2006 RAND study concluded that aviation-FID capacity may need to be expanded four-fold and possibly more to meet growing demand.²⁴

To close this capacity gap, SOCOM should create an irregular warfare (IW) wing that is “properly organized, trained, and equipped to operate by, with, and through PNs [partner nations] where U.S. Airpower cannot be directly employed and to build partner nation capacity.”²⁵ The IW wing would have two core missions: providing specialized airpower necessary to support IW operations globally; and training and enabling “partner nations to develop, sustain, employ, and fully understand the role airpower plays in combating internal threats.”²⁶ The focus would be on airborne ISR, tactical and operational mobility for ground forces, combat search and rescue, medical evacuation, and light strike (e.g., air interdiction, close-air support, and battlefield air operations) in support of counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, counternarcotics, and other host-nation internal security operations. AFSOC proposed that the wing be equipped with 84 aircraft: 20 light-medium mobility aircraft; 20 light-strike aircraft; 20 rotary-wing aircraft; 20 manned, fixed wing ISR aircraft; and four heavy mobility aircraft.²⁷ It would also have an “organic capability to integrate support requirements such as aircraft maintenance, airbase defenders, communications, intelligence, survival, and other critical combat support functions.”²⁸

Aviation foreign internal defense is a mission area that should be shared between the “big Air Force” and AFSOC. Specially trained aviation advisor squadrons within each numbered Air Force could conduct joint training and partner-capacity building exercises on a routine basis with foreign air forces. Those squadrons could provide an ideal pool for recruiting individuals for AFSOC’s combat advisor training program—much as the Ranger regiment serves as a feeder for SF and JSOC. AFSOC would focus on training their foreign counterparts in special operations aviation, as well as on conducting missions in politically sensitive countries.

Increase Special Tactics Squadron Capacity

Combat Controller Teams, one of the core elements of AFSOC Special Tactics Squadrons, are in short supply. By conducting local air traffic control and coordinating precision fire support while embedded with SOF ground units, Combat Controller Teams can significantly increase overall combat effectiveness—leveraging U.S. precision air power to its full effect. As part of the war against Salafi-Takfiri/Khomeinist terrorist groups, globally distributed SOF teams conducting unilateral counterterrorism operations,

²⁴ Alan J. Vick, Adam Grissom, William Rosenau, Beth Grill, and Karl Mueller, *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era-The Strategic Importance of USAF Advisory and Assistance Missions* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2006), pp. xviii, 125, 136-143.

²⁵ Montgomery, “Air Force Special Operations Command White Paper – USAF Irregular Warfare Concept, p. 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-16.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

combined operations with partner nations, and unconventional warfare operations with irregular forces will all require Combat Controller Team support.

Currently, AFSOC has six Special Tactics Squadrons, one of which is permanently assigned to JSOC. Given the growing importance of Combat Controller Teams in linking small teams of ground operators with precision air power, sufficient capacity is required to provide steady-state support to the Special Forces Groups, Naval Special Warfare Groups One and Two, the Rangers and MARSOC. Accordingly, the 2009 QDR should seriously consider standing up at least an additional three Special Tactics Squadrons. Achieving that goal, however, will likely prove challenging. Over the past several years, AFSOC has had recruitment and training-throughput shortfalls, especially with regard to combat controllers.

MARSOC

MARSOC, which is still struggling to reach its end-strength goal of 2,600 Marines, appears to be on the right trajectory to make a valuable contribution to the war against violent Islamist extremism. Marine Special Operations Advisor Group training teams have already deployed to several states in need of assistance. While many of these deployments have been brief, others have been as long as six months. In several cases, they have conducted training activities in the same country multiple times.

MARSOC should be encouraged to shift even further toward extended deployments, in some cases over a year, in high-priority countries—and away from routine rotational activities that general purpose forces could readily handle. Given that the demand for partner capacity building is expected to grow, MARSOC should probably not divert scarce resources to the development of an unconventional warfare capability. Rather than attempt to duplicate a capability that has been nurtured over decades at considerable cost within SF, it might make sense for MARSOC to focus on the foreign internal defense mission and, to a lesser extent, upon direct action and special reconnaissance.

Summary Recommendations

U.S. Special Operations Command

- Establish a Joint Irregular Warfare Command to ensure an appropriate balance, in both strategy and resources, between direct and indirect approaches to special operations.
- Examine the possibility of elevating the rank of selected Theater Special Operations Commanders, and increasing the size of their staffs accordingly, to give the special operations community a stronger voice in the deliberations within geographic combatant commands and more influence relative to conventional components.
- Forge a closer relationship between U.S. Special Operations Command and the CIA through, for example, the flexible detailing of SOF personnel to the CIA,

enabling and encouraging more individuals to have careers with assignments in both organizations, and routinely creating Interagency Task Forces to conduct integrated operations in specific regions/countries.

U.S. Army Special Operations Command

- Meet the objective specified in the 2006 QDR of standing up 20 active Special Forces (SF) battalions by 2013.
- Reorient SF force structure geographically to better reflect requirements associated with the war against violent Islamist extremism and the shift in U.S. national security interests toward Asia.
- Enhance SF proficiency in relevant foreign languages by expanding the number of slots at the Defense Language Institute and providing significant financial bonuses to operators who successfully complete a new course of instruction and by increasing targeted recruitment of native speakers through the 18-X program or other mechanisms.
- Create an additional Ranger regiment by standing up two new Ranger battalions, returning to three-company strength for the existing battalions in the 75th Ranger Regiment, and forming a second regimental headquarters.
- Increase the number of instructors and expand the limited training infrastructure currently available to the Special Operations Aviation Training Company (SOATC) in Fort Campbell, Kentucky.
- Stand up two additional special operations aviation battalions over the next five years to close the current rotary-wing capacity gap and keep pace with the ongoing expansion of SOF ground forces.
- Direct the Navy and the Marine Corps to stand up special-operations-capable helicopter units of their own.
- Create three additional Civil Affairs Brigades and Psychological Operations Groups.

Naval Special Warfare Command

- Enhance the foreign internal defense and unconventional warfare capabilities of SEAL and Special Boat Teams by more vigorously cultivating relevant language proficiency and cultural expertise.
- Consider assigning regional responsibility for Southeast Asia to a Naval Special Warfare Group and staffing it sufficiently to serve as a Joint Special Operations Task Force headquarters.

- Expand Special Boat Team capacity to help provide persistent reconnaissance and interdiction coverage over littoral and riverine areas that are already or could be potentially exploited by terrorists.
- Develop and procure three Joint Multi-Mission Submersibles for each of Naval Special Warfare Command's two SEAL Delivery Vehicle Teams.

Joint Special Operations Command

- Expand current SMU capacity and capabilities for distributed counterterrorism and counterproliferation operations, to include additional human intelligence capability and increased capacity to “render safe” improvised nuclear devices and nuclear weapons intercepted overseas.

Air Force Special Operations Command

- Recapitalize and expand the fixed-wing fleet by procuring 12-17 MC-130W Combat Spear transport/refuelers, as planned; 42 variants of the HC-130 replacement; 20-30 modified-versions of the C-27J Spartan, to include at least ten gunships; and 90 single- and dual-engine aircraft in the U-28A class.
- Aggressively pursue the fielding of a stealthy SOF transport based upon the airframe of the Air Force-developed Next Generation Bomber.
- Create at least ten 16-aircraft UCAS squadrons to provide a dedicated squadron to each of the five active Special Forces Groups, two squadrons for Naval Special Warfare Groups One and Two, two squadrons for operational units controlled by Joint Special Operations Command, and one squadron to support MARSOC.
- Increase the number of trained UCAS pilots, sensor operators, and mission coordinators, as well as invest in enhanced capacity for processing, exploiting, and disseminating the information collected by these platforms.
- Expand the 6th Special Operations Squadron into an irregular warfare wing to begin closing the growing gap between aviation-focused foreign internal defense capacity and global demand.
- Stand up at least three additional Special Tactics Squadrons to provide steady-state support to each Special Forces Group, Naval Special Warfare Groups One and Two, the Rangers, and MARSOC.

Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command

- Marine Special Operations Advisor Group teams should shift even further toward extended partner capacity building and foreign internal defense deployments in high priority countries—and away from routine, short-duration rotational activities that general purpose forces could readily handle.

- MARSOC should not divert resources toward the development of an unconventional warfare capability, but should concentrate instead on the foreign internal defense mission and, to a lesser extent, direct action and special reconnaissance.

In comparison to the modernization programs of the conventional joint force, nearly all of the investments recommended above are modest. In total, SOCOM accounts for less than 2 percent of the national defense budget. Given that the operations and personnel tempos of all SOF units are extraordinarily high at present and are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future, one is hard pressed to identify significant divestment opportunities. Several of the initiatives recommended above—including a major expansion in rotary-wing aviation and UCAS capacity, modernization and expansion of the fixed-wing special operations aircraft fleet, and the development and fielding of a stealthy airlifter—will require significant outlays by the conventional joint force. Given the relatively small size of SOCOM’s budget and scant SOF divestment opportunities, it will be necessary to offset the cost of these investments with cuts in conventional forces, including scaling back or terminating procurement programs that are a poor fit with the challenges posed by the future security environment (e.g., the Future Combat Systems, the F-35 Lightning II multirole fighter, and the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle) and reducing force structure that has either been retained in excess of anticipated demand or is likely to wane in operational utility in the years ahead (e.g., short-range ground-attack aircraft squadrons, artillery and attack aviation force structure, and heavy brigade combat teams).

To be sure, many of the recommendations described above will need to be modified based on operational experience, as well as adapt to unanticipated changes in the future security environment. All of these topics, however, must be debated and addressed by the Obama Administration and the U.S. Congress expeditiously in order to shape, size, and posture SOF to address current and emerging challenges, as well as to exploit new opportunities.