



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

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Summary

Special Operations Forces (SOF) play a significant role in U.S. military operations and the Administration has given U.S. SOF greater responsibility for planning and conducting worldwide counterterrorism operations. 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. The USSOCOM Commander, Admiral Eric T. Olson, in commenting on the current state of the forces under his command noted that SOF forces are deployed to more than 75 countries and 86% of these forces are in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. Admiral Olson also noted ongoing growth in SOF units and aviation assets and the effectiveness of Section 1208 authority, which provides funds for SOF to train and equip regular and irregular indigenous forces to conduct counterterrorism operations. USSOCOM's FY2011 budget request for \$9.8 billion has been recommended by the House and Senate Armed Services Committees for full funding, and both committees have also recommended additional funding for unfunded requirements.

Afghan-related issues include the impact of new command relationships as well as rules of engagement, which have limited SOF nighttime raids targeting insurgent leadership. These SOF raids have been characterized as being highly successful, even though on some occasions they have resulted in civilian casualties. U.S. SOF have been given the mission of training Afghan Civil Order Police. A more controversial mission involves up to 23 Special Forces Operational Detachments – Alphas (ODAs) training local militias in remote areas of Afghanistan to fill a security void. Potential issues for congressional consideration include how command relationships and rules of engagement are affecting special operations in Afghanistan and whether training police and militias is the best use of U.S. SOF.

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Background

Overview

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

Command Structures and Components

In 1986 Congress, concerned about the status of SOF within overall U.S. defense planning, passed measures (P.L. 99-661) to strengthen its position. 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 service. Commander, USSOCOM 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 57,000 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.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 requirements.”³ In October

¹ Information in this section is from “Fact Book: United States Special Operations Command,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, February 2009, 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 2010, p. 6.

³ *Ibid.*

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 30,000 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), consisting of about 1,400 soldiers each, are stationed at Fort Bragg and at Fort Lewis, WA, Fort Campbell, KY, and Fort Carson, CO. The 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) currently stationed at Ft. Bragg will be moving to Eglin Air Force Base, FL by September 2011 as mandated by the 2005 Base Closure and Realignment Act.⁵ 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 Army 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.

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 Henry Cuningham, "Delays in 7th Group Move Could be Costly," *Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, November 7, 2008.

⁶ "Fact Book: United States Special Operations Command," USSOCOM Public Affairs, February 2010, p. 11.

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. Psychological operations units disseminate information to large foreign audiences through mass media. The active duty 4th Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) Group (Airborne) is stationed at Fort Bragg, and two Army Reserve PSYOPS groups work with conventional Army units. USSOCOM has recently decided to replace the term “psychological operations” and instead adopt the term “Military Information Support Operations,” or MISO, instead.¹⁰

Air Force Special Operations Forces

The Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) includes about 13,000 active and reserve personnel. AFSOC is headquartered at Hurlburt Field, FL, along with the 720th Special Tactics Group, the 1st Special Operations Wing (SOW) and the U.S. Air Force Special Operations School and Training Center.¹¹ The 27th SOW is located at Cannon Air Force Base (AFB), NM. The 352nd Special Operations Group is at RAF Mildenhall, England, and the 353rd Special Operations Group is at Kadena Air Base, Japan. Reserve AFSOC components include the 193rd SOW, Air National Guard, stationed at Harrisburg, PA, and the 919th Special Operations Wing, Air Force Reserve, stationed at Duke Field, FL. AFSOC’s three active-duty flying units are composed of more than 100 fixed and rotary-wing aircraft.

Naval Special Operations Forces¹²

The Naval Special Warfare Command (NSWC) 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. NSWC has approximately 5,400 total active-duty personnel—including 2,450 SEALs and 600 Special Warfare Combatant-Craft Crewmen (SWCC)—as well as a 1,200-person reserve component of approximately 325 SEALs, 125 SWCC and 775 support personnel. 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.

¹⁰ Associated Press, “Army Opts for a Neutral Name,” *New York Times*, July 3, 2010.

¹¹ Information in this section is taken from “Fact Book: United States Special Operations Command,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, February 2009, p. 27.

¹² Information in this section is from “Fact Book: United States Special Operations Command,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, February 2009, p. 18 and the U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command Website, <http://www.navsoc.navy.mil>, accessed March 19, 2009.

Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) ¹³

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, 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 are stationed at Camp Lejeune, NC. The 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion is stationed at Camp Pendleton, CA. MARSOC forces have been deployed world-wide to conduct a full range of special operations activities.

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.”¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ JSOC’s primary mission is believed to be identifying and destroying terrorists and terror cells worldwide.

Newly Established NATO Special Operations Headquarters¹⁶

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

¹³ Information in this section is from “Fact Book: United States Special Operations Command,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, February 2010, p. 37.

¹⁴ USSOCOM website <http://www.socom.mil/components/components.htm>, accessed March 19, 2008.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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.

Current Organizational and Budgetary Issues

2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report SOF-Related Directives¹⁷

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

- To increase key enabling assets for special operations forces.
- To maintain approximately 660 special operations teams;¹⁸ 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.

2010 USSOCOM Posture Statement¹⁹

In March 2010, USSOCOM Commander Admiral Eric T. Olson testified to the House and Senate Armed Service Committees, providing them with an update of the current state of U.S. SOF. Key points emphasized by Admiral Olson included the following:

- Of the more than 12,000 SOF and SOF support forces deployed daily to more than 75 countries, 86% of these forces are in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility and under their operational control.
- USSOCOM is growing organic combat service and service support units to support special operations forces to include communications, information support specialists, forensic analysts, military working dog teams, and intelligence experts, to name but a few. In FY2011, this will represent a growth of about 2,700 personnel.
- 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

¹⁷ Information in this section is from Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review Report, February 2010.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ Admiral Eric T. Olson, "FY 2011 USSOCOM Posture Statement," U.S. Special Operations Command, March 4, 2010, p. 2.

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.

- In cooperation with the Army, USSOCOM will grow its helicopter fleet by eight MH-47 Chinooks by FY2015; fielding is almost complete for upgraded MH-47G and MH-60M helicopters. USSOCOM currently has 12 CV-22 Osprey aircraft and hopes to add 5 more aircraft this year.

FY2011 USSOCOM Budget Request

USSOCOM's FY2011 Budget Request is \$9.8 billion—with \$6.3 billion in the baseline budget and \$3.5 billion in the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) budget.²⁰ Among other things, this request is intended to support FY2011 USSOCOM growth of 2,787 military and civilian personnel allocated as follows:

- U.S. Army Special Operations Command: 1,638 personnel;
- Air Force Special Operations Command: 1,119 personnel;
- Naval Special Warfare Command: 26 personnel; and
- Marine Corps Special Operations Command: 4 personnel.

House Armed Services Committee Mark-Up: H.R. 5136, National Defense Authorization Act for FY2011²¹

The House Armed Services Committee (HASC) recommended fully funding USSOCOM's \$9.8 billion budget request and included an additional \$301.5 million for USSOCOM unfunded requirements, including tactical vehicles, operational enhancements, and special operations technology, as well as expanding counterterrorism support authorities. Recognizing the benefits of the 1208 Authority program, the HASC recommended expanding the program and authorized up to \$50 million for the program. The HASC was encouraged by the steps being taken by the Department of Defense to address special operations rotary wing requirements, but there was concern that proposed solutions would not provide adequate relief fast enough and that continued shortfalls could affect future operations. The HASC encouraged the Secretary of Defense and USSOCOM Commander to aggressively identify and implement solutions to address SOF rotary wing shortfalls, including non-standard aviation platforms and aviation foreign internal defense activities.

²⁰ Information in this section is from the United States Special Operations Command FY2011 Budget Estimates, February 2010.

²¹ Summary of H.R. 5136, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011, May 2010, pp. 23-24.

Senate Armed Services Committee Mark-Up: H.R. 5136, National Defense Authorization Act for FY2011²²

The Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) recommended fully funding USSOCOM's \$9.8 billion budget request and included an additional \$113.4 million, as opposed to the HASC, which recommended \$301.5 million (\$188.1 million difference) for USSOCOM unfunded requirements. These unfunded requirements included ground mobility vehicles, deployable communications equipment, thermal and night vision goggles, the Special Operations Combat Assault Rifle (SCAR), and non-lethal weapons technologies. The SASC also expanded the requirement for USSOCOM to provide quarterly reports on the use of Combat Mission Requirement fund to satisfy urgent operational needs.

Afghanistan-Related Issues

A Change of Command Relationship for U.S. SOF

A March 4, 2010, decision by Secretary of Defense Gates, which gave operational control of most U.S. SOF as well as all Marine Forces to the former Commander of NATO's International Security Forces (ISAF) U.S. Army General Stanley McChrystal, has raised a number of issues.²³ U.S. SOF affected by this decision are Theater Mission Forces. Theater Mission Forces are assigned or attached to Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs)—in this case the Combined Special Operations Component Command – Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A), which was under the operational control of Special Operations Command – Central (SOCCent). Theater Mission Forces are intended to develop long-term military relationships in Afghanistan and provide special operations support to combatant commanders. National Mission Forces were not affected by this decision and remain under the control of the Commander of USSOCOM. National Mission Forces conduct highly sensitive and often secretive operations of national importance.

Some press reports have suggested that this change was made because of an alleged large number of civilian casualties resulting from U.S.-led SOF night missions, as well as a lack of unity of effort, as SOF often operated independently in Afghanistan's various regional commands.²⁴ U.S. defense officials have denied that this move was made for reasons other than improving overall unity of command. One of the concerns of this new command arrangement is that SOF units would be disaggregated and used by General Purpose Forces commanders within their regional commands, as well as SOF command and control organizations such as CFSOCC-A would have no role in the employment of Theater Mission Forces.

²² Senate Armed Services Committee Press Release, "Senate Armed Services Committee Completes Mark Up of National Defense Authorizations Act for Fiscal Year 2011," U.S. Senate, May 28, 2010, pp. 19-20.

²³ Sean D. Naylor, "Change at the Top: Special Forces, Marines in Afghanistan Come Under McChrystal's Control," *Army Times*, March 29, 2010, pp. 16-17.

²⁴ Carlo Muñoz, "Unity of Effort Sought – Official: New Special Ops Guidance Not Sparked by Casualty Concerns," *Inside the Air Force*, March 26, 2010, and Sean D. Naylor, "Change at the Top: Special Forces, Marines in Afghanistan Come Under McChrystal's Control," *Army Times*, March 29, 2010, pp. 16-17.

Another concern is that this new command arrangement was a result of an earlier decision by General McChrystal to limit not only U.S.-led SOF night missions, but also air and artillery strikes in order to hopefully lessen civilian casualties, which was viewed as a necessary step to support the U.S. counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan. USSOCOM Commander, Admiral Eric Olson, reportedly has expressed concerns that counterinsurgency has “become more focused on operations to protect the local populace and less on finding, capturing, and killing insurgents.”²⁵ These views are seemingly shared by many U.S. service members in the ranks who view current rules as too restrictive, playing into the hands of the insurgents who are aware of these rules and use them to negate superior U.S. firepower, resulting in more U.S. casualties.²⁶ It is not known whether General McChrystal’s successor, General David Petraeus, who approved these rules of engagement when he was Commander of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), will continue to abide by these rules or adopt a less restrictive approach. During his Senate confirmation hearing, however, General Petraeus stated that the protection of his troops was a moral imperative and that he would closely review current restrictions.²⁷

U.S. SOF Direct Action Against Afghan Insurgents²⁸

Despite limitations on SOF night raids under current rules of engagement, reports suggest that U.S. SOF efforts to capture or kill senior insurgent leaders have been highly effective. Senior U.S. military officials have stated that raids by SOF have killed or captured 186 insurgent leaders and detained an additional 925 lower-level insurgents in the past 110 days. These raids have reportedly been most effective in and around Kandahar; officials have seen indications that improvised explosive device (IED) attacks have decreased and that Taliban control appears to be weakening. Senior NATO officials note that intelligence suggests that SOF missions aimed at provincial insurgent leaders has compelled some Taliban leaders to begin internal discussions about accepting the Karzai government’s offer of reconciliation. It has also been reported that a number of insurgent leaders have left their bases in Afghanistan to seek sanctuary in Pakistan because of the raids.

While SOF raids have resulted in civilian casualties and collateral damage, military officials who have tracked the raids note that on about 80% of these raids, no shots are fired as U.S. SOF and Afghan commando units have achieved tactical surprise, usually at night. SOF reportedly carry out an average of five raids per day against a constantly updated list of high-value targets. A little over half of the time, the raid captures or kills its intended high-value target. If the intended target is not present, however, SOF have rounded up other insurgents who have provided valuable intelligence.

²⁵ Carlo Muñoz, “SOCOM Commander Concerned Over Direction of Pentagon COIN Strategy,” *Inside the Navy*, May 31, 2010.

²⁶ Robert H. Reid, “Petraeus Faces Complaints on War Rules,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 26, 2010.

²⁷ Elisabeth Bumiller, “Petraeus Pledges Look at Strikes in Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, June 30, 2010.

²⁸ Information in this section is taken from Thom Shanker and Alissa Rubin, “Quest to Neutralize Afghan Militants is Showing Glimpses of Success, NATO Says,” *New York Times*, June 29, 2010 and David S. Cloud and Julian E. Barnes, “Afghan War Strategy May Change,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 2010.

Training Afghan Police²⁹

As a means of reducing the high attrition rate and to improve unit performance, senior U.S. military leadership in Afghanistan directed U.S. SOF to provide additional training and establish long-term partnerships with a number of Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) units. To address the high attrition rate—ranging from 50% to 140%—U.S. SOF trainers put the ANCOP Kandaks (a battalion sized organization of about 500 personnel) on a red-amber-green training cycle similar the cycle adopted by Afghan commando units previously trained by U.S. SOF. It is hoped that the new cycle, which provides for rest, refit, education, and training opportunities as well as training by and partnering with SOF, will enable these units to be employed in anticipated future military operations around Kandahar. ANCOP units are intended to augment Afghan National Police (ANP) units and are generally considered better trained, more effective, and more professional than the ANP.

Training Village Security Forces³⁰

A reportedly long-advocated U.S. SOF strategy to train and equip Afghan villagers is set to be enacted in about 23 rural areas in Afghanistan beyond the reach of U.S. and Afghan regular forces. The program, known as “The Village Stabilization Program,” is expected to be approved by Afghan President Karzai in the next few weeks. It calls for organizing, equipping, and training local militias that would then be placed under the control of local Afghan police chiefs. Army Special Forces Operational Detachment – Alphas (ODAs) would oversee these efforts. It is hoped that these village militias will counteract Taliban forces, but past U.S. SOF efforts to train local militias have met with resistance from the U.S. Embassy and the Afghan government, who were concerned that these local militias would instead conduct operations against tribal rivals as opposed to Taliban forces. Under the Village Stabilization Program, officials believe that this concern will be unwarranted, as the village militias will take their directions from the local police chief. In turn, the local police chief is answerable to the Minister of the Interior in Kabul, who will provide wages and weapons to the militia. While the Village Stabilization Program might enhance local security in outlying regions as intended, past tendencies for changing loyalties amongst the various Afghan tribal and ethnic groups could result in U.S. SOF-trained militias instead supporting insurgent groups as opposed to the Afghan central government. In deference to this possibility, U.S. SOF trainers might consider limiting training so as not to provide these village militias with tactics, techniques, and procedures—known as TTPs—used by U.S. and NATO forces that could be turned against Coalition forces if militias later switch loyalties to the insurgents.

²⁹ Information in this section is taken from Sean D. Naylor, “Special Partnership: Special Forces Add Training for Afghan Police Units,” *Army Times*, June 14, 2010, p. 16.

³⁰ Information in this section is from Yaroslav Trofimov, “U.S. Enlists New Afghan Village Forces,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 1, 2010.

Issues for Congress

Are Current Command Relationships and Rules of Engagement Having a Detrimental Impact on Special Operations in Afghanistan?

Command relationships and rules that limit the conduct of certain types of military operations are critical components in the planning and conduct of special operations. Under current command arrangements, the ISAF Commander, General David Petraeus, will have an enhanced level of authority over the organization and conduct of special operations in Afghanistan. Prior to March 2010, special forces operations were commanded by battalion-level special operations task forces operating in the various regional commands that were under CFSOCC-A. Some General Purpose Force commanders in these regions suggested that the autonomous operations of special forces units in their regions had negative effects on their counterinsurgency (COIN) campaigns. After March 2010, regional commanders would have much greater control over these SOF task forces, and some SOF commanders have expressed a concern that conventional commanders do not know how to properly employ SOF. Given the levels of concern of both conventional and special operations commanders, a comprehensive examination of command authority over SOF in Afghanistan might be warranted.

Limitations on SOF night raids against insurgent leadership, as well as SOF access to artillery and air support, might also be considered for review. Military analysts agree that civilian casualties and collateral damage are tragic inevitabilities in any type of conflict and that these occurrences can also compel friends and relatives of victims to support or even join insurgents. Special operations raids against insurgent leadership have proven effective and have been characterized by some as the most successful aspect of the war in Afghanistan. Restricting these raids, while possibly reducing civilian casualties, might in fact prolong the conflict, resulting in more civilian and coalition casualties over time.

Are We Making the Best Use of SOF in Afghanistan?

While specific information about the employment of SOF National Mission Forces in Afghanistan is not known, it can be assumed that they are focused on capturing or killing the most senior terrorists operating in the region, even if they are not directly involved with Afghan insurgents. Theater Mission Forces, however, are engaged in the full range of special operations missions, from killing or capturing insurgents to training military, paramilitary, and police forces. These Theater Mission Forces are operating under counterinsurgency guidelines, which have been interpreted by some as population-centric as opposed to enemy-centric. While there is no known delineation between high-value targets killed or captured by National Mission Forces as opposed to Theater Mission Forces, it is known that Theater Mission Forces have been involved in successful combat operations in their own right. While the Village Stabilization Program might prove successful, the utilization of 23 Army Special Forces ODAs to train local militias and other might not be the best use of these critical SOF assets. In a similar manner, dedicating SOF to train Afghan National Civil Order Police, who are intended to man checkpoints and interact with civilians, seems to be a mission that could be handled by conventional forces. While SOF training is certainly warranted for elite or highly specialized Afghan military and police units, General Purpose Forces are also capable of providing training to militias and paramilitary units. Another

possibility is that current rules of engagement, which restrict SOF night raids, have resulted in fewer opportunities for Theater Mission Forces to conduct raids against insurgents, and because there are fewer opportunities, SOF units have been reassigned the aforementioned training missions. A comprehensive review, focusing on ensuring that the most effective balance between allocating SOF units between combat and training is achieved, might prove beneficial.

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