



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

Andrew Feickert

Specialist in Military Ground Forces

Thomas K. Livingston

Air Force Fellow

March 28, 2011

Congressional Research Service

7-5700

www.crs.gov

RS21048

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 28 MAR 2011		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2011 to 00-00-2011	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF): Background And Issues For Congress				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Congressional Research Service,The Library of Congress,Independence Ave SE,Washington,DC,20540				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 12	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

Summary

Special Operations Forces (SOF) play a significant role in U.S. military operations, and the Administration has given U.S. SOF greater responsibility for planning and conducting worldwide counterterrorism operations. U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) has close to 60,000 active duty, National Guard, and reserve personnel from all four services and Department of Defense (DOD) civilians assigned to its headquarters, its four components, and one sub-unified command. The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) directs increases in SOF force structure, particularly in terms of increasing enabling units and rotary and fixed-wing SOF aviation assets and units. USSOCOM Commander, Admiral Eric T. Olson, in commenting on the current state of the forces under his command, noted that since September 11, 2001, USSOCOM manpower has nearly doubled, the budget nearly tripled, and overseas deployments have quadrupled; because of this high level of demand, the admiral added, SOF is beginning to show some “fraying around the edges” and one potential way to combat this is by finding ways to get SOF “more time at home.” Admiral Olson also noted the effectiveness of Section 1208 authority, which provides funds for SOF to train and equip regular and irregular indigenous forces to conduct counterterrorism operations.

Vice Admiral William McRaven, the current commander of the Joint Special operations Command (JSOC) has been recommended by the Secretary of Defense for nomination to replace Admiral Olson, who is retiring this year, as USSOCOM Commander. USSOCOM’s FY2012 Budget Request is \$10.5 billion—with \$7.2 billion in the baseline budget and \$3.3 billion in the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) budget, representing an increase of seven percent over the FY2011 Budget Request of \$9.8 billion.

There are potential issues for congressional consideration. U.S. SOF in Iraq are in the process of transitioning counterterror operations in Iraq to Iraqi SOF and lessons learned could assist Congress in its oversight role. Another issue is that on January 6, 2011, Secretary of Defense Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen announced starting in FY2015, the Army would decrease its permanently authorized endstrength by 27,000 soldiers and that the Marines would lose anywhere between 15,000 to 20,000 Marines. Because USSOCOM draws their operators and support troops from the Services—primarily from the non-commissioned officer (NCO) and junior officer ranks—USSOCOM will have a smaller force pool to draw its members from. In addition, because the Services will have fewer troops, they might not be as receptive to USSOCOM recruitment efforts in order to keep high-quality NCOs and junior officers in their conventional units. Another implication is that these force reductions might also have an impact on the creation and sustainment of Army and Marine Corps “enabling” units that USSOCOM is seeking to support operations.

Another potential issue involves initiatives to get more “time at home” for SOF troops to help reduce stress on service members and their families. One of the major factors cited by USSOCOM leadership regarding “time away from family” is that SOF does not either have access to or the appropriate types of training facilities near their home stations, thereby necessitating travel away from their bases and families to conduct pre-deployment training. While the creation of additional local SOF training facilities might seem to be an obvious solution to this problem, the availability of land for military use as well as existing environmental regulations could make it difficult for USSOCOM to create new training facilities or modify existing facilities to suit SOF training requirements.

Contents

Background	1
Overview	1
Command Structures and Components	1
Expanded USSOCOM Responsibilities	1
Army Special Operations Forces	2
Air Force Special Operations Forces	3
Naval Special Operations Forces	4
Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC)	4
Marine Corps Force Structure Review	5
Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC).....	5
NATO Special Operations Headquarters.....	5
Current Organizational and Budgetary Issues	6
Pending Change in USSOCOM Leadership	6
2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report SOF-Related Directives	6
2012 USSOCOM Defense Authorization Request and Posture Hearings	7
FY2012 USSOCOM Budget Request	8
Possible Issues for Congress.....	8
Transition to Iraqi Special Operations Forces	8
Potential Impact of Army and Marine Corps Downsizing	8
Initiatives to Increase SOF “Days at Home”	9

Contacts

Author Contact Information	9
----------------------------------	---

Background

Overview

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

Command Structures and Components

In 1986 Congress, concerned about the status of SOF within overall U.S. defense planning, passed measures (P.L. 99-661) to strengthen special operations' position within the defense community. These actions included the establishment of USSOCOM as a new unified command. USSOCOM is headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, FL. The Commander of USSOCOM is a four-star officer who may be from any military service. The current commander is Navy Admiral Eric T. Olson, who reports directly to the Secretary of Defense, although an Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict and Interdependent Capabilities (ASD/SOLIC&IC) provides immediate civilian oversight over many USSOCOM activities.

USSOCOM has about 58,000 active duty, National Guard, and reserve personnel from all four services and Department of Defense (DOD) civilians assigned to its headquarters, its four components, and one sub-unified command.¹ USSOCOM's components are the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC); the Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM); the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC); and the Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC). The Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) is a USSOCOM sub-unified command.

Expanded USSOCOM Responsibilities

In addition to its Title 10 authorities and responsibilities, USSOCOM has been given additional responsibilities. In the 2004 Unified Command Plan, USSOCOM was given the responsibility for synchronizing DOD plans against global terrorist networks and, as directed, conducting global operations against those networks.² In this regard, USSOCOM "receives, reviews, coordinates and prioritizes all DOD plans that support the global campaign against terror, and then makes recommendations to the Joint Staff regarding force and resource allocations to meet global

¹ Information in this section is from "Fact Book: United States Special Operations Command," USSOCOM Public Affairs, February 2011, p. 7. DOD defines a sub-unified command as a command established by commanders of unified commands, when so authorized through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to conduct operations on a continuing basis in accordance with the criteria set forth for unified commands. A subordinate unified command may be established on an area or functional basis. Commanders of subordinate unified commands have functions and responsibilities similar to those of the commanders of unified commands and exercise operational control of assigned commands and forces within the assigned joint operations area.

² "Fact Book: United States Special Operations Command," USSOCOM Public Affairs, February 2011, p. 4.

requirements.”³ In October 2008, USSOCOM was designated as the DOD proponent for Security Force Assistance (SFA).⁴ In this role, USSOCOM will perform a synchronizing function in global training and assistance planning similar to the previously described role of planning against terrorist networks. In addition, USSOCOM is now DOD’s lead for countering threat financing, working with the U.S. Treasury and Justice Departments on means to identify and disrupt terrorist financing efforts.

Army Special Operations Forces

U.S. Army SOF (ARSOF) includes approximately 28,500 soldiers from the Active Army, National Guard, and Army Reserve who are organized into Special Forces, Ranger, and special operations aviation units, along with civil affairs units, psychological operations units, and special operations support units. ARSOF Headquarters and other resources, such as the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, are located at Fort Bragg, NC. Five active Special Forces (SF) Groups (Airborne),⁵ consisting of about 1,400 soldiers each, are stationed at Fort Bragg and at Fort Lewis, WA, Fort Campbell, KY, Fort Carson, CO, and Eglin Air Force Base, FL. Special Forces soldiers—also known as the Green Berets—are trained in various skills, including foreign languages, that allow teams to operate independently throughout the world. In December 2005, the 528th Sustainment Brigade (Special Operations) (Airborne) was activated at Ft. Bragg, NC, to provide combat service support and medical support to Army special operations forces.⁶

In FY2008, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) began to increase the total number of Army Special Forces battalions from 15 to 20, with one battalion being allocated to each active Special Forces Group. In August 2008, the Army stood up the first of these new battalions—the 4th Battalion, 5th Special Forces Groups (Airborne)—at Fort Campbell, KY.⁷ The Army expects that the last of these new Special Forces battalions will be operational by FY2013.⁸ Two Army National Guard Special Forces groups are headquartered in Utah and Alabama. An elite airborne light infantry unit specializing in direct action operations⁹, the 75th Ranger Regiment, is headquartered at Fort Benning, GA, and consists of three battalions. Army special operations aviation units, including the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), headquartered at Fort Campbell, KY, feature pilots trained to fly the most sophisticated Army rotary-wing aircraft in the harshest environments, day or night, and in adverse weather.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Information in this section is from testimony given by Admiral Eric T. Olson, Commander, U.S. SOCOM, to the House Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee on the Fiscal Year 2010 National Defense Authorization Budget Request for the U.S. Special Operations Command, June 4, 2009.

⁵ Airborne refers to “personnel, troops especially trained to effect, following transport by air, an assault debarkation, either by parachuting or touchdown.” Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, 12 April 2001, (As Amended Through 31 July 2010).

⁶ “Fact Book: United States Special Operations Command,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, February 2011, p. 13.

⁷ Sean D. Naylor, “Special Forces Expands,” *Army Times*, August 11, 2008.

⁸ Association of the United States Army, “U.S. Army Special Operations Forces: Integral to the Army and the Joint Force,” *Torchbearer National Security Report*, March 2010, p. 3.

⁹ Direct action operations are short-duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments, as well as employing specialized military capabilities to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover, or damage designated targets. Direct action differs from conventional offensive actions in the level of physical and political risk, operational techniques, and the degree of discriminate and precise use of force to achieve specific objectives.

Some of the most frequently deployed SOF assets are civil affairs (CA) units, which provide experts in every area of civil government to help administer civilian affairs in operational theaters. The 95th Civil Affairs Brigade (Airborne) is the only active CA unit; all other CA units reside in the Reserves and are affiliated with conventional Army units. Military Information Support Operations units disseminate information to large foreign audiences through mass media. The active duty 4th Military Information Support Group (MISO), (Airborne) is stationed at Fort Bragg, and two Army Reserve MISO groups work with conventional Army units.

Air Force Special Operations Forces¹⁰

The Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) is one of the Air Force's 10 major commands with over 12,000 active duty personnel and over 16,000 personnel when civilians, Guard and Reserve personnel and units are included. While administrative control of AFSOC is overseen by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF), operational control is managed by the USSOCOM Commander. AFSOC units operate out of four major continental United States (CONUS) locations and two overseas locations. The headquarters for AFSOC, the first Special Operations Wing (1st SOW), and the 720th Special Tactics Group are located at Hurlburt Field, FL. The 27th SOW is at Cannon AFB, NM. The 352nd and 353rd Special Operations Groups provide forward presence in Europe (RAF Mildenhall, England) and in the Pacific (Kadena Air Base, Japan) respectively. The Air National Guard's 193rd SOW at Harrisburg, PA, and the Air Force Reserve Command's 919th SOW at Duke Field, FL, complete AFSOC's major units. A training center, the U.S. Air Force Special Operations School and Training Center (AFSOTC), was recently established and is located at Hurlburt Field. AFSOC conducts the majority of its specialized flight training through an arrangement with Air Education and Training Command (AETC) via the 550th SOW at Kirtland AFB, NM. AFSOC's four active-duty flying units are composed of more than 100 fixed and rotary-wing aircraft.

In March 2009, Headquarters AFSOC declared initial operational capability (IOC)¹¹ for the CV-22.¹² USSOCOM plans for all 50 CV-22s to be delivered to AFSOC by 2015.¹³ Since 2009, AFSOC has completed three overseas deployments, to Central America, Africa, and Iraq, and continues to be engaged currently in overseas contingency operations. Despite critical reviews of the aircraft, AFSOC considers the CV-22 "central to our future."¹⁴ AFSOC operates a diverse fleet of modified aircraft. Of 12 major design series aircraft, 7 are variants of the C-130, the average age of some of which is over 40 years old and date from the Viet Nam era. Because of the age of the fleet, AFSOC considers recapitalization one of its top priorities.

AFSOC's Special Tactics experts include Combat Controllers, Pararescue Jumpers, Special Operations Weather Teams, and Tactical Air Control Party (TACPs). As a collective group, they are known as Special Tactics and have also been referred to as "Battlefield Airmen." Their basic

¹⁰ Information in this section is from Lt Gen Wurster's presentation to the Air Force Association, September 14 2010. http://www.afa.org/events/conference/2010/scripts/Wurster_9-14.pdf and "Fact Book: United States Special Operations Command," USSOCOM Public Affairs, February 2011.

¹¹ According to DOD IOC is attained when some units and/or organizations in the force structure scheduled to receive a system 1) have received it and 2) have the ability to employ and maintain it.

¹² The CV-22 is the special operations version of the V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft used by the Marine Corps.

¹³ USSOCOM Acquisitions and Logistics office, <http://www.socom.mil/soal/Pages/FixedWing.aspx>.

¹⁴ For further detailed reporting on the V-22 program, see CRS Report RL31384, *V-22 Osprey Tilt-Rotor Aircraft: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Jeremiah Gertler.

role is to provide an interface between air and ground forces, and these airmen have very developed skill sets. Usually embedded with Army, Navy, or Marine SOF units, they provide control of air fire support, medical and rescue expertise, or weather support, depending on the mission requirements.

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

Naval Special Operations Forces¹⁵

The Naval Special Warfare Command (NSWC) consists of about 8,800 military and civilian personnel and is located in Coronado, CA. NSWC is organized around 10 SEAL Teams, two SEAL Delivery Vehicle (SDV) Teams, and three Special Boat Teams. SEAL Teams consist of six SEAL platoons each, consisting of two officers and 16 enlisted personnel. The major operational components of NSWC include Naval Special Warfare Groups One, Three, and Eleven, stationed in Coronado, CA, and Naval Special Warfare Groups Two and Four and the Naval Special Warfare Development Group in Little Creek, VA. These components deploy SEAL Teams, SEAL Delivery Vehicle Teams, and Special Boat Teams worldwide to meet the training, exercise, contingency and wartime requirements of theater commanders. SEALs are considered the best-trained combat swimmers in the world, and can be deployed covertly from submarines or from sea and land-based aircraft.

Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC)¹⁶

On November 1, 2005, DOD announced the creation of the Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) as a component of USSOCOM. MARSOC consists of three subordinate units—the Marine Special Operations Regiment, which includes 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Marine Special Operations Battalions; the Marine Special Operations Support Group; the Marine Special Operations Intelligence Battalion; and the Marine Special Operations School. MARSOC Headquarters, the 2nd and 3rd Marine Special Operations Battalions, the Marine Special Operations School, and the Marine Special Operations Support Group and the Marine Special Operations Intelligence Battalion are stationed at Camp Lejeune, NC. The 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion is stationed at Camp Pendleton, CA. MARSOC forces have been deployed worldwide to conduct a full range of special operations activities. By 2014, MARSOC is planned to have about 3,000 marines, sailors, and civilians.

¹⁵ Information in this section is from “Fact Book: United States Special Operations Command,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, February 2011, pp. 20-21.

¹⁶ Information in this section is from “Fact Book: United States Special Operations Command,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, February 2011, p. 37.

Marine Corps Force Structure Review¹⁷

In the fall of 2010, the Marines Corps conducted a force structure review that focused on the post Operation Enduring Freedom [Afghanistan] security environment. This review had a number of recommendations for Marine forces, including MARSOC. The review called for strengthening MARSOC by more than 1,000 Marines including a 44% increase in critical combat support and service support Marines. It is currently not known how these proposed increases will translate into additional capabilities and new force structure and how much these proposed additions will cost.

Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC)

According to DOD, the JSOC is “a joint headquarters designed to study special operations requirements and techniques; ensure interoperability and equipment standardization; plan and conduct joint special operations exercises and training; and develop joint special operations tactics.”¹⁸ While not officially acknowledged by DOD or USSOCOM, JSOC, which is headquartered at Pope Air Force Base, NC, is widely believed to command and control what are described as the military’s special missions units—the Army’s Delta Force, the Navy’s SEAL Team Six, the 75th Ranger Regiment, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment and the Air Force’s 24th Special Tactics Squadron.¹⁹ JSOC’s primary mission is believed to be identifying and destroying terrorists and terror cells worldwide.

A recent news release by the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) News Service which names Vice Admiral William McRaven as Admiral Olson’s successor seemingly adds credibility to press reports about JSOC’s alleged counterterrorism mission. The USASOC press release notes: “McRaven, a former commander of SEAL Team 3 and Special Operations Command Europe, is the commander of the Joint Special Operations Command. As such, he has led the command as it “ruthlessly and effectively [took] the fight to America’s most dangerous and vicious enemies,” Gates said.”²⁰

NATO Special Operations Headquarters²¹

In May 2010, NATO established the NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ), which is commanded by U.S. Air Force Lieutenant General Frank Kisner, who had previously commanded U.S. Special Operations Command—Europe (SOCEUR). The NSHQ is envisioned to serve as the core of a combined joint force special operations component command, which would be the proponent for planning, training, doctrine, equipping, and evaluating NATO special operations

¹⁷ “Reshaping America’s Expeditionary Force in Readiness: Report of the 2010 Marine Corps Force Structure Review Group,” March 14, 2011.

¹⁸ USSOCOM website <http://www.socom.mil/components/components.htm>, accessed March 19, 2008.

¹⁹ Jennifer D. Kibbe, “The Rise of the Shadow Warriors,” *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 83, Number 2, March/April 2004 and Sean D. Naylor, “JSOC to Become Three-Star Command,” *Army Times*, February 13, 2006.

²⁰ U.S. Army Special Operations Command News Service, “Gates Nominates McRaven, Thurman for Senior Posts,” Release Number: 110303-02, March 3, 2011, <http://www.soc.mil/UNS/Releases/2011/March/110303-02.html>.

²¹ Information in this section is taken from Carlo Muñoz, “SOCEUR Chief Pegged: Air Force Two-Star to Head Up New NATO Special Ops Headquarters,” *Inside the Air Force*, May 28, 2010 and NATO Fact Sheet, “NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ),” accessed from <http://www.NATO.int> on July 1, 2010.

forces from 22 countries. The NSHQ is located with the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Mons, Belgium, and will consist of about 150 NATO personnel.

Current Organizational and Budgetary Issues

Pending Change in USSOCOM Leadership²²

Vice Admiral William McRaven, the current commander of JSOC, has been recommended for nomination to replace Admiral Olson (who is retiring this year) as USSOCOM Commander. From the U.S. Army Special Operations Command News Service:

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates is recommending that President Barack Obama nominate Vice Adm. William McRaven for a fourth star and to the position of commander, U.S. Special Operations Command. ... Gates made the recommendations during a Pentagon press briefing March 1. If confirmed by the Senate, McRaven would succeed Navy Adm. Eric Olson, who has headed the command since 2008.

2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report SOF-Related Directives²³

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

- To increase key enabling assets²⁴ for special operations forces.
- To maintain approximately 660 special operations teams;²⁵ 3 Ranger battalions; and 165 tilt-rotor/fixed-wing mobility and fire support primary mission aircraft.
- The Army and USSOCOM will add a company of upgraded cargo helicopters (MH-47G) to the Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment.
- The Navy will dedicate two helicopter squadrons for direct support to naval special warfare units.
- To increase civil affairs capacity organic to USSOCOM.
- Starting in FY2012, purchase light, fixed-wing aircraft to enable the Air Force's 6th Special Operations squadron to engage partner nations for whose air forces such aircraft might be appropriate, as well as acquiring two non-U.S. helicopters to support these efforts.

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

²³ Information in this section is from Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review Report, February 2010.

²⁴ Enabling assets are a variety of conventional military units that are assigned to support special operations forces.

²⁵ These teams include Army Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha (ODA) teams; Navy Sea, Air, and Land (SEAL) platoons; Marine special operations teams, Air Force special tactics teams; and operational aviation detachments.

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

2012 USSOCOM Defense Authorization Request and Posture Hearings²⁶

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

- USSOCOM totals close to about 60,000 people with about 20,000 of whom are career members of SOF, meaning those who have been selected, trained, and qualified as SOF operators.
- Since September 11, 2001, USSOCOM manpower has nearly doubled, the budget nearly tripled, and overseas deployments have quadrupled. As an example, Admiral Olson noted that as 100,000 US troops came out of Iraq, fewer than 1,000 were from SOF and at the same time there was a requirement to move about 1,500 SOF to Afghanistan. As a result of this high demand for SOF, Admiral Olson stated that SOF is “fraying around the edges” and “showing signs of wear” but still remains a fundamentally strong and sound force.
- Admiral Olson further noted a slight increase in mid-career special operations troops with 8 to 10 years of service opting to leave the service.
- One of the key actions that USSOCOM is taking is to get SOF more “days at home” and predictability and part of that effort is trying to relieve SOF members of jobs or responsibilities that can be done by other individuals or units.
- One key problem that USSOCOM faces that contributes to fewer “days at home” for SOF personnel is the lack of readily available, local ranges so that SOF can conduct pre-deployment training. Such a lack of local ranges means that SOF operators have to “travel to train” which further increases their time away from home.
- USSOCOM is also developing a force generation system that will better interface with the Service’s force generation systems which is intended to provide better, more optimized force packages to the Geographic Combatant Commanders.
- Section 1208 authority (Section 1208 of P.L. 108-375, the FY2005 National Defense Authorization Act) provides authority and funds for U.S. SOF to train and equip regular and irregular indigenous forces to conduct counterterrorism operations. Section 1208 is considered a key tool in combating terrorism and is directly responsible for a number of highly successful counter-terror operations.

²⁶ CQ Congressional Transcripts, Senate Armed Services Committee Holds Hearings on the Fiscal 2012 Defense Authorization Requests for the U.S. Special Operations Command and the U.S. Central Command, March 1, 2011 and Posture Statement of Admiral Eric T. Olson, USN, Commander, United States Special Operations Command Before the 112th Congress House Armed Services Committee March 3, 2011.

- Regarding equipment, USSOCOM is fielding the first of 72 planned MH-60M helicopters; is on the path to recapitalize the gunship fleet with AC-130J models; and the MC-130J program is on track to replace aging MC-130Es and MC-130Ps. USSOCOM plans to award a competitive prototype contract later this year for the Combatant Craft- Medium (CCM) to replace the Special Warfare Rigid Hull Inflatable Boat (RHIB) and has also realigned funds from cancelled programs to fund the development of a family of Dry Submersibles that can be launched from surface ships or specialized submarines.

FY2012 USSOCOM Budget Request

USSOCOM's FY2012 Budget Request is \$10.5 billion—with \$7.2 billion in the baseline budget and \$3.3 billion in the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) budget.²⁷ This represents an increase of seven percent over the FY2011 Budget Request of \$9.8 billion. USSOCOM has long maintained that it represents about 2% of the Department of Defense budget and provides maximum operational impact for a limited investment. Another one of SOCOM's perceived benefits is that its components take proven, service-common equipment and modify it with SOF funding for special operations-unique capabilities.

Possible Issues for Congress

Transition to Iraqi Special Operations Forces²⁸

Reports suggest that after years of training by U.S. SOF, Iraqi SOF are now taking the lead in counterterrorism operations in Iraq. The almost 4,100 member Iraqi SOF are now planning and conducting their own missions with U.S. SOF providing some intelligence assistance and post-mission advice. Some maintain that this represents a highly successful effort in building Iraq's indigenous counterterrorism capabilities from the ground up. Congress might examine the lessons learned from training and equipping Iraqi SOF for use in future oversight activities.

Potential Impact of Army and Marine Corps Downsizing²⁹

On January 6, 2011, Secretary of Defense Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen announced that starting in FY2015, the Army would decrease its permanently authorized endstrength by 27,000 soldiers and that the Marines would lose anywhere between 15,000 to 20,000 Marines, depending on their force structure review. These downsizings have implications for USSOCOM. The first is that because USSOCOM draws their operators and support troops from the Services (primarily from the non-commissioned officer (NCO) and junior

²⁷ Information in this section is from the United States Special Operations Command FY2012 Budget Estimates, February 2011 and Posture Statement of Admiral Eric T. Olson, USN, Commander, United States Special Operations Command Before the 112th Congress House Armed Services Committee March 3, 2011.

²⁸ Thomas Erdbrink, "In Iraq, U.S. Special Forces Gearing Up to Leave," *Washington Post*, March 24, 2011.

²⁹ Unless otherwise noted, information in this section is taken from U.S. Department of Defense News Transcript, "DOD News Briefing with Secretary Gates and Adm. Mike Mullen from the Pentagon" January 6, 2011. <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4747>.

officer ranks) USSOCOM will have a smaller force pool to draw its members from. In addition, because the Service will have fewer troops, they might not be as receptive to USSOCOM recruitment efforts in order to keep high-quality NCOs and junior officers in their current units. Another implication is that these force reductions might also affect the creation and sustainment of Army and Marine Corps “enabling” units that USSOCOM is seeking to support operations. In this particular circumstance, Congress might decide to examine with the Services and USSOCOM how these downsizing efforts might affect the creation of enabling units.

Initiatives to Increase SOF “Days at Home”

Because USSOCOM growth is limited due to the high entrance standards for SOF candidates, while requirements to deploy SOF are likely to continue at the current rate, efforts to increase SOF “days at home” to decrease stress on SOF and their families will probably need to focus on times when SOF units are at their home stations. One of the major factors cited by USSOCOM leadership is that SOF units do not always have access to appropriate training facilities near their home stations, thereby necessitating travel away from their bases to conduct pre-deployment training. Given these circumstances, Congress might act to review USSOCOM proposals to improve the situation, whether by giving SOF priority access to existing training facilities, by modifying existing facilities to accommodate SOF training, or by building new SOF-dedicated training facilities closer to SOF bases. Factors that could limit efforts to improve SOF local training include the availability of land for military use, as well as existing environmental regulations that can preclude certain SOF-related training activities.

Author Contact Information

Andrew Feickert
Specialist in Military Ground Forces
afeickert@crs.loc.gov, 7-7673

Thomas K. Livingston
Air Force Fellow
tlivingston@crs.loc.gov, 7-0432