

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE'S SUBCOMMITTEE
ON TERRORISM AND UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS AND CAPABILITIES**

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SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Miller, and distinguished Members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today and I thank you for your invitation to discuss the challenges and opportunities that will face U.S. Special Operations Forces.

I am doubly honored to appear before this committee because I know first hand how hard it strives to support our Special Operations Forces. Not long ago, as a Special Forces Lieutenant Colonel, I served as a Legislative Liaison for Special Operations Command and later for the Secretary of Defense. During that time, I personally witnessed the dedication and hard work that this subcommittee offers our nation and our forces.

The topic that you explore today is important – and it is one that is close to my heart. As a 20-year veteran of Ranger Battalions and Special Forces units, I have a love for the Special Operations Community. It is a love that animated my efforts on a yearlong study to catalogue how SOF has changed since 9/11 and where SOF should go in the future.

This past year, my research took me to Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Horn of Africa. Additionally, I visited with officers and non-commissioned officers from thirteen different military locations, ranging from San Diego, Camp Lejeune, and Fort Bragg. My findings and recommendations emanate from those visits and I look forward to sharing them with you today.

With the Chairman's approval, I would like to submit for the record a more comprehensive version of my findings and recommendations. If there is no objection, I will summarize my findings verbally before the committee. But in keeping with the policies of the Center for a New American Security, I must state that in my testimony and in answers to questions, I am not speaking on behalf of my think tank or any other entity with which I am associated, but expressly and entirely for myself.

Special Operations Forces (SOF) have spearheaded the War on Terror from the very first days of the campaign in Afghanistan to the current battlefields of Iraq, where they are engaged in a dramatically successful man-hunting operation against extremist leaders.

Some of their missions and successes are well known; others such as the quiet battle being waged against Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, less so. But one thing seems certain: the demand for SOF in the near and long term is likely to increase. As conventional forces depart Iraq and Afghanistan, SOF is projected to stay; as AFRICOM grows, so will SOF participation in Africa;

and as pressure on the Defense budget grows, policymakers will increasingly rely on SOF as an efficient and effective return on investment.

To that end, senior leaders must be aware of the issues that face SOF and of the choices that they will have to make to best position this capable force for the future.

This study has indentified some of those key issues and has derived a set of findings as a result.

SOF Must “Right-size” Growth to Support Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) 2006 Increases. The 2006 QDR dictated substantial growth in personnel and equipment for Special Operations Command (SOCOM) and its component commands. These increases, however, have not been "right-sized" to meet the current and future demands on SOF - nor are the assets and enablers to support 2006 QDR growth keeping pace with that demand. In addition, the present force structure across the board is stressed by the current deployment cycle. Men and material are beginning to feel the results of constant combat deployments. As a result, the 2010 QDR needs to focus on heavily "right-sizing" growth to support 2006 gains as well as growing SOF across the spectrum to meet emerging missions.

SOF Must Strike Balance Between the Direct and the Indirect Approaches. The relative balance between direct and indirect operations impacts budgets, authorities, and roles and missions. The direct approach is military-led and focuses on neutralizing violent extremist organizations by capturing or killing their leaders and disrupting their infrastructure. The indirect approach is the process of enabling partners to combat violent extremist organizations by eroding the underlying support for these ideologies and by fostering conditions that are inhospitable to violent extremists. Conventional wisdom holds that the special operations community has not struck an effective or appropriate balance between the direct and indirect approaches—that the majority of resources and energy are still devoted to exercises, programs, and capabilities that emphasize the direct approach. While the case for imbalance may be overstated, the need to address this issue is not.

SOF and General Purpose Forces (GPF) Must Seek a Division of Labor. As SOF responsibilities grow, policymakers and military leaders will need to determine where GPF can take on SOF roles and where SOF has a comparative advantage. In March of 2008, Admiral Olson stated that with regards to traditional SOCOM missions, "there are really very few countries in the world where you can put a brigade combat team to do a train and assist mission. In most of the countries of the world, access is gained through low profile operations, keeping it out of the newspapers, working in small unit to small unit level kinds of engagement."¹ But with the pressure to seemingly be everywhere and do everything at once, a resource-constrained SOCOM will struggle to meet demands. The Department of Defense took an important step in providing guidance by issuing the DoD Irregular Warfare Directive 3000.07. SOCOM and Joint Forces Command's recently created Joint Irregular Warfare Center must strive to strike a balance in terms of doctrine, efforts, and enablers.

¹ ADM Eric T. Olson in a speech delivered on 3 March 2008 at the Willard Hotel, Washington, DC.

SOCOM Must Evaluate SOF Roles and Missions to Address Duplication and Balance Resources. Seven years into the Global War on Terror, SOCOM tactical units are heavily engaged in direct and indirect actions around the world. The war has acted as an accelerator of sorts with all elements making dramatic leaps in combat applications and development. However, there is still some confusion as to who should be doing what. For example, the SEALs are now a trusted member of the special operations land component – with some question as to their role at sea. Should the SEALs become a land-based component, Marines might fulfill the role of maritime special operators.

The resources balance between the various sectors of special operations is also in question as the ambiguity in roles and missions persists. There is some danger that the emphasis on meeting current land-based demands could skew the long-term institutional structure of SOF.

SOF Must Conduct Acquisition at the Speed of War. SOF has traditionally been in the lead of rapidly taking equipment and putting it into the hands of its operators. At the major program level, this is still true, as SOCOM's acquisition professionals are pushing the edges of their Congressionally mandated authorities to rapidly bring new special operations air frames and submersibles into the inventory.

Unfortunately, that same speed is not being applied to the individual operator. A lack of acquisition executives with special operations experience combined with a risk-averse approach to bringing new "soldier systems" on board have dramatically slowed the procurement process. The Army's Rapid Equipping Force has bypassed SOCOM to the point that some SOCOM operators bemoan the fact that the conventional units are better equipped. SOCOM needs to reverse this trend and bring back the days of SOF primacy in the arena of combat development and acquisition.

DoD Must Ensure Enabler and Logistics Support for SOF Remaining in Iraq as Conventional Forces Withdraw. It is clear that the conventional military forces that are now in Iraq will draw down in the near future. It is likely that SOF will not be drawing down. In fact, it is conceivable that the demand for SOF will increase.

SOF, however, does not have the logistics architecture to support such prolonged deployments. Basing, messing, fuel, motor pools, medical facilities, ammunition resupply, and base security - to name a few areas of concern - reside within the conventional force. Civilian and military leaders alike will have to make value judgments as to what the conventional military leaves behind. Perhaps it is time to resurrect the forgotten "5th SOF Truth" written by Colonel (Retired) John Collins over twenty years ago: "most special operations require non-SOF assistance."²

SOCOM Must Receive More Authority to Manage and Recruit Personnel. The 2006 QDR was generous to SOCOM, adding over 13,000 people to its rolls.³ Unfortunately, this generous authorization in manpower has been challenging to fulfill due to the assessment and selection

² Colonel Collins wrote the "Five SOF Truths," which first appeared in a House Armed Services Committee print entitled *United States and Soviet Special Operations*, 28 April 1987. Congressman Earl Hutto signed the Foreword that contains Fifth Truth.

³ ADM Eric T. Olson in a speech delivered on 3 March 2008 at the Willard Hotel, Washington, DC.

criteria for special operations personnel and the arduous training involved once they are selected. Once selected, the Services retain a strong voice in the management of these special operators. SOCOM should have more of a say in how they are managed.

The issue extends to SOF-trained personnel such as intelligence analysts. Once trained by SOF, they should either be brought into a closed loop system or given a skill identifier to increase the likelihood of retaining hard learned skills in the SOF community.

Recommendations - Five Big Ideas. The findings and issues above hint at some of the recommendations that are offered below. While there are many recommendations that can be offered, five stand out:

Encourage SOCOM to Reevaluate Component Roles and Missions. In a time of decreasing budgets, the demise of the wartime supplemental, and confusion in the field as to who is to do what, it is necessary for SOCOM to reevaluate the missions it expects the component commands to execute.

Increase Interagency Participation in Special Operations. The early days of the fight in Afghanistan offers a model of interagency special operations. Army Special Forces and CIA officers used their unique talents and Congressional authorities to great effect. This relationship must continue to evolve and include other members of the interagency as well. Ideas such as permanently seconding a Special Forces unit to the CIA must be explored, as should creating Joint Interagency Operational Detachment Alphas made up of Army Special Forces and members of the interagency (like CIA, the Department of State, or Department of the Treasury). A new entity that is still breaking ground, MARSOC could be used as an “interagency special operations laboratory” to test relationships and validate tactics, techniques and procedures. Such efforts will allow for a melding of Titles 10, 22, and 50 during the conduct of operations.

Dramatically Increase SOF to Meet Future Demands. SOCOM must match the missions that they expect SOF to conduct to the forces and enablers that are required. At a time when the Defense budget is likely to be slashed and when the nation is under so much fiscal strain this will make for a hard sell. But the return on investment offered by SOF is undeniable; as is SOF's role in what will likely be a future of persistent presence, persistent engagement and shaping operations. Steps such as dramatically increasing the number of Special Operations Aviation Regiment airframes, formalizing the creation of a Special Operations Aviation Training Battalion, adding another Ranger Battalion (and manning Ranger Squads at nine Soldiers), increasing MARSOC personnel authorizations by 3-5% per year, bolstering Civil Affairs, and growing more in house enablers like Unmanned Aerial Systems and intelligence analysts are prudent choices for the Department of Defense and SOCOM to make in this financial and security environment.

Establish a Permanent Position on the Joint Chiefs of Staff for a Special Operations Flag Officer. Refitting our Services to conduct military operations in a constrained economic environment while continuing to suppress extremism will require the empowerment of SOF. All of the Services currently have elements organized under SOCOM. While SOCOM sits as a Combatant Command, it is not adequately represented at the JCS level in the Pentagon where

the uniformed Services conduct strategy planning and resourcing decisions. There have been discussions in past years of creating a completely separate Service for SOF to address this shortfall in representation. While this has some appeal as a means to address the current and future military challenges, it is not appealing in an environment of constrained resources. The Services have significant organization, support and logistic tails, which SOF would have to recreate at significant cost in terms of both resources and time. A more timely effect could be achieved by having a Four Star SOF representative sit on the JCS as an equal partner. This would provide SOF with top-level representation in the discussion of roles and responsibilities as well as resources in the current fight. The recent inclusion of the National Guard in this capacity and the longstanding inclusion of the U.S. Marine Corps provide ample precedent.

Restructure the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict and Interdependent Capabilities (ASD SO/LIC & IC) to Report Directly to the Secretary of Defense. The ASD SO/LIC & IC is currently organized under the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy. At a time when ASD SO/LIC & IC is functioning as the Secretary of Defense's primary advisor on SOF and countering extremists, this is ineffective. This advice and oversight extends across all the Services and Agencies of the Department. As such, ASD SO/LIC & IC should be elevated to a level where oversight and coordination can more effectively include all aspects of the Department.

In conclusion, the fighting of two wars, the conduct of global operations and the rapid growing of the force pose unprecedented challenges to the special operations community and USSOCOM. At this critical juncture, policy makers and defense officials will need to make budgetary and force decisions about the direction of DoD and where SOF fits into our national security architecture.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member and Members of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to come and share my thoughts with you. I hope that you found my testimony useful.

I will be happy to answer your questions.

THE FUTURE OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS.

Introduction.

Special operations are the leading edge of America's efforts against violent extremism around the world. In seven years of the War on Terror, U.S. special operators have led unconventional warfare efforts in Afghanistan and northern Iraq, supported conventional military operations in both countries, conducted foreign internal defense missions from the Philippines to the Horn of Africa, and conducted clandestine missions around the world. Policymakers have reevaluated the strategic role of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) giving it the responsibility to synchronize all military efforts in the war on terror. The human and material resources for special operations have increased substantially and will continue to grow through the FYDP. The Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) commander has been elevated to the three-star level, the first Marine Corps Special Operations Command units are operational, and end strength increases have been programmed for Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations (PSYOPs), SEAL teams, and Green Berets. By 2013, USSOCOM's topline will have increased three-fold over 2001 levels.

The fighting of two wars, the conduct of global ops and the rapid growing of the force pose unprecedented challenges to the special operations community and USSOCOM. To help inform the strategic and operational decisions ahead, the Center for a New American Security conducted a yearlong study on the future of U.S. Special Operations. This study provides an independent assessment of the tradeoffs that lay ahead. It aims to inform the decisions about special operations made by senior leaders, both military and civilian, and by Congress in the early phases of a new administration. This report emanates from this study.

This effort will help leaders to take stock of our record employment of SOF in recent years. It will offer a brief assessment of how SOF has evolved since 9/11 and it will test some of the developing "conventional wisdoms" about the future security environment and the strategic utility of special operations. Most importantly, this report aims to offer actionable recommendations about the future direction of Special Operations.

This report is based on research conducted in Washington DC, the Component Command Headquarters around the United States, the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Forces (CJSOTFs) in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the Special Operations Command and Control Element - Horn of Africa. Interviews were conducted with operators and leaders involved in every phase of the War on Terror, from the decision to dislodge the Taliban, to new, preventive efforts in Africa.

With a drawdown in Iraq on the horizon, a ramping up of U.S. efforts projected in Afghanistan, AFRICOM's effort to make headway in Africa, and a probable decrease in defense spending in the coming years, it is fair to say that change is in the wind. At this critical juncture, policy makers and defense officials are going to have to make budgetary and force decisions about the direction of DoD and where SOF fits into our national security architecture.

The premise of this report is that SOF must rapidly grow to support and right-size Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) 2006 growth; and that policy-makers must support further dramatic growth in the coming years to better enable the United States' most effective capability to address the irregular challenges that await us.

Special Operations from 9/11 to the Present.

To understand where SOF needs to go, one must understand where SOF currently is - and how it got there. This section will show how SOCOM has grown in missions, size, budget, and authority; where SOF is distributed; how the roles and missions of the component organizations have evolved; and offer a brief assessment of how it is going across mission sets.

This section will also attempt to highlight the changing nature of how SOF is perceived in the strategy and policy world. To be sure, while most within the community consider SOF to be strategic in nature, many outside the special operations community are only now coming to that conclusion. This sentiment is reflected in recent comments by Assistant Secretary of Defense Michael Vickers who stated, "when trying to answer the question about what made Special Operations Forces special, we liked to say that 'well, it was because of this tactical virtuosity or the skill of the individual operator - that they were trained to such a high level.' My counterpart Admiral Olson and I now like to talk about it that it really is the strategic employment or impact that these forces cumulatively have in this broad war that we find ourselves in that really is what is making them special."⁴

This wider appreciation of what SOF brings to the table is a prime driver for SOCOM's growth since 9/11. As this report shows, SOF has evolved and is continually moving forward; but stewardship and leadership are necessary to ensure that it is evolving and moving in the right direction.

SOCOM – Managing Growth in Missions, Responsibility and Resources.

The Special Operations Command, located in MacDill, Air Force Base, Florida, was created in April of 1987 with the passing of the Nunn-Cohen Amendment to the Goldwater Nichols Act of 1986 by Congress. The command was born in the wake of the failed hostage rescue attempt in Iran in 1980 in an effort to bring under one command the capabilities and equipment needed to conduct joint special operations.⁵

The Unified Command Plan's Two Missions: As a Force Provider; and as the Lead Combatant Command for Planning, Synchronizing - and as directed - Conducting Department of Defense Operations Against Terrorist Networks.⁶

The Unified Command Plan tasks the command with two very different missions. The first is as a force provider that provides "fully capable Special Operations Forces to defend the United

⁴ Assistant Secretary of Defense Michael Vickers at a speech before the Washington Institute for Near East Policy on 24 October 2008.

⁵ USSOCOM Posture Statement, pg 1.

⁶ Ibid.

States and its interests."⁷ More specifically, SOCOM is responsible for organizing, training, equipping and deploying Special Operations Forces to work for the Global Combatant Commanders.

In its role as a force provider, SOCOM personnel are heavily invested in on-going operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Philippines, and the Horn of Africa. But as Admiral Eric T. Olson, the Commander of SOCOM, also points out, members of SOCOM "woke up in 58 countries of the world this morning, and only a couple of those where we are engaged in a fight."⁸ Joint Combined Exercises for Training (JCETs), Foreign Internal Defense (FID) missions, exchanges, and liaisons showcase the command's breadth and width when it comes to supporting the efforts of the Regional Commands.

But SOCOM authority has also grown, with the command becoming a *supported* command for the first time.

In 2005, based on early successes in the War on Terror and the evolving nature of the challenge at hand, SOCOM was given a second mission when it was designated as the lead combatant command for planning, synchronizing - and as directed - conducting Department of Defense operations against terrorist networks.⁹

The second mission is important to understand, as it initially gave the impression that Special Operations Forces would be deploying from the United States to conduct unilateral missions in the Areas of Responsibility of the Global Combatant Commanders. Truth be told, this new mission engendered much discussion between the Pentagon, Capitol Hill, the Global Combatant Commanders, and SOCOM. All were trying to figure out what the mission meant and how best to carry it out. In the end, SOCOM decided on emphasizing the synchronization aspect, acting as a sort of clearing house for military and interagency communication.¹⁰

In a speech before an audience assembled by the Center for a New American Security, Admiral Olson explained, "what we really do is synchronize the plans and planning in the Global War on Terror. We do not synchronize specific operations or activities," he stated, saying that the operational commander is the one who remains responsible for execution of the plans. Admiral Olson continued, saying, "but we at Special Operations Command receive the plans, review the plans, coordinate the plans, deconflict them, collaborate them, prioritize them, match them against the needs around the world, and then make recommendations to the Joint Staff and the Secretary of Defense on how resources ought to be allocated around the world to match the demands of the Global War on Terror."¹¹

⁷ From the mission statement on SOCOM Command Website located at http://www.socom.mil/Docs/Command_Mission_26112007.pdf

⁸ ADM Eric T. Olson in a speech delivered on 3 March 2008 at the Willard Hotel, Washington, DC.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ ADM Olson at Johns Hopkins Unrestricted Warfare Conference on 10 March 2008.

¹¹ ADM Eric T. Olson in a speech delivered on 3 March 2008 at the Willard Hotel, Washington, DC.

SOCOM's approach to accomplishing the synchronization mission resulted in CONPLAN 7500, the Department of Defense Global War on Terror Campaign Plan. The plan, which is also the DoD supporting plan for the National Implementation Plan (NIP), outlines the military responsibilities - or Lines of Operation (LOOs) - as well as the activities that SOCOM and the DoD believe will enable other government agencies, non-governmental agencies (like the United Nations or Save the Children) and partner nations to succeed.

But perhaps the most important fallout from the newly bestowed Presidential authority is the creation of an on-going dialogue that includes all of the combatant commands, the interagency, our allies and the NGO community. Twice a year, SOCOM hosts the "Global Synch Conference" in Tampa, Florida where conference attendees from the Global Combatant Commands, the services, the special operations components, partner nations, and about 120 members of the interagency community all meet to discuss their plans and activities as they relate to CONPLAN 7500 and the National Implementation Plan. The attendees conduct further coordination and cooperation by way of membership in one or more of the twelve working groups. The working groups - covering such topics as Unconventional Warfare, Security Force Assistance, Terror Threat Finance, and Plans - enable SOCOM to fulfill its role as a synchronizer.

The dialogue is furthered by regular global Video Tele-Conferences (VTCs), interagency liaisons with permanent positions within the command, and by over seventy special operations officers designated as liaisons to other governmental agencies and organizations in Washington DC and elsewhere.

2006 QDR Growth – Unbalanced Increase.

Along with increased responsibility, SOCOM has also been the recipient of organizational and budgetary growth by way of the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review. The QDR, described as a document "designed to capture the best contemporary thinking, planning and decisions during this period of profound change,"¹² listed as one of its key programmatic decisions for Fiscal Year (FY) 2007:

"To strengthen forces to defeat terrorist networks, the Department will increase Special Operations Forces by 15% and increase the number of Special Forces Battalions by one-third. U.S. Special Operations Command (U.S. SOCOM) will establish the Marine Corps Special Operations Command. The Air Force will establish an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron under U.S. SOCOM. The Navy will support a U.S. SOCOM increase in SEAL Team manning and will develop a riverine warfare capability. The Department will also expand Psychological Operations and Civil Affairs units by 3,700 personnel, a 33% increase. Multipurpose Army and Marine Corps ground forces will increase their capabilities and capacity to conduct irregular warfare missions."¹³

To get a partial feel for the numbers, this growth - supported by rather dramatic increases in SOCOM's yearly budget - has been translated into a projected 13,000 SOF personnel increase over a five year period, which includes the addition of the Marine Special Operations Command

¹² 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, pg 1.

¹³ Ibid, page 5.

(MARSOC), five Special Forces Battalions (at about 450 men per Battalion), an extra Ranger Company per Ranger Battalion (at about 140 men per company), and two Civil Affairs Battalions (at about 400 men each).

But there is a cloud in this silver lining: the QDR growth was not balanced or entirely resourced. As a result, the additional troops are left wanting for weapons, radios, transportation, and MILCON, just to name a few. Twelve man Special Forces teams are to receive four MMBMR radios versus the fourteen that they require (one per man and two per vehicle); the Rangers will receive fifty-four Strykers but will not receive the motor pool and mechanics needed to maintain the vehicles; battalions of Soldiers have been added without a proportional increase in rotary-winged aviation; and these are just a few examples.¹⁴

One officer explained that his command was relieved that they had forces continually deployed because they have no place to put them should they all return at once. "We are 'hot cotting' in troop billeting and headquarters areas," he stated.¹⁵

Irregular Warfare – Balancing the Efforts and Resources of SOCOM and the General Purpose Force.

Strategic policy for the United States increasingly focuses on the “indirect approach” as key to success in the long war against terrorism and extremism.¹⁶ This is reflected in strategic guidance and in planning documents, to include the 2006 QDR which states that in "the post-September 11 world, irregular warfare has emerged as the dominant form of warfare confronting the United States, its allies and its partners; accordingly, guidance must account for distributed, long-duration operations, including unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and stabilization and reconstruction operations."¹⁷

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has even gone on record, stating that Irregular Warfare is the Defense Department's number one priority.

Resultantly, a lot of effort is going into turning this guidance into meaningful action. The intent is to institutionalize this guidance and document it to solidify hard won IW

SOCOM, working with the services, the Joint Force, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and others developed Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept (IW JOC). The JOC, which was designed to describe how future joint force commanders could conduct protracted irregular warfare, is supported by a series of Joint Implementation Concepts, or JICs.¹⁸ These JICs, also being developed with great input throughout the Department of Defense and interagency community, cover such topics as Foreign Internal Defense, Counterterrorism, and Counterinsurgency.

¹⁴ Interviews with SOF personnel conducted from June - October 2008.

¹⁵ Interview with ARSOF officer at Fort Bragg, NC. 30 July 2008.

¹⁶ The Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept defines Irregular Warfare on page 6 as “A violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations. IW favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities, in order to erode an adversary’s power, influence, and will.”

¹⁷ 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, pg 36.

¹⁸ Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept, Version 1.0, dtd 11 SEP 2007, pg. 5.

The Department of Defense recently issued new guidance to SOCOM and the General Purpose Force (GPF) by way of a new directive. Department of Defense Directive 3000.07 "establishes policy and assigns responsibilities for DoD conduct of IW and development of capabilities to address irregular challenges to national security..." The directive goes on to establish that irregular warfare (IW) is as strategically important as traditional warfare and it addresses the SOF/GPF balance.

The upshot of all of this movement is that IW has come to the fore of DoD thinking - and that will translate into roles and missions and budgetary considerations. SOCOM is already riding this wave, to some extent, and the command's influence in this arena is projected to increase.

Command Focus Areas – Fighting, Caring for Personnel and Families, and Sustaining the Force.

All large organizations must have a focus to remain effective, and with over 50,000 employees stationed all over the world, SOCOM is no exception. In an effort to provide guidance to his subordinate units and personnel, SOCOM Commander ADM Eric T. Olson has established three main focus areas- with each focus area having three subcomponents.

The first focus area is characterized as "Deter, Disrupt and Defeat," and consists of planning and conducting special operations, emphasizing culturally-attuned engagement (building long-term systemic relations with partner nations), and fostering interagency relations by way of establishing liaison, personnel exchanges and dialogue with other members of the U.S. government.

"We understand that the conflict in which we are engaged is not going to be resolved by United States Special Operations Command, no matter what my authority for synchronizing plans in the global war on terror," Admiral Olson said. "It's bigger than the Department of Defense. It's bigger than government. It requires a global effort to address this. I can't take responsibility for the global effort, but what I can do is encourage both international and interagency cooperation and collaboration," Admiral Olson concluded.¹⁹

The second focus area for SOCOM is "Develop and Support our People and Families." The command defines this as recruiting and retaining high quality people and then caring for them and their families. The command believes that by nurturing and sustaining special operators and their families, they will get longer and more dedicated service from them.

Once recruited, the command is committed to the long term training and education of its personnel with the desired end state being a "Joint Warrior Diplomat," which SOCOM sees as a person who is an expert in his military specialty, integrated into the joint architecture, and culturally and linguistically attuned to his operational environment.

Lastly, SOCOM is committed to "Sustaining and Modernizing the Force." The command believes that its "operators" must be rapidly equipped with the best equipment that industry and

¹⁹ ADM Eric T. Olson in a speech delivered on 3 March 2008 at the Willard Hotel, Washington, DC.

military can offer; that SOF must upgrade all fixed-winged, rotary-winged, and ground mobility platforms; and that the command must achieve an increase in persistent intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capability.

Arrayal of Forces – SOF in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Depending on whom you talk to, SOF is waking up every morning in either fifty-eight countries or sixty; but the general idea is that SOF is a distributed force that is busily at work abroad. This fact cannot, however, escape the powerful statistic that over 80% of deployed SOF is engaged in either Iraq or Afghanistan.²⁰ Fifty-six or so countries aside, here is a quick look at the two places where SOF is predominately distributed:

Afghanistan – In Need of Enablers and Partnerships.

Afghanistan's Special Operations efforts are marshaled by a Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) that is commanded by an Army Special Forces Colonel (the Special Forces Group commander of the rotating unit deployed). A truly joint organization, the CJSOTF has personnel from all elements of the special operations community as well as civilian members of the interagency. In addition to the CJSOTF, there are other SOF elements in the battle space, but due to their classified nature and focus they fall out of the scope of this report.

The CJSOTF headquarters (HQ) - likened in size to a Brigade Combat Team HQ - is in Bagram, Afghanistan, with battalion level Special Operations Task Forces (SOTFs) spread out in three locations, giving SOF elements a country-wide reach.

The tribal nature of Afghanistan and the mountainous terrain make fighting a difficult proposition - and one quite different from Iraq.

"You cannot take the Iraq model and drop in on Afghanistan, without any refinements to the IPB (Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield)," one officer told me. "The 101st, for example, is so dispersed that it cannot mass combat power. In Iraq, you have neighborhood watches; Afghanistan, you have 10,000-foot mountains in between villages. You cannot go through; you have to go around."²¹

The terrain and the dispersed nature of the population make rotary winged aviation assets and Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) critical enablers. When considering Pentagon plans to surge SOF into the battle space, a Special Forces commander responded by saying, "SOF surge - no. Enabler surge - yes. We do not need more ODAs (Operational Detachment Alphas - the basic 12-man Special Forces unit) out here. What we need is to find permanent Afghani partners for our existing ODAs and then surge enablers, such as intelligence analysts, ISR, rotary winged aviation, and ramp space for air support. After all," he continued, "this war is all about time and space, and air maneuver is good."²²

²⁰ Email from SOCOM PAO Ken McGraw, dtd 31 OCT, 2008.

²¹ Interview with CJSOTF Commander, 25 SEP 2008, Balad, Iraq.

²² Interview with CJSOTF Commander, 21 SEP 2008, Bagram, Afghanistan.

And that is a problem, as there are few such enablers to go around. To be sure, there are helicopters and predators in Afghanistan - just not for the CJSOTF.

"The NMF (National Mission Force) gets all of the ISR and Helos," an officer stated. "Yet the targets around here are not that hard. NMF hits 20 bad guys, armed with only 10 working AKs, while they are asleep, and applies overwhelming combat power on them with AC-130s and TF 160th (special operations helicopters). Huge overkill. The bottom line is that there is inequitable distribution of enablers."²³

A common topic of discussion in the CJSOTF was whether the requirement was for dedicated SOF rotary winged aviation or just aviation that is available when requested. While the answer to that question remained inconclusive, the need for air support was clear. One officer reported that an enemy encampment had been discovered over 45 days ago - and yet SOF had yet to hit the camp due to a lack of air movement platforms.

"The SOAR (Special Operations Aviation Regiment – also known as “TF 160) will only fly at night and in low illumination; and that comes out to two weeks of nights per month,” an officer said. “That is not much and we are competing with the NMF for the same assets,” he continued. This officer and others went on to say that the real requirement is for a daylight non-risk adverse capability. “The problem is that the TF 160th only flies at night; and the ANA only fights during the day.”²⁴

The CJSOTF has approached conventional forces for aviation support, but with mixed results. One officer stated, “The 101st (the 101st Airborne Division from Ft. Campbell, KY – the major conventional military command during this research visit) won’t fly us either. So we are scratching for anything, to include coalition air.”²⁵

The air requirement stretches to resupply as well. The requirement is for low-level, low cost air resupply. “We could supply our remote sites by Casa (a Short Take-Off and Landing (STOL) aircraft). We could land it on an airstrip or just kick a 500 lb bundle out the door. As it stands, we are begging for free support from Black Water (the private contracting company).”²⁶

A commonality with fighting in Iraq is that SOF partners with Afghani units for all combat operations - an element of Foreign Internal Defense (FID, a Special Forces mainstay). The CJSOTF does not conduct unilateral operations. The premier partnership is with the Commandos, an elite unit that was trained and equipped by Special Forces. They are reputed to be disciplined, well manned and combat ready. “They are great,” one officer relayed. “We just need to ramp up their planning capability, and we are working on that.”²⁷

Lack of logistical support is issue in Afghanistan. Special Forces Groups, sadly, do not have a robust support unit - a common theme that arises when talking to special operators from Ft.

²³ Interview with CJSOTF officer, 22 SEP 2008, Bagram, Afghanistan.

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Interview with CJSOTF officer, 22 SEP, in Bagram, Afghanistan.

Bragg, to Afghanistan, to Iraq. Unlike the Army, that created a Brigade Support Battalion (BSB) to sustain the Army's Unit of Action, the Special Forces created the Group Support Battalion. The difference: the BSB were well designed and manned at 90%. GSBs were designed on the cheap and then manned at 50%.

"Bottom line: there was little to no analysis done on 'what is the requirement,'" an officer stated. "Did SOCOM design the GSB to support PDM growth? Did we have an advocate in USASOC G-4? Did COSCOM volunteer to do the MTOE? Did we have a proponent address this issue with the Army? My thought is that USASOC would not give up personnel growth to non-trigger pullers, and so we got shorted in the support side of the house."²⁸ Another officer joined in, offering that "the rest of the Army is growing its logistics support elements; SOCOM is reducing."²⁹

Additionally, the GSBs are designed with three companies, a number that seems suboptimal to support officers considering the growth of the Special Forces Groups to four battalions. The general thought expressed is that the GSBs need to grow to four companies, so that a company could train and deploy with a Special Forces Battalion, building a habitual relationship between the supported and the supporting.

"We are fully ten years behind the Army," said another officer. "The Army gets it right. We should rotate support elements every trip and those same supporting elements should align themselves with deploying units."³⁰

The GSB issue hints at another challenge: that of supplying the right personnel to support CJSOTF operations. Short on personnel due to its organizational structure, the GSB ends up sending some of its High Demand/Low Density (HD/LD) Military Occupation Specialties (MOS) on almost back-to-back deployments. An intelligence analyst, for example, will undoubtedly find himself with more in-country time than that of his operator friends, as he repeatedly supports different battalion rotations.

Personnel problems at the Special Forces Group level mirror those of the GSB, in that the subordinate battalions have a rotation plan - the Groups do not. Thus the Group staff ends up deploying at exceedingly high rates. This is made more problematic by the shortage of personnel on the staff. The missions and responsibilities have grown, but the MTOEs (Modified Table of Organization and Equipment - the approved organization, manning, and equipment structure of a military unit) that support them have not. The Intelligence section of the CJSOTF, for example, is manned at 70%, necessitating the pulling of personnel from the subordinate battalions back at home station to supplement the Group staff - cutting their "rest and refit" time.

Lastly, the CJSOTF finds itself shorted on Joint Manning Document (JMD) fills – currently hovering at 58%.³¹ JMD positions are best described as jobs that can be done by MOS-immaterial personnel who are pulled from assigned positions elsewhere and loaned to units

²⁸ Interview with GSB support officer, 21 SEP 2008, in Bagram, Afghanistan.

²⁹ Interview with GSB support officer, 21 SEP 2008, in Bagram, Afghanistan.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Interview with CJSOTF personnel officer, 23 SEP, in Bagram, Afghanistan.

overseas to conduct essential functions. The process tends to be dysfunctional on both the loaning and receiving ends. In all cases studied, the result is a position forward (Afghanistan, Iraq, or Djibouti) that is rarely filled or filled with the wrong person. The problem is that the position is valid (but in personnel terms, not "validated"); so that when it is not filled the unit suffers.

As a CJSOTF personnel officer concluded, "the bottom line is that the personnel system is way too slow."³²

In summation, the CJSOTF is adding great value in Afghanistan but it could use a boost in enabler and personnel support. And what would the CJSOTF Commander do if he had all of the enabler and personnel support that he needed? "I would push all down to the SOTFs - this is a bottom driven war."³³

Iraq – Combat FID and Preparing for the Drawdown.

Like Afghanistan, Iraq currently has one Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) that is commanded by a Colonel and staffed by an Army Special Forces Group (Airborne). The CJSOTF has elements of the NAVSPECWAR community (the SEALs) as well as Civil Affairs, PSYOP, and some strong enabling support. There is a classified SOF component as well, but due to the nature of this report, it will not be addressed. What one can say, however, is that there is a strong SOF presence in Iraq, consisting of large command and control nodes (where assets, relationships and missions are managed and controlled) and small combat outposts, where SOF units are linked with their Iraqi counterparts.

Like Afghanistan, SOF is committed to these partnership relationships. On a recent visit, the commander of the CJSOTF stated that, "every SEAL and Special Forces element has a partner unit - and 70% of them picked their partners."³⁴

The commander went on to say that in his view, there is no distinction between SEALs and Special Forces in Iraq, fully confirming that at the small unit level, the NAVSPECWAR community has earned the respect of their Army counterparts.

The mission of this CJSOTF is Foreign Internal Defense, or FID. In short, FID is when U.S. units are used to help partner nations quell internal strife. FID in many cases teaches partner units marksmanship, human rights, and small unit tactics. In Iraq, however, FID is geared towards Direct Action (DA) in which U.S. forces train and then fight with their Iraqi partners (called "Combat FID"). "FID is our DA enabler," an officer stated. "You want to do more DA? Do more FID."³⁵ Another Special Forces officer offered that, "you don't know if your FID is working unless you do DA."³⁶

³² Interview with CJSOTF personnel officer, 23 SEP 2008, Bagram, Afghanistan.

³³ Interview with Commander, CJSOTF, 23 SEP 2008, Bagram, Afghanistan.

³⁴ Interview with CJSOTF Commander, 25 SEP 2008, Balad, Iraq.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Interview with CJSOTF Deputy Commander, 25 SEP 2008, Balad, Iraq.

Unlike Afghanistan, Intelligence, Reconnaissance and Surveillance (ISR) Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) are needed but not considered necessary to CJSOTF operations. "We do not necessarily need an enabler surge. Things make sense here," the CJSOTF Commander stated.

Human Intelligence (HUMINT) networks are the coin of the realm in Iraq, providing a preponderance of actionable intelligence to SOF and their partnered units, with one officer saying, "68% of our targets in Baghdad are HUMINT driven."³⁷

When asked what keeps him awake at night, the CJSOTF Commander replied, "logistics when Big Army leaves and we eventually draw down forces from Iraq."³⁸ The conventional wisdom is that SOF will not draw down; that it may actually increase in size and scope of missions. The problem is that SOF relies on the conventional military for support - everything from base security, messing (food), mechanic/motor pool support, helicopter mobility, Quick Reaction Force (QRF - the infantry unit that comes to the rescue in extremis situations), and medical evacuation (MEDEVAC). "Without a QRF or MEDEVAC," a commander stated, "we are not going to be able to have an SF ODA (Operational Detachment Alpha - the basic 12-man Special Forces unit) in places like Amara."³⁹

The issue is that logistical support is to a great extent a zero sum game.

"The problem is that Army logistics are TPFDD'ed Army Divisions," an officer stated, referring the military acronym for "Time-Phased- Force and Deployment Data." In other words, when the Army leaves, they must - due to the organizational structure of their units - take their organic logistics with them; otherwise they will render the Army non-deployable and incapable of conducting training at home station.

One positive note on logistics: Log FID. The GSBs have taken to teaching their Iraqi counterparts about how to logistically support forces in the field. The training teams, instituted to enhance the capabilities of the Iraqi Special Operations Force (ISOF), goes by the name of the Logistics Training and Advisory Teams (LTATs). This training is seen as essential to helping the Iraqi SOF conduct independent operations one day. "Unless we do this," a sergeant said, "we waste 5-7 years of combat."⁴⁰

The problem is well documented in the *Department of Defense Report to Congress: Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*. This report states that the Iraqis are lagging in areas such as supply, maintenance, logistics, personnel, and ammunition management. "There are over 600,000 Iraqi Security Forces and yet none of them are quite yet self sustaining," another Soldier offered. "There is no local purchasing authority, no PBAC (Program Budget Advisory Committee), no ammunition forecasting, and no resource management. In most cases, there is not even a supply officer - the unit commander gives the supplies out."⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Interview with CJSOTF Commander, 25 SEP 2008, Balad, Iraq.

³⁹ Interview with CJSOTF Command Sergeant Major, 25 SEP 2008, Balad, Iraq.

⁴⁰ Interview with logistic NCO, 26 SEP 2008, Balad, Iraq.

⁴¹ Interview with logistics officer, 26 SEP 2008, Balad, Iraq.

To address a weak logistics process in units partnered with SOF, the LTATs deploy from the GSB in Balad to help build unit-level logistic architecture. The program received laudatory comments from all familiar with it. "We are working on systems as well as leadership and culture. We are teaching them that it is ok to request what you need; it is ok to report that your vehicles are broken."⁴²

In the area of personnel, JMD fills (like Afghanistan) are running low, with Iraq hovering at about 58%. In the intelligence arena, the fills weigh in at 44%, with L3 (a contracting company) providing the bulk share of analysts. "We have submitted a JUONS (Joint Urgent Operational Needs Statement), as a lack of intel and analytic capability is our biggest challenge. I need about thirty more analysts. The problem is that we did not stand up the capability to deal with thirty DIRs (an intelligence report) a day."

And personnel issues are not the only challenge that the SOF intelligence is dealing with. What makes intelligence work so challenging in Iraq is that traditional field craft does not work well in that environment. SOF operators are laying aside a lot of the training that they have received - training focused on a traditional battlefield – and are focusing on delving into the intricacies of tribal networks. "We have to keep in mind that we are dealing in an environment where the garbage man might be sending and receiving reconnaissance reports as cell text sms."

"We need tactical patience," he continued. "We need to gain an appreciation for tribal networks. Only then can we gain the information that we need to deconstruct and attack enemy logistics and financial networks. The bottom line here is that you have got to be out in the villages with the Iraqis."⁴³

Yet another intelligence related issue stems from a lack of Counter Intelligence officers to manage, validate, and deconflict assets - the sources that are providing that very important HUMINT. One officer said that he needed at least one more Warrant Officer and ten additional people.

Lastly, when asked what the differences are between Iraq and Afghanistan, an officer with time in both locations said that "In Iraq, once a mission is approved, we have the authority to do it. Not always so in Afghanistan." He said that the reason relates to the relationship that SOF has built with the conventional military - specifically the Multi-National Corps. Liaison officers are mindful of establishing credibility with "Big Army," and they are very sensitive to the conventional commander's intent. "You have to be value added," one officer stated. "Our attitude is this: we do not own any terrain in this country. Therefore, every operation needs a Division Commander's approval."⁴⁴

Component Commands – the Building Blocks of SOCOM.

SOCOM is made up of five component commands: the United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), the Naval Special War Command (NAVSPECWARCOM), Air Force

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Interview with CJSOTF officer, 25 SEP 2008, Balad, Iraq.

Special Operations Command (AFSOC), the Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC), and the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). Each is different in its roles, missions, organization, and focus. They have also grown differently and learned different lessons since 9/11. It is therefore valuable to survey the commands in order to gain understanding into the SOF community. This report will look at USASOC, NAVSPECWARCOM, AFSOC, and MARSOC. Due to its classified nature, JSOC will be omitted.

USASOC – Managing Growth, OPTEMPO and a Need for Aviation Investment.

Headquartered at Ft. Bragg, NC, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) has 30,000 soldiers worldwide, spread between its active, reserve, and National Guard components. The command currently has over 5,100 Soldiers deployed to 56 countries on 92 separate missions.

The command provides trained and ready forces to support the Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCC), the Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOC) and Chiefs of Mission (CoM) throughout the world.⁴⁵

The command consists of Special Forces, Ranger, Special Operations Aviation, Psychological Operations, Civil Affairs, as well as Signal and Combat Service Support units.⁴⁶ ARSOF is characterized by maturity, flexibility, regional expertise, language skills and specialized training.

ARSOF elements are tasked to conduct the core tasks of Unconventional Warfare, Foreign Internal Defense, Combating Terrorism, Direct Action, Special Reconnaissance, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operations.

USASOC stresses that these core tasks provide GCCs options that allow them to balance the direct and the indirect approach; and that the majority of ARSOF's successes are in the realm of the indirect approach, where they work through, by and with partners and allies. Often, ARSOF works behind the scenes with these partners offering subtle advice and long-term persistent engagement. Examples include the creation, training, and equipping of such high end finishing forces as the Iraqi National Counter Terror Force (INCTF) and the Afghan Commandos.⁴⁷

Like all of its SOF brethren, the command is currently undergoing significant QDR directed growth. Between FY07 and FY14 USASOC will add five Special Forces battalions (one to each of the active duty Groups), one Special Operations Aviation battalion, three Ranger rifle companies, as well as increases in Ranger reconnaissance, logistic support, military intelligence and communications capabilities.

⁴⁵ 2008 USASOC Green Book submission, pg 1.

⁴⁶ CRS Report for Congress "U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF): Background and Issues for Congress," Andrew Feikert, pg 2.

⁴⁷ Interview with USASOC staff officer, 18 AUG 2008, Ft. Bragg, NC.

In the past year alone, USASOC stood up a Civil Affairs (CA) Brigade headquarters, added one CA battalion, five Psychological Operations companies, one Ranger special troops battalion and some miscellaneous support and training elements.⁴⁸

Managing this growth will not be without challenges as the command struggles to recruit, train, and retain high demand/low density (HD/LD) Military Occupational Specialties (MOS). The personnel increases will also demand that USASOC purchase more Soldier equipment and increase MILCON.

The command will also face the challenge of moving an entire Special Forces Group to Eglin Air Force Base, FL – no small feat.

Lastly, as a quick snapshot of how USASOC fits into the special operations community, the command accounts for 52% of SOCOM's total manpower, 65% of SOCOM's deployed force, 27% of the SOF budget and 75% of all SOCOM casualties (over 200 killed in action and over 1500 wounded). For comparison MARSOC will be only 1% of ARSOF numbers when fully operational in 2009.⁴⁹

USASOC has many different components. It is useful to understand the size, disposition and roles of some of those units.

U.S. Army Special Forces Command (USASFC).

Within USASFC (A), there are five active component Special Forces Groups located at Ft. Bragg, NC, Ft. Lewis, Washington, Ft. Campbell, KY, Ft. Carson, CO and soon, Eglin AFB, FL. The command also has two U.S. Army National Guard groups. Each group has three line battalions, a group support battalion and a headquarters company – a total of 1400 personnel. The companies within the line battalions have six Operational Detachment Alphas, or ODAs (A-teams), assigned to them. The 12-man "A" Team is the key operating element of the Special Forces Group.

Each Special Forces Group is regionally oriented to support one of the warfighting geographic combatant commanders - U.S. European Command, U.S. Pacific Command, U.S. Southern Command and the U.S. Central Command. Individual Special Forces Soldiers are trained in a language that supports his regional affiliation.

Special Forces units perform seven doctrinal missions: Unconventional Warfare, Foreign Internal Defense, Special Reconnaissance, Direct Action, Combating Terrorism, Counter-proliferation, and Information Operations. These missions make Special Forces unique in the U.S. military, because they are employed throughout the three stages of the operational continuum: peacetime, conflict and war.

Of particular note, Foreign Internal Defense operations, SF's main peacetime mission, are

⁴⁸ 2008 USASOC Green Book submission, pg 4.

⁴⁹ Interview with USASOC general officer, 18 AUG 2008, Ft. Bragg, NC.

designed to help friendly developing nations by working with their military and police forces to improve their technical skills, understanding of human rights issues, and to help with humanitarian and civic action projects. In places like Colombia, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Horn of Africa and the Trans-Sahel, Special Forces units provide host nation forces training and advice, intelligence fusion, civil-military and psychological operations support (though they are restricted from accompanying these forces on combat operations). Iraq and Afghanistan have given SF a new focus: Combat FID – where SF units work with and then fight with the forces they have trained.⁵⁰

Rangers.

The 75th Ranger Regiment, headquartered at Ft. Benning, GA, consists of three Ranger Battalions, located at Hunter Army Airfield, GA, Ft. Lewis, Washington and Ft. Benning, GA. The Regiment and its Battalions are required to be able to deploy to anywhere in the world within 18 hours of notification.

Rangers specialize in special light infantry operations. These include attacks to temporarily seize and secure key objectives and other light infantry operations requiring unique capabilities. Like their Special Forces counterparts, Rangers can infiltrate an area by land, by sea or by air.

Until recently, each battalion was authorized 660 personnel assigned to three rifle companies and a headquarters company.

QDR growth for the Rangers, however, has increased the number of line companies in a battalion to four. A Special Troops Battalion was added as well, to support combat and training operations. It houses the Regimental Reconnaissance unit, Military Intelligence, a signals detachment, and other enabling elements. It is commanded by a Colonel and has 185 personnel.⁵¹

The Rangers are fully engaged at all times, with 33% - 40% of the unit forward deployed. In a seismic shift for the Rangers, the unit of action in Iraq and Afghanistan is the 40-plus-man platoon – very different from the days when the Regiment focused on the battalion airfield seizure.⁵²

The 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment.

The 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) provides support to Special Operations Forces on a worldwide basis with three types of modified helicopters: M/AH-6 light helicopters, MH-60L and K helicopters and MH-47E and G heavy assault helicopters.

The unit specializes in all weather night flying, thus earning the nickname the “Night Stalkers.”

⁵⁰ Interview with USASOC staff officer, 18 AUG, 2008, Ft. Bragg, NC.

⁵¹ Interview with Ranger Regiment staff officer, 3 SEP 2008, Ft. Benning, GA.

⁵² Ibid.

The capabilities of the SOAR include inserting, resupplying and extracting U.S. and Allied SOF personnel. They also assist in SOF Search and Rescue, and Escape and Evasion activities. In addition to general aviation support to the SOF community, these units provide airborne command and control, and fire support.

The Regiment currently consists of three battalions, a headquarters company, the Special Operations Aviation Training Company (SOATC), and two forward-deployed companies located in the U.S. Southern Command and U.S. Pacific Command areas of responsibility. The 1st and 2nd battalions are located at Fort Campbell, KY, while the 3rd Battalion is located at Hunter Army Airfield, GA. The organizational structure of the 160th SOAR (A) allows the Regiment to quickly tailor its unique assets to meet the mission requirements of SOF.

The SOAR is incredibly busy supporting four JSOTFs while aggressively modernizing its fleet (with emphasis on the MH 47 platforms) and maintaining a robust training regimen.⁵³

Challenges include the current deployment of SOF aircraft to the wartime Areas of Operation, with almost 40 aircraft currently overseas (from a sustainable number of 26).⁵⁴

Despite the blistering pace, the Regiment is focused on four areas: professional development, sustaining the fight, modernizing the fleet, and transforming the Regiment.⁵⁵

Unfortunately, the SOAR did not receive significant growth from QDR 2006.

4th Psychological Operations Group (Airborne).

The 4th Psychological Operations Group (Airborne) is based at Ft. Bragg, NC. The mission of Psychological Operations Group (4th POG) is to “organize, equip and collectively train assigned and attached forces to rapidly deploy anywhere in the world and conduct psychological and other specified communications tasks in any environment in support of Combatant Commanders, joint and coalition task forces and other government agencies as directed by the President and the Secretary of Defense.”⁵⁶

An important point to note is that PSYOPs personnel disseminate *truthful* information to foreign audiences in support of U.S. goals and objectives. They disseminate those messages in the form of leaflets, posters, broadcasts and audiovisual tapes. Each unit has its own intelligence and audiovisual specialists.⁵⁷

PYSOP became a branch of the U.S. Army (like Infantry or Special Forces) in 2006, the same year that the 4th POG was designated as a major subordinate command under USASOC.

⁵³ Interview with SOAR staff officer, 27 AUG 2008, Ft. Campbell, KY.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Interview with Commander, SOAR, 27 AUG 2008, Ft. Campbell, KY.

⁵⁶ Interview with PSYOPs personnel 19 August 2008.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

95th Civil Affairs Brigade.

Like a majority of ARSOF the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade is located at Ft. Bragg, NC. The Civil Affairs units are designed to prevent civilian interference with tactical operations, to assist commanders in discharging their responsibilities toward the civilian population, and to provide liaison with civilian government agencies, civilian aid agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These translate into their five core tasks: Populace and Resource Control, Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, Nation Assistance, Support to Civil Administration, and Civil Information Management.

As their literature states: “The culturally oriented and linguistically trained Soldiers also specialize in identifying critical requirements needed by local citizens in war or disaster situations; and they can provide a capability for emergency coordination and administration where political-economic structures have been incapacitated.”⁵⁸

QDR growth has resulted in the addition of the 91st CA Battalion, a unit that will come online in early 2009.⁵⁹

SOSCOM – The Special Operations Support Command.

In late 1995, the Special Operations Support Command (Airborne) was formed to centrally manage signal and combat service support to Special Operations units. The command's activation realigned the command and control organizational structure of the following units: 112th Special Operations Signal Battalion (Airborne); 528th Special Operations Support Battalion (Airborne); Material Management Center (Airborne) and five Special Operations Theater Support Elements. It also concentrates a dedicated, regionally oriented, combat and health services, communications planning, coordination and liaison base to assure support for all Army Special Operations Forces units.

Of the elements listed, two are Army battalion commands. The 112th Special Operations Signal Battalion (Airborne) provides communications links and service amongst the command, joint controlling agencies or commands, and U.S. Army special operations commands in two theaters of operation. The 528th Special Operations Support Battalion (Airborne) enhances USASOC's medical, maintenance, supply and transportation capabilities. Both of these battalions are known for providing support in austere environments.⁶⁰

Current Operations.

USASOC units are undeniably busy. The command states that “on any given day, elements of three of the five active duty Special Forces Groups, 1 Ranger Battalion, some 34 Special

⁵⁸ Literature provided during visit to USASOC on 19 AUG 2008.

⁵⁹ Interview with USASOC staff officer, 19 AUG 2008, Ft. Bragg, NC.

⁶⁰ From USASOC internet website at http://www.soc.mil/soscom/soscom_default.htm.

Operations aircraft and more than 35 Civil Affairs Teams and 35 Psychological Operations teams and supporting logistics units are deployed around the world.”⁶¹

The command also points out that it is heavily invested in Iraq and Afghanistan, running two Combined Joint Special Operations Task Forces (CJSOTF) and one Joint Psychological Operations Task Force (JPOTF) – enterprises that demand strong ARSOF staffing.

USASOC elements are also heavily engaged in the Trans-Sahel, the Horn of Africa, the Philippines, Colombia and 33 U.S. Embassies around the world.⁶²

In terms of training foreign units, there are currently more that 120 12-man ODAs deployed constantly around the world advising and assisting 100 host nation battalion size and national level counter terrorist and counter insurgency forces on a persistent basis. Add to that over seventy Joint Combined Exercises for Training (JCET) that are conducted annually, the number of battalion sized elements that ARSOF trains nears 200.⁶³

And while USASOC elements are deployed, the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS) is busy at home station Ft. Bragg, NC, training more than 10,000 students yearly in 44 courses. The schoolhouse – called SWC (pronounced “swick”) for short – conducts assessment and selection for prospective Special Forces Soldiers as well as the qualification course that results in the awarding of the Green Beret. The school trains SF Soldiers in their MOS skills and provides language training and advanced skills such as military freefall, close quarters combat and SERE (Survive, Escape, Resist and Evade).⁶⁴

Future Operations.

With recent pronouncements by President Obama’s administration about the future drawdown in Iraq, one might gather that there will be a resultant decrease in special operations activity. Many believe, however, that while conventional forces do indeed withdraw from Iraq, SOF will be left behind to combat advise Iraqi forces, hunt high value targets in conjunction with the Iraqi National Counter Terror Force and generally conduct Foreign Internal Defense and other forms of Security Force Assistance.

It is worthwhile to note that there have been calls to essentially double the SOF commitment in Afghanistan. And as recently reported in The New York Times, Army Special Forces is currently in Pakistan training members of the Frontier Corps.⁶⁵

Lastly, Secretary Gates has made it clear that Irregular Warfare is his number one priority. So militarily, it is not a stretch to predict a future of persistent presence, persistent engagement and building partnership capacity. SOF will undoubtedly have an increased role.

⁶¹ Interview with USASOC staff officer, 18 AUG 2008, Ft. Bragg, NC.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ 2008 USASOC Green Book submission, pg. 3.

⁶⁴ Ibid, pg. 5.

⁶⁵ Email exchange with USASOC staff officer, 1 MAR 2009.

Challenges.

The impressive array of current operations being conducted combined with an aggressive growth agenda for the next few years comes at a cost. The challenges before USASOC will demand strong leadership, superb management, and perhaps more resources, if ARSOF is to continue to provide the nation with continued excellent service. Below are a few of the issues that the command will need to resolve.

OPTEMPO. Perhaps the most pressing challenge is that of Operational Tempo, or OPTEMPO. OPTEMPO can be defined as the pace and duration at which Soldiers are deployed. Currently, the Army has created a metric called Dwell Time to measure the OPTEMPO of its units. The Army strives for a deployed to home station ration of 1:2. Dwell time for SF is now between 1:0.82 and 1:0.85. “We are breaking all of the rules with regards to Dwell Time,” an officer stated. “You can submit a waiver, but we are not even keeping track of ODAs anymore because we are so out of whack.”⁶⁶

The culprit is the Special Forces Group rotation to Iraq and Afghanistan. Hailed as a model for the Army as it is based of a 7-month rotation vice the Army’s 15-month or 12 version, it still has its drawbacks. The problem can best be summarized like this: two battalions of an SF Group’s three battalions spend months in the field conducting Pre-Mission Training (PMT) to prepare for a rotation to the GWOT. Additionally, sizeable portions of the battalion and group staffs deploy early to conduct liaison and transition activities. The units then deploy for the rotation, leaving behind one battalion to conduct JCETs, Mission Essential Task List (METL) training, and specialized schooling. Eventually, the deployed battalions return, leaving staff and stay behind personnel to continue transition activities to the incoming battalions. Upon return, the battalions immediately roll into their portion of JCETs, METL training and specialized schooling. Shortly, two of the battalions (the one that formerly stayed behind and the one that previously deployed) begin to conduct their PMT to ready themselves for the next rotation. The bottom line here is that no one ever really stands down or takes a breath.

To make matters a bit worse, the staffs are always undermanned at the Group or CJSOTF level (in part because the JMDs are not being filled), requiring the units to pull Soldiers from units that are supposed to be back at home station. Add to the mix the HD/LD MOS’s – those few Soldiers who have critical skills and thus are subjected to rotation after rotation – and you have an OPTEMPO problem.

Oddly, morale is still high - retention numbers and a host of others metrics prove this to be the case. Officers claim that troops are enduring the brutal pace because they like to fight. But the force is showing anecdotal signs of strain.

Special Operations Aviation. If there is one portion of USASOC that is woefully under-resourced it is the Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR). In terms of airframes, flying hours, personnel and training, the SOAR is a superb choice for dramatic increase.

⁶⁶ Interview with USASOC staff officer, 18 AUG 2008, Ft. Brag, NC.

As one might imagine, SOF Aviation is so expensive that SOCOM is hesitant to ask the Department of Defense and Congress for enhanced growth. Resource-wise, asking for the dollars to right-size the SOAR to support 2006 QDR growth and to support future mission sets is problematic when addressing Hill appropriators and DoD officials.

One issue is a lack of dedicated rotary winged airframes to support special operations in combat. AFSOC divested itself of its MH-53 fleet (in exchange for CV-22 tilt winged transports) and there are precious few SOAR platforms around.

The majority of the SOAR aircraft are overseas supporting national mission forces; others are in maintenance phase; some are undergoing modernization efforts; still others are dedicated to training missions and operational missions in support of national assets. This essentially leaves nothing for CJSOTF efforts in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Philippines and the Horn of Africa.⁶⁷

Add to this the pressure extended by 2006 QDR growth, which has have given us five SF Battalions, three Ranger Companies, the introduction of MARSOC, the growth of NAVSPECWARCOM, and the creation of SOCAFRICOM.

More troops, two major wars, and yet very little growth in ARSOF aviation.

This frustrates SOAR officers. One stated that, "there are white side Green Berets who will start and end a career without ever stepping on a SOAR bird."⁶⁸

The solutions range from increasing the number of aviation companies in the SOAR to finding ways to get General Purpose Forces (GPF) to support SOF. Both solutions should be pursued.

But a lack of airframes is not the only issue confronting the SOAR. The school that trains SOAR pilots, the Special Operations Aviation Training Company (SOATC), is also under resourced. The SOAR is truly unique in that it has its combat missions and the Title 10 mission of recruiting, assessing, and training new aircrews - and this is all done "out of hide." That means that pilots, aircrews, flying hours, fuel and training facilities are all pulled out of units and thrown together to assess, select, train and qualify new personnel.⁶⁹

Fiscal support of the SOATC would be money well spent. But the school would also benefit from formalization, taking it from an "out of hide" organization and converting it to a TDA (Table of Distribution and Allowances) entity. The unit should be officially recognized by SOCOM and TRADOC (Training and Doctrine Command) and its courses should be given an official Army school code. Lastly, the SOATC should be grown, right-sizing it from a company to a battalion sized organization.

⁶⁷ Interview with SOAR officer, 27 AUG 2008, Ft. Campbell, KY.

⁶⁸ Interview with SOAR officer, 27 AUG 2008, Ft. Campbell, KY.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Special Operations Soldier Equipment. Another challenge for USASOC to overcome is a shortage of special operator equipment. This topic is widely discussed by all components of SOCOM, from the U.S. to the war zones. At issue is the difference between Base of Issue Required (BOIR) – defined as what a unit requires to achieve its mission - and Base of Issue Authorized (BOIA) – what it is allowed to have. In a resource perfect world, BOIR equals BOIA. Sadly, however, this is not always the case. Take the MBMMR individual radio, for example. The BOIA for MBMMRs on a 12-man SF ODA is 4; while about everyone you talk to will tell you that every Soldier needs his own radio – and that an ODA should have two more to use for vehicular movement. The BOIR is therefore 14. Huge difference.⁷⁰

A few factors collide to create this problem. First, QDR growth has rapidly and dramatically added to Soldier equipment needs. Second, the schoolhouse adjusted to the demands for growth much faster than anyone anticipated, producing SOF Soldiers at an unprecedented rate. Third, industry has a capacity problem, as programs and contracts were based on earlier projections of personnel growth. Fourth, SOCOM started behind the power curve, as BOIA did not equal BOIR prior to QDR growth, thus bringing a “legacy gap” into the mix.⁷¹

“There was no continual analysis,” an officer commented. “We just accelerated the personnel numbers with little thought as to what follows.”⁷²

Sadly, the problem may be around for a while.

In an attempt to address the problem, money from FY10 was shifted to FY08, partially solving some equipment issues but bankrupting future purchases of next generation technologies.

Most in the command know of the problem, understand the issues, and are not happy. One officer offered “the mindset was that we need to save money, and so dudes in SOCOM are pinching pennies with people and equipment to buy platforms - all while we are out there spending blood and treasure. Well, we want to start spending more of that treasure.”⁷³

A senior officer concluded, “SOCOM acquisition is platform centric; we are people centric.”⁷⁴

Recently, SOCOM attempted to address the problem by pushing some (not all) acquisition authority to the components. This would technically allow USASOC units to buy all the radios and equipment they want – if they had enough money. As one officer relayed, “now however, when we make the difference between BOIR and BOIA a readiness issue they say that we can just reprioritize our funds to buy those shortages - and you know the math – what other equipment are we not going to buy? GMVs? Helos? Ammunition for training? And the list goes on.”⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Interview with USASOC staff officer, 18 AUG 2008, Ft. Bragg, NC.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Interview with acquisition professional, 28 MAY 2008, Framingham, MA.

⁷⁴ Interview with USASOC staff officer, 19 AUG 2008, Ft. Bragg, NC.

⁷⁵ Interview with USASOC officer, 1 MAR 2009.

The bottom line is that the BOIA/BOIR may become moot – but only because SOCOM is changing the rules.

“I guess the thing to say on the BOIR and BOIA issue is to say that SOCOM has adopted a new system for component resourcing that is an attempt to solve this problem but it is too early to determine the results.”⁷⁶

A lack of equipment affects the support personnel as well. Take the example of body armor. Current fielding allows for all Special Forces operators to be issued the best and most lightweight protective equipment. Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations, and communications Soldiers receive standard Army issue; or older versions thereof. This might make sense from an acquisition or resourcing standpoint, but when a combined patrol of operators and support personnel step off on long distance foot movement at 15,000 feet in Afghanistan, guess who lags behind due to the extra weight that they are packing? And guess who freezes at night because they were not fielded with the same lightweight warm sleeping bags, boots, and underwear that the green berets have in their rucks or on their bodies?⁷⁷

On a positive note, SOCOM is taking on a long-talked about issue: giving component commands the same acquisition authorities that reside with the National Mission Forces. While the details are still being worked out, this is a positive step that will undoubtedly produce dividends in the coming years.

HD/LD. As stated earlier, High Demand/Low Density (HD/LD) Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) are being worn out by the currently deployment schedule. Intelligence Analysts, UAS operators, Special Operations Teams – Alpha (SOT-A), supply specialists and communications/signal Soldiers fall into this category. It perhaps goes without saying that even under a more relaxed schedule, the HD/LD MOS's would be under stress, because there are not many to begin with. Exacerbating this problem: QDR growth. As ARSOF grows, as tactics change, and as the rotations continue, so will the challenge of filling and retaining those precious few Soldiers who hold critical skills.

The need for intelligence analysts is clear, so allow for another example that might not be expected: property book officers and NCOs. A HD/LD occupational specialty for sure, property book professionals are in short supply and overwhelmed. Units outfitted for garrison management of property are now responsible for property books at home station, Afghanistan and combat outposts. With massive amounts of equipment being given to SOF and being registered on classified and unclassified property books, the train wreck is underway.⁷⁸

Command Staffing. Another common theme is the lack of staffing of the component commands over that of SOCOM. USASFC has 13,000 Soldiers assigned to it and 174 staff for a ration of

⁷⁶ Interview with USASOC staff officer, 1 MAR 2009.

⁷⁷ Interview with acquisition professional, 28 MAY 2008, Framingham, MA.

⁷⁸ Interview with USASOC staff officer, 19 AUG 2008, Ft. Bragg, NC.

1:74; USASOC has over 26,000 Soldiers assigned to its active components and has 784 staff for a ratio of 1:32.⁷⁹

The upshot is that in terms of staffing, USASOC is hurting.

“In SOCOM, the staff is hyper-specialized; and maybe they have to be because of its service-like responsibilities and budgeting and acquisition authority,” an officer said. “But here at USASOC, we are spread thin. We lost a key staff officer for over ten months with no backfill.”⁸⁰

NAVSPECWAR – An Evolved Focus on Land Operations and an Expeditionary Future.

Naval Special Warfare (NSW) is the principle maritime component for Special Operations Command and is the leading enterprise for the US Navy in the Global War on Terror. From the mountains of Afghanistan, to the deserts of Iraq, to the jungles of the Philippines, the U.S. Navy Sea Air Land (SEAL) Commandos and their supporting personnel are one of the most versatile forces in the American Military. Since 9/11 Navy SEALs and their supporting elements have been awarded two Congressional Medals of Honor, six Navy Crosses, 61 Silver Stars, 86 purple hearts, 1380 Bronze Stars and several other combat awards. This is more than any other enterprise in the United States Navy.

Naval Special Warfare Command is the headquarters for the NSW community. Located in San Diego, CA it is headed up by a two star Admiral that directly reports to both the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) for administrative purposes and to the United States Special Operations Command Commander for operational purposes. All service common items are paid for by the Navy while all SOF unique programs and operating costs are paid for by Special Operations Command. Of the three principle SOF service components, NSW receives the highest percentage of its yearly budget from USSOCOM, more than 90%.

Directly reporting to Naval Special Warfare Command are seven Major Commands headed by a Navy Captain (O-6). NSW Group ONE owns West Coast SEALs and the operational support personnel and commands while NSW Group TWO is a virtual mirror image of Group ONE for the east coast. NSW Group Three is responsible for all undersea related commands and programs while NSW Group Four is responsible for all surface support commands and programs. The Naval Special Warfare Center owns basic and advanced training for the SEAL community while Naval Special Warfare Development Group conducts Research and Development for both equipment and tactics for NSW. Last is the Center for SEAL and (Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewmen (SWCC) which serves as the force structure policy command which develops the rating tests for advancement for Enlisted SEAL and SWCC operators.

Traditionally NSW's primary two mission sets have been direct action and special reconnaissance in unconventional environments. Since 9/11 NSW has performed with great success in both of these traditional mission sets and has made significant advancements in their

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Interview with USASOC staff officer, 19 AUG 2008, Ft. Bragg, NC.

ability to conduct combat advisement and advanced targeting techniques that leverage augmentation and equipment from the interagency and the U.S. Navy.

Origins that can be traced to the Navy Scouts and Raiders and Underwater Demolition Teams of WWII, NSW as we know it today began in 1962 when President John F. Kennedy commissioned SEAL Teams ONE and TWO. Since the year 2000, NSW has made significant transformations in operational employment, force structure and acquisition programs.

In the 1990's there were six SEAL Teams (three on each coast) who were regionally focused commands. Each SEAL Team was comprised of traditional garrison support personnel, a training cell and eight SEAL Platoons (PLTs). The SEAL Teams were training commands who always had two of their eight SEAL PLTs deployed forward to Geographic Commands for operational employment. Therefore, at any time there were 12 SEAL PLTs deployed around the globe from six different SEAL Teams. The eight SEAL PLTs at each team operated in pairs on a 2-year cycle, which could be broken down into 6-month increments, post deployment and professional development, basic unit level training, advanced unit level training and pre-deployment and deployment. PLTs deployed for 6 months either on a large naval vessel or to a US base in the Geographic Combatant Commands Area of Responsibility. Operational command of the SEAL Platoon (PLT) was delegated to the respective Naval Special Warfare Unit. The NSW Units worked directly for the Theater Fleet or the Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOC). Therefore, a SEAL Team rarely executed tactical command of its SEAL PLTs.

This is important for several reasons. First, SEAL PLTs were comprised of only SEAL officers and SEAL enlisted with no support personnel organic to their PLTs. Either the U.S. Navy vessel or the NSW Unit handled all administrative, logistic and operational support. Consequently, there was no organic expeditionary support tailored to Naval Special Warfare. Second, with few exceptions, the largest operational element within NSW was the SEAL PLT. Occasionally Task Units would be pieced together if a specific operation required more top cover but the elements never really trained to that standard prior to deployment. Last, a SEAL Team's primary responsibility and focus was to ensure the deploying SEAL PLTs were either deployed or progressing appropriately in their respective six-month block of training.⁸¹

Around the year 2000, NSW underwent a zero growth reorganization called Squadron 21 or Force 21. The primary purpose was to operationalize the SEAL Teams to be expeditionary commands capable of commanding and controlling their subordinate elements on deployment. The goals of Squadron 21 were deployment of more senior NSW leadership forward, unity of command overseas and standardization of training across the force. Additionally, NSW felt that it could gain efficiencies and streamline operating procedures by consolidating the training components and garrison support elements at the Group Level (one level above the SEAL Team). First, two new SEAL Teams (SEVEN and TEN) were created by taking two SEAL PLTs from every SEAL Team to build eight equal size SEAL Teams of six SEAL PLTs. Now an entire SEAL Team went through a revamped two year Inter Deployment Training Cycle (IDTC). IDTC consisted of four 6-month increments, individual professional development (PRODEV), Unit

⁸¹ Email from SEAL officer, NOV 2008.

Level Training (ULT), Squadron Integration Training (SIT) and deployment. The Group HQ established a Training Detachment (TRADET) that ran the SEAL Teams through Unit Level Training. Each SEAL Team reorganized itself into three SEAL Troops comprised of a small SEAL command and control element and two SEAL PLTs. During SIT and for deployment the SEAL Team transitions into a SEAL. The SEAL Squadron receives administrative and operational support enablers for its deployment. The Commanding Officer of the Squadron then task organizes his SEAL Troops based on the overseas operational requirements.⁸²

The subsequent reorganization did meet some of its original goals. SEAL Teams now have significantly more leadership overseas which in turn ensures better command and control representation in Special Operations Missions. SEAL Task Units became the new operational standard able to synchronize multiple elements against operational lines to affect an overall operational strategy. Likewise the SEAL Squadrons were able to focus on both operational and strategic operations for NSW in the assigned Area of Responsibility (AOR).

Current Operations.

As already noted, the SEALs are heavily involved in the fight in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Philippines. This is significant, as SEALs have migrated from their primary role as SOCOM's maritime SOF component and are now decidedly focused on ground combat operations. There has been a resultant organizational shift in philosophy, tactics, and resource investments. No where is this better showcased than in Ramadi, Iraq, where the SEALs established a Task Unit that broke new ground in building relationships with conventional Army Brigade Combat Teams, training and employing Host Nations forces (Combat FID), and used Counterinsurgency tactics to degrade insurgent capability. The SEALs worked with the Army to determine their needs and the results produced an unexpected victory in what was once called the most dangerous place in the world.⁸³

“The Task Unit Commander built relationships, determined the need and then had the guts to take casualties like Infantry,” a SEAL officer who fought in Ramadi stated. “He did not carpet bomb enemy objectives – he fought smart and offered the enemy an alternative.”⁸⁴

Dick Couch's excellent book on the fight – called “The Sheriff of Ramadi” - has one picture that is worth a thousand words: a SEAL who is wearing an Army uniform with the combat patch of the Army's 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment. The point being that the SEALs integrated with their Army brothers to produce a Joint effect. Absent was the “we/they” that permeates many military environments.⁸⁵

The war has also produced an unlikely friendship between competitors. “The good news is that the war has finally broken down the barriers between SF and the SEALs,” a SEAL officer said.⁸⁶

⁸² Email from SEAL officer, NOV 2008.

⁸³ Interview with SEAL officer who fought in the battle of Ramadi, MAR 2008, Sun Valley, Idaho.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Photo, Courtesy of the U.S. Army, in the “Sheriff of Ramadi,” by Dick Couch, published by the Naval Institute Press, 2008.

⁸⁶ Interview with SEAL officer who fought in the battle of Ramadi, MAR 2008, Sun Valley, Idaho.

His comments were echoed by Army Special Forces Soldiers in Iraq, who stated that the SEALs were a welcome addition to the ground fight.⁸⁷

Future Operations.

The future for NAVSPECWAR will include FID; and most SEALs will lobby for a sustained land presence. To support that presence, most will also state that they need more capability. Specifically, SEALs say that they need the staffing and enablers that will allow them to deploy and conduct command and control in austere environments.

“The future is expeditionary,” a SEAL Commander shared. “It is deploying with intelligence, medical assets, even doctors, lawyers and cops.”⁸⁸

“We are on the verge of becoming irrelevant,” one SEAL told me. “We have to grow an expeditionary capability. The Navy is going to have to ante up,” to support SEAL personnel and material growth.⁸⁹

The problem is that a deployed command and control node has a staff that may run over 100 people. Army SOF can meet that requirement. The Navy cannot.

“We have got to be able to position ourselves to run a CJSOTF,” another SEAL told me. “We do not bring enough (experienced bodies) to the table when it comes to manning a CJSOTF.”⁹⁰

“Due to numbers, we may be better position to contribute in CJSOTF-P (Philippines) or should there be a requirement for a CJSOTF Pakistan or Iran,” an officer opined.⁹¹

“Where that hurts us is in leader development,” a SEAL officer stated. “We have O-5s (the field grade rank of Commander) and below racking up combat time. O-6s (Navy Captains) – not that much. And that’s a problem.”⁹²

For the SEALs, the issue is contribution. The NAVSPECWAR community has something to offer to the fight and they strongly desire to carry their share of the burden.

Current Challenges.

Force Structure and Personnel. Current Challenges for NSW focus around force structure and personnel items – and rightly so, as in NSW, the most important asset is its people. Everything else revolves around them. The ability to accurately develop a budget for equipment, facilities, training venues and operations and maintenance (O&M) funds depend on the NSW community’s ability to understand its current and future manpower force structure requirements. For NSW, SOCOM and the United States Navy this is the single greatest challenge.

⁸⁷ Interview with CJSOTF officer, 25 SEP, Balad, Iraq.

⁸⁸ Interview with SEAL Commander, JUL 2008, Coronado, CA.

⁸⁹ Interview with SEAL officers, MAR 2008, Sun Valley, Idaho.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

As of November 2008 the approximate numbers for SEAL Officer, Enlisted, Limited Duty Officers (LDO), Chief Warrant Officers (CWO) and of authorizations for manpower and the current inventory of bodies are listed in the below table:

NSW Operators	Authorized	Inventory	% of Authorizations
SEAL Enlisted	2174	1852	85.19%
SEAL Officers	754	498	66.05%
SEAL Limited Duty Officers	48	35	72.92
SEAL Chief Warrant Officers	65	62	95.38%
SWCC Enlisted	822	692	84.18%
SWCC Chief Warrant Officers	33	17	51.52%
Totals	3896	3156	81.01%

As one can see, the NSW community is undermanned at every operator's position. These shortfalls were created by SEAL operator growth since 2000. Almost all of the SEAL operator growth has occurred at the experience positions, E6 and above and O-4 and above. While there has been a demand increase in experienced SEALs there has not been any growth in the number of SEAL platoons. Every enlisted and officer SEAL initially reports to a SEAL platoon. This is the means by which all SEALs gain their experience.⁹³

A SEAL platoon is a carefully balanced element of both new and experienced operators. The number of entry-level positions is balanced against the number of experienced operators to ensure the operational element is fully capable. In order for SEALs to be promoted there are leadership milestones that both the SEAL enlisted and officers must successfully complete. The junior milestones are SEAL Platoon Officer in Charge (OIC) (O-3 milestone), Leading Petty Officer (LPO) (E-6 milestone) and Chief Petty Officer (CPO) (E-7 milestone). In each of these cases, the number of SEAL Platoon leadership positions and their annual availability has not changed over the course of the last eight years.⁹⁴

Therefore with increased requirements at post SEAL Platoon LPO, CPO and OIC's these milestone positions have become choke points that limit the ability for the force to grow. Secondly, SEAL platoons only have so many entry-level positions for incoming accessions. All enlisted SEALs currently finish SEAL selection and training and are detailed to one of the 8 SEAL teams. There are currently 6 SEAL Platoons at each SEAL team, 48 total SEAL Platoons,

⁹³ Email from SEAL officer, NOV 2008.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

which operate on a two-year cycle. Each SEAL Platoon can only handle about 6 new enlisted SEALs per cycle, or every two years.

Consequently, NSW can only handle approximately 150 SEAL accessions a year. With annual attrition at approximately 130 enlisted SEALs a year; the ability for the SEAL community to grow is extremely limited. In the short term some NSW has assessed that it can handle 250 SEAL accessions a year but if sustained for more than two years there will be significant challenges as new enlisted SEALs will have to be double stuffed into billets for which there is no gear, training dollars or facilities to accommodate.

“In short, we need to grow the baseline numbers of Platoons to support feeding requirements,” one officer put it.

“We are striving to add one hundred extra SEALs per year – but not the extra guns, MILCON (buildings and such), NVDs (Night Vision Devices) and other equipment,” a SEAL stated.⁹⁵

The second problem is that SEALs, like the rest of SOF, are very hard to produce. Traditionally naval recruiting efforts only filled Basic Underwater Demolition School with approximately 600 qualified students. With attrition rates consistently above 75%, annual enlisted SEAL production has consistently produced approximately enough SEALs (120-150 enlisted SEALs) to offset its annual losses to retirements, resignations and other attrition factors. Beginning in 2005, the U.S. Navy and Naval Special Warfare significantly enhanced its recruiting efforts to try and increase the number of qualified SEAL candidates to begin training to approximately 1,000 per year. The assumption being that if attrition rates get better with refined selection and pre-SEAL training efforts, then annual SEAL production would increase to 220-250 a year. This would allow for an annual net growth of approximately 100 qualified SEALs a year. Therefore in 5-7 years the community would be 100% manned at FY08 requirements. But this growth comes with challenges outlined previously. NSW is an organization that primarily runs on its enlisted experience. The significant increase in new SEAL accessions significantly reduces the experience ratios in the SEAL Platoons.⁹⁶

A third challenge is that NSW support to operator ratio is woefully out of proportion. Consequently, NSW has to rely on individual augmentees from the Navy in order to function overseas. NSW classifies support personnel and the enablers they control in two categories, administrative support and operational support. To keep it simple, administrative support are those personnel and their gear, equipment or networks that can deploy forward to the most remote combat outpost but usually do not go on the objective during the operation. These personnel include intelligence analysts, mechanics, communications and IT specialists, engineers, administrative officers, dive technicians and others. They are critical to the daily operations cycle of the SEAL elements deployed. The second type of support is the operational support personnel.⁹⁷

Operational support is a relatively new capability that has exploded throughout SOF as

⁹⁵ Interview with SEAL officer, MAR 2008, Sun Valley, Idaho.

⁹⁶ Email from SEAL officer, NOV 2008.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

operational tactics have advanced with the fusion of technology, platforms, equipment and subject matter expertise needed on target to complement the SEAL operator. These include signal specialists, tactical close air support, dog handlers, interpreters, sensitive site exploitation experts and others. To meet the requirements of the deploying NSW Squadrons, the U.S. Navy provides approximately 180 personnel with various skills to enable NSW to function overseas. The vast majority of the personnel have never served in supporting capacity to SOF in their career and they usually show up less than 3 months prior to a SEAL Squadrons deployment. The vetting process for these individuals is limited which means there is usually a large quality spread of talent and not enough time to train with their SEAL Squadron on the tactics techniques and procedures prior to deployment. Recently NSW has started to grow the operational support personnel and the NSW identifier with the help of the Navy.

But there is still a problem: a lack of a career path for SEAL support personnel. “We cannot truly professionalize a capability unless we establish a growth path for intelligence and signals support,” an officer stated. “The Army has figured this out,” he continued. “For intelligence officers, for example, they have established a closed loop system that allows for repetitive assignments to SOF units and a promotion system that recognizes their contribution. The Navy? Nothing.”⁹⁸

The idea is that an intelligence analyst might serve three years with the SEALs and become an expert in targeting, SEAL tactics, and all things SOF. Then to progress in his career, that officer or NCO has to leave the SOF community to serve at sea (where he will not use what he learned with the SEALs) – never to return to NAVSPECWAR.⁹⁹

“The bottom line is that the Navy’s personnel system must change to support war as a steady state,” an officer offered.¹⁰⁰

But these operational support personnel are still limited in the time they spend in NSW without hurting their advancement opportunities in the Navy. Therefore they are forced to leave after one maybe two tours and usually do not come back to NSW which means that the money time and training that the individuals receive from NSW begins anew every 3-5 years. The small amount of organic support personnel and available augmentees from the Fleet limits the size and scope of leadership responsibility that NSW can have in the overseas Combined Joint Special Operations Task Forces.¹⁰¹

Resources and Programs. When the community reorganized, it exposed the significant gear, and support personnel shortfalls that were more easily hidden when a command only had to deploy two of its SEAL Platoons. The basis of issue (BOI) plan for a Squadron that now had to outfit an entire command with expeditionary equipment, coupled with rapid advancements in technology for the individual operators, left the community scrambling for resources to equip the SEAL Squadrons for deployments. After 9/11, supplemental funding was leveraged to pay for

⁹⁸ Interview with SEAL officer, 22 AUG 2008, Washington, DC.

⁹⁹ Interview with SOF personnel officer, JUL 2008, Coronado, California.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with SEAL officer, 22 AUG 2008, Washington, DC.

¹⁰¹ Email from SEAL officer, NOV 2008.

the significant training and equipment increases. Some of this money has been transitioned to baseline but more than 40% of the Operations and Maintenance (O&M) budget for the two SEAL Groups remains in the supplemental bills. This reliance on the supplemental for basic training, gear and deployment cost possess significant challenges for NSW should the supplemental go away. Currently NSW has the same number of SEAL PLTs deployed then it did before 9/11. Most of these PLTs are currently concentrated in Iraq at the expense of the other Geographic Combatant Commands (GCC's). The SEAL Squadrons and Task Units currently leverage OIF or OEF support in Iraq and Afghanistan respectively. This means NSW O&M is not being leveraged for garrison and food costs associated with the deployment. Should Iraq end tomorrow, the SEALs currently assigned to Iraq would reposition to other GCC's and the cost of care and feeding would come back to the SEAL Groups to cover, thereby increasing the O&M costs for NSW.¹⁰²

AFSOC – Fighting, Maintaining, and Replacing an Aging and Overworked Fleet.

In August of 1987, the 23rd Air Force (AF) moved to Hurlburt Field, Florida, in what was to be the first step in assuming duties as the special operations arm of SOCOM. Two years later, the Air Force, divested 23rd AF of its non-special operations units. Yet the 23rd AF still served a dual role - still reporting to Military Air Command, but also functioning as the air component to USSOCOM.¹⁰³

Then on 22 May 1990, Gen. Larry D. Welch, Air Force Chief of Staff, redesignated 23rd AF as Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) with headquarters at Hurlburt Field, FL. This action designated AFSOC as one of ten major Air Force commands, and the Air Force component of U.S. Special Operations Command.

AFSOC describes its mission as: America's specialized air power...a step ahead in a changing world, delivering special operations power anytime, anywhere.

The command provides Air Force special operations forces for worldwide deployment and assignment to regional unified commands. The command's SOF are composed of highly trained, rapidly deployable Airmen, conducting global special operations missions ranging from precision application of firepower, to infiltration, exfiltration, resupply and refueling of SOF operational elements.

AFSOC's unique capabilities include airborne radio and television broadcast for psychological operations, as well as aviation Foreign Internal Defense instructors to provide other governments with military expertise for their internal development. The command's special tactics squadrons combine combat controllers, special operations weathermen and pararescuemen with other service SOF to form versatile joint special operations teams.

The command's core missions include battlefield air operations; agile combat support; aviation Foreign Internal Defense; Information Operations; precision aerospace fires; Psychological Operations; specialized air mobility; specialized refueling; and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

¹⁰² Email from SEAL officer, NOV 2008.

¹⁰³ <http://www.afsoc.af.mil/library/afsoheritage/>

AFSOC has approximately 16,000 active-duty, Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard and civilian personnel. The command's active duty and reserve component flying units operate fixed and rotary-wing aircraft, including the CV-22, AC-130H/U gunships, C-130, EC-130, MC-130, U-28A, PC-12 and MH-53.

The command's forces are organized under two active-duty wings, one reserve wing, one National Guard wing, two overseas groups, and several direct reporting units.¹⁰⁴

Current Operations.

AFSOC is heavily invested in multiple facets of today's Global War on Terror (GWOT) and Irregular Warfare (IW). AFSOC provides air support to the Special Operations Component (SOC) in theater and currently supports operations in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF), Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), and Horn of Africa (HOA); averaging 6,000 sorties and 15,000 hours in providing this support. Over the course of a year, AFSOC receives more than 3,500 air support requests and supports nearly all of them. AFSOC also expends on average each year more than 120K rounds of munitions, transports more than 7.5M pounds of cargo and 20K passengers and offloads more than 200K of fuel. Moreover, AFSOC contributes each year to more than 600 enemies killed in action, more than 400 high value targets destroyed and more than 2,000 detainees captured.¹⁰⁵

The command is instrumental in advising AF, Joint and OSD on matters of IW. They are key to airpower's role in IW and advise on each level in the development of doctrine.

Future Operations.

The AFSOC Commander has laid out clear guidance with underlying tenets and priorities. There are two key tenets: (1) Employ the force to provide the full spectrum of AFSOC air power capabilities and (2) modernize the force to sustain operational readiness and future relevance.

The Commander's priorities are steeply leaned towards acquisition and modernization of capabilities that support his tenets:

- Recapitalize the MC-130 fleet
- Accelerate the CV-22 program
- Acquire the AC-27 gunship
- Accelerate Nonstandard Aircraft
- Fully develop ISR/PED capability
- Battlefield Airman transformation
- Improve institutional training

Along with this AFSOC commander guidance are underlying fundamental changes or shifts in the roles and missions that AFSOC performs. It is abundantly clear that the post 9/11 AFSOC has focused mostly on the GWOT and IW. Prior to this shift, AFSOC was attuned to "start fast, stay short missions...converted to start fast, stay for long time."¹⁰⁶ This long time frame shift requires persistent engagement with unique skill sets and places a tremendous burden on the

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.afsoc.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=5561>

¹⁰⁵ AFSOC A8X Documents dated 13 Nov 08

¹⁰⁶ AFSOC A5/8 brief 21 August 2008, p.11 AFSOC PowerPoint Briefing

low-density, high-demand force. Additionally, this persistence impacts AFSOC's aging fleet, much of which is Vietnam War vintage.

Growth in both existing and new missions as well as the onset of emerging missions is another theme for the post 9/11 force. Aviation Foreign Internal Defense (AvFID) has increased 100% during this time, ultimately doubling 6th Special Operations Squadron. The importance of this mission is not contested but the challenge to fill these billets may be a bit to ask an already overstretched organization; especially billets that are filled by the most experienced AFSOC personnel. Often the expertise needed to staff AvFID is needed presently in both Iraq and Afghanistan partnering with them to build and train their fledgling air forces. Another closely related operation to AvFID has been AFSOC's engagement with some of our allies on unmanned Aerial System Operations (UAS) with the hopes of building partner capacity in this growing system.

Perhaps and arguably one of the most important developments in the last few years has been the activation of an indigenous AFSOC UAS operation. AFSOC currently operates the MQ-1B Predator and the MQ-9 Reaper. The former is predominately an intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) platform with some strike capability and the latter can be considered a strike platform with ISR capability. Both weapons systems are dedicated for AFSOC support of SOCOM missions.

The addition of the ISR mission into AFSOC's portfolio has also added additional manpower requirements needed to support processing, exploitation and dissemination (PED) of ISR in the name of the 11th Intelligence Squadron. AFSOC may find itself in direct competition with other U.S. Air Force organizations for limited personnel and resources. It is safe to say that AFSOC will continue its rapid growth in this mission area.

Challenges.

Like the other components of SOCOM, AFSOC shares a laundry list of challenges. As one delves into understanding the command's issues, one begins to see that all of its major challenges center around manpower and funding – two hurdles that will continue to hamper AFSOC in its ability to grow in the manner needed based on mission requirements. Below is the aforementioned laundry list.

Aging Fleet. As mentioned earlier, much of the AFSOC aircraft fleet is from the Vietnam War era. In fact, AFSOC just retired an MH-53M Pave Low helicopter that participated in the famous Son Tay raid during the Vietnam War. This is the most difficult challenge AFSOC faces especially against the backdrop of a long war with changing and shifting roles and missions. With modernization being one of the AFSOC commander's priorities, they do have an ambitious recapitalization strategy.

The strategic decision to get out of the helicopter business was a major change in the way AFSOC saw the future of SOF mobility. This decision to get out of the helicopter business was for a variety reasons, including: the acquisition of the CV-22, the divestiture of CSAR and its aircraft (MH-60), the aging MH-53M fleet and finally a new host of future small mobility aircraft.

Amid the aggressive retirement of the aging MH-53M fleet is perhaps a more troubling problem, the persistent use of the MC-130, another low density/high demand (LD/HD) asset. Their overuse, flying 4X as many hours as planned or programmed, has accelerated routine maintenance and inspections and accelerating a critical airframe problem in the center wing box area, requiring an expensive and time demanding service-life extension program. Their

continuous use has created a sustainment downward spiral. These two aging aircraft issues (MH-53 retirement and MC-130 sustainment) also helped motivate a mobility transformation.

Mobility transformation. The current AFSOC lift capacity is far outstripped by the number of ground SOF personnel. AFSOC is not the only one that has experienced explosive growth; all of SOCOM's forces have seen rapid growth. As mentioned above, AFSOC has undergone a significant change regarding SOF mobility and since CY 2000, the command has suffered an aggregate loss in lift capacity.¹⁰⁷ It comes as no surprise then that three of the AFSOC Commander's priorities deal with SOF mobility transformation (recapitalize the MC-130 fleet; accelerate the CV-22 program and accelerate the non-standard aircraft program).

The MC-130E and P variants average more than 40 years old and AFSOC's MC-130H and W variants average 20 years old. AFSOC has an ambitious plan covering all models and variants that combine various service life extension programs, such as: wing replacements, next generation M-X, and converting to the common C-130J airframe and designating it as the MC-130J.

Accelerating the CV-22 program is an imperative to not only increase growth in mobility capacity but also prevents a gap caused by the loss of AFSOC rotary lift. AFSOC expects to meet full operational capability after 2015.

Finally, developing the non-standard aircraft program with its complement of light aircraft and leased medium aircraft will alleviate intra-theater mobility strains on the MC-130 fleet. The use of these aircraft to transport small teams and cargo improves upon efficiency and does not attract attention.

Ultimately, these three programs will go a long way in order to right size the air component in order to compliment ground and maritime SOF.¹⁰⁸

Fire support. Currently, AFSOC has 8 AC-130H and 17 AC-130U. The recent growth of special operations (two additional Special Operations Groups) and the fact that the current fleet is experiencing life cycle problems such as the center wing box necessitate AFSOC acquiring an additional precision fire capability. Both the USAF and SOCOM have approved the AC-27, using the common C-27 airframe. AFSOC anticipates a prototype by FY12 and an operational aircraft by FY15. The expected total fleet size is 12 aircraft.

Battlefield Airmen. Arguably, this group of SOF operators is the most recognizable to the other services on the battlefield yet is not well known within its own service. The AFSOC Special Tactics Teams (STS), consisting of: Combat Controllers, Pararescuemen, and Special Operations Weather are Air Power's tactical enablers who connect land/SOF with air. Formally, the STS mission is to "plan, prepare and when directed, integrate, synchronize, and control the elements of air and space power to execute air missions in support of President/SECDEF objectives."¹⁰⁹ In total, they provide several key competencies; however, their roles and missions are what make them key enablers: (1) support of ODA, SEALs, and Coalition SOF; (2) support theater assault zone requirements; (3) support SOF weather requirements; and (4) combat search and rescue (CSAR) in support of SOF. It becomes clear these Airmen are highly specialized, skilled and in most cases the most mature Airmen.

¹⁰⁷ ibid

¹⁰⁸ ibid

¹⁰⁹ Special Tactics Mission and Capabilities briefing, 21 August 2008, Hurlburt AFB, FL.

AFSOC has several challenges with its Battlefield Airmen. The greatest challenge is managing the explosive growth in requirements levied by SOCOM without all of the commensurate funding for manpower. As a result of this growth, AFSOC's Battlefield Airmen, e.g. its STS forces are manned at only 75%. This trend will in all likelihood continue as AFSOC faces emerging and expanding missions overall. Another key challenge AFSOC faces is the recruitment of these highly specialized Airmen (Combat ready 5-level takes anywhere from 19-months for a Combat Controller on the low end to 28-months for a SOF Weather Airman on the high end), especially when all of the services are recruiting from the same pool of highly talented American men and women. AFSOC faces an even greater challenge due to the lack of "name recognition" or brand names the other services have developed, e.g. SEALs, Green Berets and Ranger. Despite the challenges, AFSOC retention numbers remain a positive signal that their current recruiting and retention programs are gaining traction. It is our opinion that they will remain successful only if SOCOM manpower requirements and emerging and growing missions do not outstrip their efforts.

Global Force Posture. Another significant challenge facing AFSOC is the outcome of any global force posture review. Much of AFSOC's capabilities are enabled because of forward basing. In fact, one can argue if AFSOC should not have permanent forward basing in AFRICOM and CENTCOM. Nonetheless, the current force structure is changing and AFSOC still has to negotiate agreements in Japan and the UK for the basing of its CV-22 fleet now that the MH-53 fleet has been retired.

MARSOC – Upon Creation: an Immediate and Diversified Capability.

On 9 November 2001, General Charles R. Holland, Commander of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), and General James L. Jones, Commandant of the Marine Corps, signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the purpose of improving interoperability, cooperation and coordination by exploring areas of mutual interest.

The MOA most visibly resulted in a series of "USMC-SOCOM" Warfighters, service level conferences held at alternating headquarters (the first in January 2002 in Tampa followed by October 2002 in Quantico). The first Warfighter established several working groups whose members remained engaged between actual conferences: Training, Aviation, Operations, Equipment/Technology, Communications, Information Operations, Civil Affairs, Intelligence and Future Concepts to include Force Contribution. The Force Contribution working group received the greatest visibility, resulting in the first Marine General Officer assignment to USSOCOM (then Brigadier General Dennis "Denny" J. Hejlik), the addition of Marine Liaison Officers at the Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs) and ultimately the establishment of the USMC SOCOM Detachment One as a Proof of Concept (this was a Marine Special Operations Command under the operational control of USSOCOM that successfully deployed to Iraq with Naval Special Warfare Group One).¹¹⁰

After years of Warfighters and 'healthy' professional dialogue, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld directed the establishment of a Marine component to USSOCOM. As a result, the

¹¹⁰ Email with MARSOC officer, 28 FEB 2009.

United States Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC) was activated at Camp Lejeune on 24 February 2006.¹¹¹

SOCOM did not give the MARSOC much time to get up and running. Upon creation, the unit was essentially told to grow, evolve and get to the battlefield.

In order to both grow and operate simultaneously much of this capacity had to be built around extant Marine Corps units that already possessed many of the skillsets that would be required by Marine Special Operators – namely the Foreign Military Training Unit (now the MSOAG) and the two Force Reconnaissance Companies (now 1st and 2nd MSOB). The bottom line is that MARSOC is now and will remain scalable special operations, forward deployed and persistently present in peace and in war.¹¹²

That said, MARSOC is not remaining still – it is continually evolving.¹¹³ The concrete has yet to settle on the unit's role, and the MARSOC's contribution to SOCOM is migrating – with the potential to fill long avoided niches in the special operations community.

MARSOC's mission letter states that it “trains, organizes, equips; and when directed by CDRUSSOCOM, deploys task organized, scalable, and responsive US Marine Corps special operations forces worldwide in support of combatant commanders and other agencies.”

The unit's core tasks are Foreign Internal Defense (FID), Direct Action (DA), Special Reconnaissance (SR), Counterterrorism (CT), with a secondary task of Information Operations (IO).¹¹⁴

MARSOC is comprised of a component level headquarters and five subordinate elements; the Marine Special Operations School (MSOS), a Marine Special Operations Support Group (MSOSG); a Marine Special Operations Advisor Group (MSOAG), and two Marine Special Operations Battalions (MSOBs). While 1st MSOB is located at Camp Pendleton, CA, the HQ and remainder of MARSOC are located at Camp Lejeune, NC.

The MSOAG can be likened to an Army Special Forces Group – in organization and function. Organizationally, it is commanded by a Colonel who has two battalion-level commands underneath him, both commanded by Lieutenant Colonels. The Battalions further break down into three companies commanded by Majors, with each company containing three teams.

Functionally, the MSOAG is focused on the indirect approach by way of Foreign Internal Defense (FID) and Unconventional Warfare. Its subordinate units are regionally aligned, culturally attuned and language trained. The MSOAG “provides tailored military combat-skills training and advisor support for identified foreign forces in order to enhance their tactical capabilities and to prepare the environment as directed by USSOCOM. Marines and Sailors of the MSOAG train, advise and assist friendly host-nation forces -- including naval and maritime

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Interview with MARSOC leadership 14 AUG 2008.

¹¹⁴ USSOCOM Directive 10-1 (Terms of Reference – Roles, Missions, and Functions of Component Commands).

military and paramilitary forces -- to enable them to support their governments' internal security and stability, to counter subversion and to reduce the risk of violence from internal and external threats."¹¹⁵

The two MSOBs are more aligned with Army Ranger Battalions in that they have a direct action and reconnaissance focus. By mission letter, they also conduct counterterrorism (CT), FID and Information Operations (IO). Each battalion has four companies (called MSOCs) that are commanded by a Major. Each company has three 14-man teams, each commanded by a Captain.

The battalions are outfitted with the latest and best investments in combat equipment; and individual Marines are trained in a variety of skills, ranging from HALO (High Altitude Low Opening parachuting), SCUBA and specialized marksmanship training. The MSOBs claim their lineage from the Marine's Force Recon units.¹¹⁶

Marine Special Operations Support Group provides specified support capabilities for worldwide special operations missions as directed by MARSOC. The MSOSG specifically provides combined arms planning and coordination, K-9 support, special operations communications support, combat service support (including logistics) and all-source intelligence fusion capability. The MSOSG can deploy tailored support detachments as directed by MARSOC.

This group provides great value to the MARSOC, in that it gives it an impressive level of sustainability, especially in the area of all-source intelligence fusion.¹¹⁷

The success of MARSOC will in many ways depend on how it brings Marines into the SOF community. It is worth taking a more detailed look at how the Marine Special Operations School (MSOS) has taken its old Training Group and migrated it into a formal schoolhouse, ala the Special Forces Special Warfare Center at Ft. Bragg, NC.

The MSOS "performs the screening, recruiting, training, assessment and doctrinal development functions for MARSOC. It includes two subordinate Special Missions Training Branches (SMTBs), one on each coast. The SMTBs provide special operations training in tactics, techniques and procedures, and evaluation and certification of MARSOC forces to specified conditions and standards for SOF."

MSOS has taken a further step in creating a "roadmap" that outlines the training that an individual special operator receives from his initial entry to MARSOC to the end of his career.

The school's first ITC (Individual Training Course) commenced in October of 2008. The course, modeled after the Army's Special Forces Qualification Course, takes Marines and builds a "common culture and baseline" of skills.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Email from MARSOC officer, 28 FEB 09.

¹¹⁶ Visit to MSOB at Camp Lejeune, NC, 15 AUG 2008.

¹¹⁷ Visit to National Training Center to view MARSOC Raven exercise, JUL 2008.

¹¹⁸ Interview with MARSOC Training officer 14 AUG 2008.

The schoolhouse also has ten advanced and specialized courses – some are “legacy” courses from the training group days when units like the Force Recon trained “in house.” Other courses are new and geared to skill sets that allow for success across the spectrum of warfare, from special operations direct action to FID.

The school house also supports four company level exercises per year (called “Ravens”) that prepare MARSOC elements for deployment to the combat zone. The exercises brings all elements of the unit to be deployed - from the CJSOTF level to the SOTF, and all the way down to the four-man teams - integrating all components of the battlefield operating systems (from Unmanned Aerial Systems to HUMINT operations).

Taking another page from the Army SF handbook, the MARSOC has created a feeder system into the schoolhouse called Assessment and Selection. And like Army SF, the assessment portion had a high failure rate – one that hovers at 40%. More than half of that number are “boarded” for not possessing the resident attributes that will make for a successful special operator.

And that is an important part of the story, as the Marines began with the end in mind. Long before their first selection course, senior officers and enlisted sat down with behavior scientists to determine the attributes that they were looking for in a MARSOC operator. Painstakingly, they then designed a course that would allow evaluators to identify those with the desired attributes. So while the candidate might think that he is going through a hard physical event to determine his level of fitness, he is actually being evaluated on his character and psychological makeup. And while it is too early to tell if the course will hit its marks, it is encouraging to note that the MARSOC leadership will evaluate the course yearly and inject course changes as needed.¹¹⁹

Current Operations.

In the other component commands, operations in Afghanistan or Iraq are heavily highlighted. For MARSOC – a unit that already provided great value on the battlefield – an important part of the story is their organizational and functional growth as they enter the special operations family.

The Unit’s Mission. The MARSOC’s 2006 mission letter – provided by SOCOM – was generic enough to allow the Marines to grow into their strengths. But that proved to be a two-sided sword, as that same mission letter was not specific enough to provide detailed guidance as to what SOCOM wanted MARSOC to become. And that has implications that reverberate today.

“Look, we are not looking to be SEALs or Army SF,” one officer stated. “We are Marines, and no matter how this ends up, it is going to be different and it is going to add value.”¹²⁰

But where does that value lay? “ADM Olson says that ‘you bring your company level capability to the fight,’” one officer stated. “But we come from two cultures: the advisory culture from our

¹¹⁹ Visit to MARSOC, 15 AUG 2008.

¹²⁰ Interview with MARSOC leadership 14 AUG 2008.

Advisory Groups; and our direct action/reconnaissance capability from our Force Recon units. So what are we? Ranger Battalions or Special Forces Groups? Are we DA/SR or FID? We still must answer these two questions: who are we? And what to we want to be?”¹²¹

“What is MARSOC bringing to SOCOM?” another officer asked. “What is our niche? In the old days, we just went out there and got into the fight – we just figured it out under fire. Seems that SOCOM saw this and said ‘hey, you guys are good at this! Keep it up!’ But there are effects: DOTMLPF starts with the question ‘what do you want us to do?’”¹²²

A resourcing officer added that “the start up was good in a way, because it was not ‘here is what we need,’ but rather ‘here is what we do.’ That allowed us to put the FMTU right to work. And at the end of the day, SOCOM needed capability – and quick.”

“General Halleck used to say that ‘we are painting the car while driving it 60 mph,’” an officer said.¹²³ “But what happens when Afghanistan and Iraq go away?” another officer wondered. “Then what is our mission?”¹²⁴

Determining what MARSOC is to do has an impact on who is selected as a MAROC Marine. Currently, one size fits all – the Assessment and Selection process picks out Marines based on agreed upon attributes. But after that, “we create the 80% guy and then send him out.”¹²⁵ The thought being that with better-defined roles and missions, the schoolhouse can better assess, select and train its Marines.

Some senior MARSOC officers believe that the changing nature of the war in Afghanistan (where MARSOC is predominately utilized) will act as a forcing function. They feel that the current need is for direct action but that the future is the advisory mission. “The key to being relevant in the long term is to develop an Unconventional Warfare (UW) capability.”

And yet there seems to be a capability gap. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, with the SEALs predominantly fighting on the ground there is a question as to who “owns” the water. “No one is answering the requirement for maritime SOF,” one officer noted. “Who does what? Who adjudicates?”

Future Operations.

In the coming years, the MARSOC can expect to see continued deployments to Afghanistan, where they are adding great value to CJSOTF operations.¹²⁶ Company rotations will be the norm, with higher-level staff officers entering into CJSOTF staff positions in order to improve MARSOC SOTF level capability.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Interview with MARSOC officer 15 AUG 2008.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Interview with MARSOC Leadership 15 AUG 2008.

¹²⁶ Interview with CJSOTF Commander, Bagram, Afghanistan, 21 SEP 2008.

The schoolhouse will complete a massive MILCON project that will allow them to host all facets of MARSOC training. Admirably, the project allows for projected growth with hardened structures and facilities designed for future training concepts.

The MSOAG will most likely grow more teams and attempt to more closely mirror MSOBs structure. Despite the mission differences, the goal is to make the units more interchangeable in terms of organizational structure.

Challenges.

Assessment and Selection. As stated earlier, the chain of command for MARSOC worked hand-in-hand with behavior psychologists to determine the attributes that one needs to expect of a special ops Marine. But contrast that with the unit's search for its mission. One can expect that as MARSOC migrates to more defined roles and missions, the command may vary in what it is looking for in a Marine.

Well enough, but caution: do not throw the baby out with the bath water. Army Special Forces missions have changed in some ways – be that environment, mission direction, equipment and the like. And yet SF has largely sought and selected the “same guy” for over 50 years: an adaptive, ethical person who thrives in a complex and ambiguous environment.

The bottom line here is that the MARSOC may have this right. The challenge will be to find that line of continuity from mission to Marine.

Personnel. As one might expect, the MARSOC is wrestling with personnel issues. Though a basic tenet within SOCOM tends toward the “SOF for life,” the Marine Corps has agreed to five-year tours. At first blush this issue seems to present a concern for MARSOC, especially at the thought of losing a Marine after significant cultural, linguistic and operational investment.

But if there is a bottom line here, the MARSOC wants to train their Marines and keep them for a while to get a return on investment.

“We have read and studied 25 years of Army SF trying to get this done (MOS),” a Marine offered.¹²⁷

The thought is that if the MARSOC cannot hold onto a Marine for more than five years, then they are not going to learn the intricacies of COIN and UW; they are not going to foster resident knowledge in their community; and they will not grow mentors within their senior enlisted. Thus the push for an MOS. But some are reaching for the brass ring – a ‘closed loop’ system that allows MARSOC to keep enlisted and promote against other special operations MOS holders. Others however, doubt the utility of such a system; and most say that it is politically untenable.

Truthfully though, at the two year mark of being a component within USSOCOM, with its first ITC just underway, and with rank structures and Tables of Organization still solidifying, there may not yet be sufficient data points for either the Marine Corps or USSOCOM to start making a significant ruckus over this issue.

¹²⁷ Interview with MAROC personnel officer, 16 AUG 2008.

Another personnel related challenge concerns the competition between the Advisory Group and the Recon/Infantry community. To those on a promotion board, the Advisory Group Marine may get penalized, due to the perception of homesteading” (staying in one unit on one post and not moving around the Corps to take challenging new jobs). The board may also note that the Advisory Group NCOs deploy to Africa while their contemporaries are getting back-to-back tours to the combat zone. “At issue is educating the Marine Corps as to what goes on in MARSOC. We must demonstrate to the Corps that you are competitive for promotion if you come to MARSOC. If not, the conventional camps and the special ops camps will split – and that will effect who we recruit.”¹²⁸

One Marine said that recruiters and career monitors do not know about MARSOC. Overall, Marines know that if they come to MARSOC they will get put into the fight and hopefully get promoted. “But we need to articulate to recruits, monitors and promotion boards that the fight is broader than Afghanistan. It is Mauritania, it is Nigeria, and it is Somalia.”¹²⁹

MARSOC does intend to see a significant number of Marines promoted to fill its higher ranks, rotate into school and headquarters positions and continue the cycle by ultimately returning to its operational units. Of greater concern is the competition for appropriately qualified candidates to screen, recruit and assess, as this small pool of individuals is also being sought by other ‘niche’ communities within the Marine Corps. The likelihood of internal competition within MARSOC itself – between the Advisory Group and the Special Operations Battalions – will continue to lessen as greater and greater overlap between missions and requirements occurs and as ITC graduates progressively populate the ranks (understandably a little ways off).

On another vein, the MARSOC suffers from the same HD/LD problem that is plaguing her sister components – specifically intel analysts, tactical signals intelligence, HUMINT specialists and communications specialists.

If there is a bottom line to the MARSOC, it is that once activated, it provided immediate results; and while successful in adding value on the battlefield, it is still seeking to find its niche in the special operations community. But institutionally, Marines seem to do well with ambiguity.

As one Marine put it, “I am not sure what the MARSOC is going to look like in five years – and that excites me.”¹³⁰

Shaping Events and Issues.

Armed with a sense of how SOF has evolved since 9/11, one must now consider the environmental factors that will impact SOF now and over the next few years. Some have already been broached, such as the effect of a drawdown in Iraq in which SOF is left behind. Others have not been highlighted, like the importance of Unmanned Aerial Systems and the creation of AFRICOM. Despite the fact that this list is partial and subject to change, SOF must

¹²⁸ Interview with MARSOC officer, 16 AUG 2008.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Interview with MARSOC officer, 15 AUG 2008, Camp Lejeune, NC.

take these factors into account when considering roles and missions and the resources that will follow.

CONPLAN 7500 – Changing Emphasis from Direct to Indirect Actions.

When CONPLAN 7500 was initially briefed to Capitol Hill, the graphic depiction showed the two military lines of operation that represent the "direct approach" on top and the three lines representing the "indirect approach" on the bottom.

Over the past few years, SOCOM lobbied to flip the lines of operation so that the direct approach now rests on the bottom while the indirect approach has switched to the top. The command successfully argued that the visualization of CONPLAN 7500 should represent the true nature of the Department of Defense Global War on Terror Campaign Plan, in that the indirect approach should have primacy and that the direct approach is a supporting effort.

"The direct approach is largely military led. It is largely kinetic, chaotic, violent in nature," Admiral Olson stated. "We consider the direct approach to be important, urgent, necessary, but not decisive. It is a holding action that buys time for the indirect approach to have its decisive effect."¹³¹

That said, the end result on the ground is often hard to categorize. "It's tempting to try to categorize people or units or capabilities into being either direct or indirect," said Admiral Olson. "The same unit can be doing both approaches, even simultaneously, as we are doing when we train with and fight with Iraqi and Afghan counterparts." While such activity looks like the direct approach, it is very indirect in nature, as it enables U.S. partners to deal with their own problems. "This occurs all of the time," Admiral Olson stated, "and it is, to a large degree, defining what Special Operations is becoming in this new world in which we live."¹³²

AFRICOM and Special Operations in the Horn of Africa: Growing Pains and a Projected Need for More SOF.

On 1 October 2008, the United States Africa Command stood up as the Global Combatant Command responsible for conducting "sustained security engagement through military-to-military programs, military-sponsored activities and other military operations as directed to promote a stable and secure African environment in support of U.S. foreign policy."¹³³

AFRICOM's Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC) is Special Operations Command Africa – SOCAF. Commanded by an Army Brigadier General, SOCAF is co-located with its parent command in Stuttgart, Germany. SOCAF oversees operations throughout the continent of Africa, to include OEF-Trans-Sahara (a counterterrorism mission geared to improving regional capacity), and the efforts of a CJSOTF in the Horn of Africa (CJSOTF-HOA).

The creation of AFRICOM is a powerful statement by the U.S., essentially saying that America recognizes the strategic importance of Africa. The continent houses strategic minerals, vast oil

¹³¹ ADM Eric T. Olson in a speech delivered on 3 March 2008 at the Willard Hotel, Washington, DC.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ U.S. AFRICOM Brief, pg. 2, www.africom.mil.

deposits and untapped human capital. It is also the home to great poverty, tribal/ethnic strife and failed or failing states – an environment favored by radical extremists seeking safe havens from which to operate.

Stability in Africa, then, is a strategic concern for the United States. It is fortuitous that AFRICOM inherited a military presence in the Horn of Africa - a two-star command called Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa, or CJTF-HOA. The command's focus is on Humanitarian Assistance (HA), Maritime and Coastal Security, Civil Affairs, MED and VETCAPs (sending doctors and veterinarians to villages to conduct house calls), officer and non-commissioned officer training, counterterrorism and the training of elite forces.

As one might guess, SOF has the capability to play a large role in CJTF-HOA's mission. CJSOTF-HOA is co-located with CJTF-HOA at Camp Lemonier, Djibouti. It is commanded by a Special Forces Colonel and manned by a joint force that includes members of the 19th and 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and a sizeable number of Joint Manning Document (JMD) fills.¹³⁴

CJSOTF-HOA, small by comparison to her sister CJSOTFs in Iraq and Afghanistan, is busy. The command boasts of great activity in the region, from Joint Combined Exercises for Training (JCETs) to counterterror and counterdrug efforts. The classified nature of most of its missions precludes sketching out CJSOTF-HOA activities to any great depth, but the scope and reach of these military operations are impressive.

Furthermore, based on the intelligence reports, the need for SOF is likely to increase. It is very conceivable that special operations may play a role in addressing such problems as piracy in Somalia, a regional drug trade, money laundering and the well-documented challenges faced by Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia. There are some who even predict that HOA will be the next staging base for Al Qaeda.

If the command has an Achilles' heel, it is its relationship with the CJTF. In an unusual lash up, the CJSOTF is considered as "Special Staff" to the CJTF; not as a command. Adding to the confusion, some are unsure as to who is supposed to direct special operations and who is designated to support. "Are we TACON to the CJTF? Are we the 'supported command?' Are we 'supporting?' I am not entirely sure," one special ops officer questioned.¹³⁵

"We just do not want to be in a position to have to go to the CJTF and say 'mother may I,'" another officer said.¹³⁶

At issue is the role of the TSOC. And it is not isolated to HOA. In fact, the issue of commanding special operations arises in every theater of operations. Missions in Afghanistan and HOA, for example, have a rather complex approval processes (Iraq is much more straight forward).

¹³⁴ Interview with CJSOTF-HOA Commander, 30 SEP 2008 Camp Lemonier, Djibouti.

¹³⁵ Interview with CJSOTF-HOA staff officer, 30 SEP 2008, Camp Lemonier, Djibouti.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

In HOA, most special operators would prefer to be under the control of the TSOC, “and only inform the CJTF,” when executing missions. But when the two-star at the CJTF has been given responsibility for military operations in the entire region that may not be possible.¹³⁷

That said, perhaps the underlying issue is that the CJTF has a decided humanitarian focus and what seems to be an aversion to SOF. “Its all about Humanitarian Assistance, not pirates off the coast of Somalia,” an officer said. “The CJTF is run like a flotilla and it is afraid of SOF.”¹³⁸

Considering the challenges that face the region, the CJTF and the CJSOTF will need to work things out.

Command relationship issues are not the only issue that CJSOTF-HOA is wrestling with. Personnel shortages will continue to hamper the ability of the command to run at full steam – and like Iraq and Afghanistan, JMD positions are going unfilled.

This is not surprising when one considers that the TSOC (SOCAF) has only 90 of 187 authorized personnel. By comparison, SOCCENT - the TSOC that supports Central Command – has about 500 personnel.¹³⁹

“The big problem is the way ahead for SOCAF and CJSOTF-HOA,” an officer said.

Frankly, it is too early to pass judgment. SOCAF, while understaffed (at the time of the research visit in October of 2008, the command only had 90 of 187 authorized personnel), is burning the midnight oil to bridge the personnel and funding gaps experienced by CJSOTF-HOA. The TSOC is also engaged in ironing out command relationships between the CJTF and the CJSOTF. Considering the location of the CJSOTF and the importance of the region, all understand the value of reaching solutions sooner rather than later.¹⁴⁰

SOF Presence in the Philippines.

Over the past few years, the Philippines have been under pressure by such insurgent groups as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). To support the Philippine government and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in its counterinsurgency and counterterror efforts, the U.S. embedded a CJSOTF on the island of Zamboanga.

The unit, CJSOTF-P, is hailed as a model for the “indirect approach” as its efforts are largely non-kinetic, focusing instead on information operations, civil affairs and direct FID (wherein U.S. SOF trains AFP but does not go on combat missions with them).¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Interview with a USASOC officer at Ft. Bragg, NC, 15 AUG 2008.

CJSOTF-P operates with a light and inexpensive footprint, and yet it has been credited with helping the AFP change its tactics from infantry-styled direct action tactics to a more intelligence-driven approach to securing the populace.

As a result, the ASG had been degraded to just 200 insurgents who are being pursued by an AFP infantry brigade on what is essentially a twelve-mile long island that is about 1,000 miles from the capitol city of Manila.¹⁴²

ASG, which had a slew of fighters who learned their trade in Afghanistan, has suffered the decimation of its leadership. “Their top tier is old and experienced, but as they are killed or captured, there is no backbench ready to take their place. Younger fighters do not have enough experience, talent or ‘wasta’ (credibility) to take charge,” a government officer reported. “The argument that ‘if you take someone out, they will only be replaced’ does not apply in the Philippines.”¹⁴³

With ASG on the ropes, the big question is “when can we leave without jeopardizing the gains that we have made?”

The answer is “probably not yet.”

After ASG is under control, JI is still in the area. And despite the challenges that confront the insurgent group, it still represents a threat. And with a breakdown in negotiations between the Philippine government and the MILF, the CJSOTF can still add value.

But perhaps the hidden value of the SOF presence is its impact on China. “Relations are currently lopsided,” a government officer stated. “It is all CT and not big issues. But you cannot think of the Philippines without thinking of China.”¹⁴⁴

Within flying distance of Mainland China and close to Taiwan, the Philippines are also close to Chinese submarine lanes. The Chinese are mindful of the American presence.

Keeping a SOF presence may therefore be important on many levels, from the tactical to the strategic.

Full Motion Video (Unmanned Aerial Systems) – “PredPorn” and “Kill TV.”

The importance of Full Motion Video (FMV) in Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) has grown to the point that it is now seen as essential to conduct and approve military operations. In this war, the ability of troops to see over the horizon to identify terrain (human and physical), enemy formations, routes and other forms of general reconnaissance cannot be overstated. The need is showcased by the directive verbiage in the 2006 QDR, which directed the establishment of “a

¹⁴² Interview with a U.S. government officer, Washington, DC 1 MAR 2009.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

SOF unmanned aerial vehicle squadron to provide organic capabilities to locate and target enemy capabilities in denied or contested areas."¹⁴⁵

Currently, SOCOM's FMV UAS supports the National Mission Force. Other SOF have either limited assets or use "feeds" from conventional commands. In Afghanistan, the CJSOTF has only one orbit (an orbit is 24-hour coverage and usually consists of more than one UAS) of Full Motion Video (FMV) - a Shadow platoon at the Special Forces Group level. The system, while appreciated, is limited in capability, providing mainly force protection, battle damage assessment and quick reconnaissance for troops engaged in battle. "In a TIC (Troops in Contact) environment it is excellent," a CJSOTF officer in Afghanistan, stated. "But it is loud and low and easily detectable by the enemy. It is not a covert targeting system."¹⁴⁶ The requirement, as CJSOTF officers see it, is an extreme altitude, long duration, combat capable, covert capability. Most officers will say that each battalion level combat formation - or SOTF - needs its own FMV orbit; and in a perfect world, multiple systems, from the loud-and-low to the high altitude covert.

Based on the above, one might get the feeling that a lack of flying machines is the challenge that must be overcome. But as SOCOM officers are fond of saying, it is not the Predator drone or the Reaper plane that makes for success – it is the complete system, one that includes the civilian contractor who flies the drones (often from the United States), the analysts who make sense of the data, the specialists that manage the data and video networks, the mechanics and fuel personnel who maintain the vehicles and even the ramp space that hosts the crews and machines. If anything is missing or lacking, you do not have a functioning system. A simple thing such as contractor support can impact military capability. If a contractor cannot go forward to Afghanistan, Pakistan or the Horn of Africa, then you do not have FMV.

If anything, the flying machine may not be the critical piece. "We need to think about UAS differently," one officer stated. "In fact, we can use manned vehicles as easily as we can unmanned. We need to think in terms of capability. We can slap video or weapons under just about anything, so the trick is making packages that are essentially 'plug and play' on anything that flies."¹⁴⁷

In an unusual twist, the biggest problem with FMV UAS is its use in resourcing and approving missions. "It is now to the point that if you do not have FMV to watch your mission, then your mission does not get approved," an NCO said. That can be problematic when, as stated, a CJSOTF may only have one feed – and they have to compete for it.

And there is another problem: "the FMV handcuff." A CJSOTF NCO explained, "In the old days, the dude on the ground made the call. We hired that squad leader or company commander to be the Ground Commander – and what he said was the law. Now you got some jackass back in

¹⁴⁵ 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, pg 45.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with CJSOTF officer, 22 SEP 2008 Bagram, Afghanistan.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with SOCOM officer, 26 FEB 2009, Tampa, FL.

Tampa watching FMV – which is essentially like watching the action through a soda straw – trying to impact actions of the objective.”¹⁴⁸

A story was related about a Ranger Battalion Squad Leader (usually a Staff Sergeant) who was moving his men towards an enemy objective when an officer watching his maneuver by FMV ordered him to “tighten your wedge” (essentially ordering him to modify his movement formation). “After the mission, in the hotwash (the after action review held back in the CJSOTF headquarters) the NCO confronts the officer, telling him that he had better never give him an order again unless ‘you are gonna put your boots on the ground and insert with me.’ He was fired, of course.”¹⁴⁹

While it is clear that FMV is here to stay, what is unclear is how it is best used. The combat laboratories of Afghanistan and Iraq will create lessons learned that will result in TTPs (tactics, techniques and procedures) for FMV use. One hopes that we are learning the right lessons.

Pakistan.

Recently, it has been revealed that Special Forces units are training members of the Frontier Corps in Pakistan. SOCCE FWD-PAK is currently advising and assisting the Pakistanis in infantry tactics, counterinsurgency methods, communications and information operations. Reports in the press are generally correct and by all accounts the SF Soldiers are achieving good effects.¹⁵⁰

Some SOF officers believe that while we are succeeding in transferring military knowledge to the Pakistanis, we still have a long way to go in terms of building relationships and trust. They say that we are behind the power curve due to restrictions regarding military-to-military contact (note: many would say the same is true for Indonesia).

“Because of our concerns (rightly) over nuclear weapons and human rights we cut off military contacts and lost the long term relationships that are essential for having access and influence,” an officer stated. “Compare Pakistan and Indonesia with Colombia and the Philippines. The long term SF - Colombian military relationship and the SF – Armed Forces of the Philippines relationship was built on trust and personal contact through years and years of persistent engagement and have led to numerous successes against the FARC and the ASG/JI (Abu Sayyaf Group/ Jemaah Islamiyah). The hostage rescue by the Colombians was an excellent example of a successful operation planned and executed by the Colombian military - but it was the result of years of engagement and sharing of expertise that helped to influence their operation. It was truly an example of the benefits of the indirect approach and long term persistent engagement.”¹⁵¹

And yet even in an unrestricted environment, there are challenges to maintaining mil-to-mil contacts.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with CJSOTF Fires NCO, 22 SEP 2008, Bagram, Afghanistan.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Email from Special Forces officer, 1 MAR 2009.

¹⁵¹ Email from Special Forces officer, 1 MAR 2009.

“Because of Afghanistan and Iraq we are losing the ability to develop those long-term relationships. With 7th SFG deployed to Afghanistan half the year, their ability to engage has suffered and more importantly the future is being mortgaged in Central and South America because our younger generation of SF soldiers are spending more time in Afghanistan than in SOUTHCOM. We have to fight and win the wars we are in but we have to also realize that the heavy commitment of SF to CENTCOM will have generational effects. We need to realize that. There will be no substitute for this because the GPF cannot by nature and organization assume this role.”¹⁵²

Another consideration concerning Pakistan is the possibility of direct U.S. action against Al Qaeda and the Taliban in the Waziristan/Swat regions. Most believe Predator Drone attacks and U.S. commando raids to be counter productive; but not everyone.

“If we showed up in the FATA (the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan) to hunt AQ, the Pakistanis would say ‘well, we figured you were going to show up eventually’ and they would deal with it,” an officer said. “Americans in the tribal areas – no one will care. The only difference will be that the sanctuary enjoyed by our enemies will be gone.”¹⁵³

Regardless of the policy decisions to be rendered, SOF’s role in Pakistan will likely remain constant.

Strategic Choices.

On 2 November 2007, the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) hosted a roundtable event to flesh out the main issues confronting SOF as a way of providing a starting azimuth for research. The conversation introduced the main "conventional wisdoms" that have bubbled up since 9/11. Subsequent field research discounted some of the topics of discussion that emanated from the roundtable; other topics were confirmed; and still others showed differences in interpretation depending on how the topic was viewed at the tactical, operational and strategic levels.

This section will identify the main issues that will confront policy makers in the next few years, providing them with a better understanding of the larger choices to be made.

SOF Must “Right-size” Growth to Support Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) 2006 Increases. The 2006 QDR dictated substantial growth in personnel and equipment for Special Operations Command (SOCOM) and its component commands. These increases, however, have not been "right-sized" to meet the current and future demands on SOF - nor are the assets and enablers to support 2006 QDR growth keeping pace with that demand. In addition, the present force structure across the board is stressed by the current deployment cycle. Men and material are beginning to feel the results of constant combat deployments. As a result, the 2010 QDR needs to focus on heavily "right-sizing" growth to support 2006 gains as well as growing SOF across the spectrum to meet emerging missions.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Interview with special operations officer, 22 SEP 2008, Bagram, Afghanistan.

SOF Must Strike Balance Between the Direct and the Indirect Approaches. The relative balance between direct and indirect operations impacts budgets, authorities, and roles and missions. The direct approach is military-led and focuses on neutralizing violent extremist organizations by capturing or killing their leaders and disrupting their infrastructure. The indirect approach is the process of enabling partners to combat violent extremist organizations by eroding the underlying support for these ideologies and by fostering conditions that are inhospitable to violent extremists. Conventional wisdom holds that the special operations community has not struck an effective or appropriate balance between the direct and indirect approaches—that the majority of resources and energy are still devoted to exercises, programs, and capabilities that emphasize the direct approach. While the case for imbalance may be overstated, the need to address this issue is not.

SOF and General Purpose Forces (GPF) Must Seek a Division of Labor. As SOF responsibilities grow, policymakers and military leaders will need to determine where GPF can take on SOF roles and where SOF has a comparative advantage. In March of 2008, Admiral Olson stated that with regards to traditional SOCOM missions, "there are really very few countries in the world where you can put a brigade combat team to do a train and assist mission. In most of the countries of the world, access is gained through low profile operations, keeping it out of the newspapers, working in small unit to small unit level kinds of engagement."¹⁵⁴ But with the pressure to seemingly be everywhere and do everything at once, a resource-constrained SOCOM will struggle to meet demands. The Department of Defense took an important step in providing guidance by issuing the DoD Irregular Warfare Directive 3000.07. SOCOM and Joint Forces Command's recently created Joint Irregular Warfare Center must strive to strike a balance in terms of doctrine, efforts, and enablers.

SOCOM Must Evaluate SOF Roles and Missions to Address Duplication and Balance Resources. Seven years into the Global War on Terror, SOCOM tactical units are heavily engaged in direct and indirect actions around the world. The war has acted as an accelerator of sorts with all elements making dramatic leaps in combat applications and development. However, there is still some confusion as to who should be doing what. For example, the SEALs are now a trusted member of the special operations land component – with some question as to their role at sea. Should the SEALs become a land-based component, Marines might fulfill the role of maritime special operators.

The resources balance between the various sectors of special operations is also in question as the ambiguity in roles and missions persists. There is some danger that the emphasis on meeting current land-based demands could skew the long-term institutional structure of SOF.

SOF Must Conduct Acquisition at the Speed of War. SOF has traditionally been in the lead of rapidly taking equipment and putting it into the hands of its operators. At the major program level, this is still true, as SOCOM's acquisition professionals are pushing the edges of their Congressionally mandated authorities to rapidly bring new special operations air frames and submersibles into the inventory.

¹⁵⁴ ADM Eric T. Olson in a speech delivered on 3 March 2008 at the Willard Hotel, Washington, DC.

Unfortunately, that same speed is not being applied to the individual operator. A lack of acquisition executives with special operations experience combined with a risk-adverse approach to bringing new "soldier systems" on board have dramatically slowed the procurement process. The Army's Rapid Equipping Force has bypassed SOCOM to the point that some SOCOM operators bemoan the fact that the conventional units are better equipped. SOCOM needs to reverse this trend and bring back the days of SOF primacy in the arena of combat development and acquisition.

DoD Must Ensure Enabler and Logistics Support for SOF Remaining in Iraq as

Conventional Forces Withdraw. It is clear that the conventional military forces that are now in Iraq will draw down in the near future. It is likely that SOF will not be drawing down. In fact, it is conceivable that the demand for SOF will increase.

SOF, however, does not have the logistics architecture to support such prolonged deployments. Basing, messing, fuel, motor pools, medical facilities, ammunition resupply, and base security - to name a few areas of concern - reside within the conventional force. Civilian and military leaders alike will have to make value judgments as to what the conventional military leaves behind. Perhaps it is time to resurrect the forgotten "5th SOF Truth" written by Colonel (Retired) John Collins over twenty years ago: "most special operations require non-SOF assistance."¹⁵⁵

SOCOM Must Receive More Authority to Manage and Recruit Personnel. The 2006 QDR was generous to SOCOM, adding over 13,000 people to its rolls.¹⁵⁶ Unfortunately, this generous authorization in manpower has been challenging to fulfill due to the assessment and selection criteria for special operations personnel and the arduous training involved once they are selected. Once selected, the Services retain a strong voice in the management of these special operators. SOCOM should have more of a say in how they are managed.

The issue extends to SOF-trained personnel such as intelligence analysts. Once trained by SOF, they should either be brought into a closed loop system or given a skill identifier to increase the likelihood of retaining hard learned skills in the SOF community.

Recommendations - Five Big Ideas. The findings and issues above hint at some of the recommendations that are offered below. While there are many recommendations that can be offered, five stand out:

Encourage SOCOM to Reevaluate Component Roles and Missions. In a time of decreasing budgets, the demise of the wartime supplemental, and confusion in the field as to who is to do what, it is necessary for SOCOM to reevaluate the missions it expects the component commands to execute.

Increase Interagency Participation in Special Operations. The early days of the fight in Afghanistan offers a model of interagency special operations. Army Special Forces and CIA

¹⁵⁵ Colonel Collins wrote the "Five SOF Truths," which first appeared in a House Armed Services Committee print entitled *United States and Soviet Special Operations*, 28 April 1987. Congressman Earl Hutto signed the Foreword that contains Fifth Truth.

¹⁵⁶ ADM Eric T. Olson in a speech delivered on 3 March 2008 at the Willard Hotel, Washington, DC.

officers used their unique talents and Congressional authorities to great effect. This relationship must continue to evolve and include other members of the interagency as well. Ideas such as permanently seconding a Special Forces unit to the CIA must be explored, as should creating Joint Interagency Operational Detachment Alphas made up of Army Special Forces and members of the interagency (like CIA, the Department of State, or Department of the Treasury). A new entity that is still breaking ground, MARSOC could be used as an “interagency special operations laboratory” to test relationships and validate tactics, techniques and procedures. Such efforts will allow for a melding of Titles 10, 22, and 50 during the conduct of operations.

Dramatically Increase SOF to Meet Future Demands. SOCOM must match the missions that they expect SOF to conduct to the forces and enablers that are required. At a time when the Defense budget is likely to be slashed and when the nation is under so much fiscal strain this will make for a hard sell. But the return on investment offered by SOF is undeniable; as is SOF’s role in what will likely be a future of persistent presence, persistent engagement and shaping operations. Steps such as dramatically increasing the number of Special Operations Aviation Regiment airframes, formalizing the creation of a Special Operations Aviation Training Battalion, adding another Ranger Battalion (and manning Ranger Squads at nine Soldiers), increasing MARSOC personnel authorizations by 3-5% per year, bolstering Civil Affairs, and growing more in house enablers like Unmanned Aerial Systems and intelligence analysts are prudent choices for the Department of Defense and SOCOM to make in this financial and security environment.

Establish a Permanent Position on the Joint Chiefs of Staff for a Special Operations Flag Officer. Refitting our Services to conduct military operations in a constrained economic environment while continuing to suppress extremism will require the empowerment of SOF. All of the Services currently have elements organized under SOCOM. While SOCOM sits as a Combatant Command, it is not adequately represented at the JCS level in the Pentagon where the uniformed Services conduct strategy planning and resourcing decisions. There have been discussions in past years of creating a completely separate Service for SOF to address this shortfall in representation. While this has some appeal as a means to address the current and future military challenges, it is not appealing in an environment of constrained resources. The Services have significant organization, support and logistic tails, which SOF would have to recreate at significant cost in terms of both resources and time. A more timely effect could be achieved by having a Four Star SOF representative sit on the JCS as an equal partner. This would provide SOF with top-level representation in the discussion of roles and responsibilities as well as resources in the current fight. The recent inclusion of the National Guard in this capacity and the longstanding inclusion of the U.S. Marine Corps provide ample precedent.

Restructure the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict and Interdependent Capabilities (ASD SO/LIC & IC) to Report Directly to the Secretary of Defense. The ASD SO/LIC & IC is currently organized under the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy. At a time when ASD SO/LIC & IC is functioning as the Secretary of Defense’s primary advisor on SOF and countering extremists, this is ineffective. This advice and oversight extends across all the Services and Agencies of the Department. As

such, ASD SO/LIC & IC should be elevated to a level where oversight and coordination can more effectively include all aspects of the Department.