



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

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Summary

Special Operations Forces (SOF) play a significant role in U.S. military operations, and the Administration has given U.S. SOF greater responsibility for planning and conducting worldwide counterterrorism operations. U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) has about 63,000 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's FY2013 Budget Request was \$10.409 billion, 0.6% lower (due to decreases in Operations & Maintenance, Research, Development, Test, & Evaluation, Procurement, and Military Construction funding) than the FY2012 Appropriation of \$10.477 billion. USSOCOM's FY2013 Budget Request also represented the first year some Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding will be migrated into USSOCOM's baseline budget request. As part of USSOCOM's FY2013 Budget Request, it plans to add an additional 3,355 service members and civilians, bringing it to a total of 66,594 personnel. During FY2013, USSOCOM plans to add its fifth and final 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)-mandated Special Forces Battalion, as well as additional forces for the Ranger Regiment, Special Operations Aviation Regiment, and Civil Affairs and Military Information Support Operations units. In a similar manner, Air Force Special Operations plans to add additional personnel to a number of its units, and Naval Special Warfare, in addition to adding combat support and service support personnel, plans to add additional personnel to the Naval Special Warfare Center and School. The Marine Special Operations Command plans to add additional combat support and service support personnel in FY2013 as well.

The FY2013 NDAA recommends fully funding the Administration's FY2013 request and adds an additional \$159 million to fulfill a critical unfunded requirement for high-definition Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance capabilities. There are a number of legislative provisions contained in the FY2013 NDAA impacting not only funding but authorities as well.

On January 5, 2012, the Administration unveiled its new strategic guidance refocusing U.S. strategic efforts to the Pacific and the Middle East and, at the same time, proposing significant cuts to ground forces. This new strategic direction has the potential to significantly affect U.S. SOF. USSOCOM leadership continues to pursue additional authorities that would enable it to control the movement of SOF units deployed to a theater of operations as well as give additional authorities to Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs), which are allocated to each geographic combatant command. Another possible issue for congressional consideration is the balance between direct and indirect special operations activities in world-wide counterterrorism operations. This report will be updated.

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Background

Overview

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

Command Structures and Components

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

USSOCOM has about 63,000 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. USSOCOM's components are the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC); the Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM); the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC); and the Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC). The Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) is a USSOCOM sub-unified command. Additional command and control responsibilities are vested in Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs). TSOCs are theater-specific special operational headquarters elements designed to support a Geographical Combatant Commander's special operations logistics, planning, and operational control requirements, and are normally commanded by a general officer.

Expanded USSOCOM Responsibilities

In addition to Title 10 authorities and responsibilities, USSOCOM has been given additional responsibilities. In the 2004 Unified Command Plan, USSOCOM was given the responsibility for synchronizing DOD plans against global terrorist networks and, as directed, conducting global operations against those networks.¹ 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."² In October 2008, USSOCOM was designated as the DOD proponent for Security

¹ "Fact Book: United States Special Operations Command," USSOCOM Public Affairs, February 2011, p. 4.

² Ibid.

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

Army Special Operations Forces

U.S. Army SOF (ARSOF) includes approximately 28,500 soldiers from the Active Army, National Guard, and Army Reserve organized into Special Forces, Ranger, and special operations aviation units, along with civil affairs units, military information units, and special operations support units. ARSOF Headquarters and other resources, such as the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, are located at Fort Bragg, NC. Five active Special Forces (SF) Groups (Airborne),⁴ 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.⁵

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.⁶ The Army expects that the last of these new Special Forces battalions will be operational by FY2013.⁷ Two Army National Guard Special Forces groups are headquartered in Utah and Alabama. An elite airborne light infantry unit specializing in direct action operations,⁸ the 75th Ranger Regiment, is headquartered at Fort Benning, GA, and consists of three battalions and a regimental special troops battalion that provides support to the three Ranger Battalions. Army special operations aviation units, including the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) (SOAR), headquartered at Fort Campbell, KY, feature pilots trained to fly the most sophisticated Army rotary-wing aircraft in the harshest environments, day or night, and in adverse weather.

³ Information in this section is from testimony given by Admiral Eric T. Olson, Commander, U.S. SOCOM, to the House Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee on the Fiscal Year 2010 National Defense Authorization Budget Request for the U.S. Special Operations Command, June 4, 2009. For a more in-depth treatment of Security Force Assistance, see CRS Report R41817, *Building the Capacity of Partner States Through Security Force Assistance*, by Thomas K. Livingston.

⁴ 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).

⁵ “United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012, p. 14 .

⁶ Sean D. Naylor, “Special Forces Expands,” *Army Times*, August 11, 2008.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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 that exclusively support USSOCOM. In September 2011 the 85th Civil Affairs Brigade was activated to support U.S. Army General Purpose Forces (GPFs). All other CA units reside in the Reserves and are affiliated with Army GPF units. Military Information Support Operations (formerly known as psychological operations) units disseminate information to large foreign audiences through mass media. Two active duty Military Information Support Groups (MISG)—the 4th Military Information Support Group (MISG) (Airborne) and 8th Military Information Support Group (MISG) (Airborne)—are stationed at Fort Bragg, and their subordinate units are aligned with Geographic Combatant Commands.

U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command Established⁹

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

Air Force Special Operations 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.

⁹ Michael Hoffman, "Interview: Brig. Gen. Kevin Mangum," *Defense News*, May 2, 2011, and U.S. Army Special Operations Command Fact Sheet, May 2011.

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 "United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012," USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012, p. 18.

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, dating from the Vietnam era. Because of the age of the fleet, AFSOC considers recapitalization one of its top priorities.

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

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

Naval Special Operations Forces¹⁵

The Naval Special Warfare Command (NSWC) is composed of approximately 8,900 personnel, including more than 2,400 active-duty Special Warfare Operators, known as SEALs; 700 Special Warfare Boat Operators, known as Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewmen (SWCC); 700 reserve personnel; 4,100 support personnel; and more than 1,100 civilians. NSWC is organized around 10 SEAL Teams, 2 SEAL Delivery Vehicle (SDV) Teams, and 3 Special Boat Teams. SEAL Teams consist of six SEAL platoons each, consisting of 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, Four, and Ten and the Naval Special Warfare Development Group in Little Creek, VA. These components deploy SEAL Teams, SEAL Delivery Vehicle Teams, and Special Boat Teams worldwide to meet the training, exercise, contingency, and wartime requirements of theater commanders. Because SEALs are considered experts in special reconnaissance and direct action missions—primary counterterrorism skills—NSWC is viewed as well postured to fight a globally dispersed enemy ashore or afloat. NSWC forces can operate in small groups and have the ability

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 Program*, by Jeremiah Gertler.

¹⁵ Information in this section is from Naval Special Warfare Command website, <http://www.public.navy.mil/nsw/pages/Mission.aspx>, accessed January 6, 2012, and “United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012, pp. 16-17.

to quickly deploy from Navy ships, submarines and aircraft, overseas bases, and forward-based units.

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. MARSOC missions include direct action, special reconnaissance, foreign internal defense, counterterrorism, information operations, and unconventional warfare. MARSOC currently has approximately 2,600 personnel assigned. MARSOC, reportedly at present, consists of 625 critical skills operators, 32 teams, and 9 companies but plans to expand to 844 critical skills operators, 48 teams, and 12 companies by 2016.¹⁷

Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC)

According to DOD, JSOC “provides a joint headquarters to study special operations requirements, ensures interoperability and equipment standardization, develops joint special operations plans and tactics, and conducts joint special operations exercises and training.”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 news release by the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) News Service which named Vice Admiral William McRaven as Admiral Olson’s successor seemingly adds credibility to press reports about JSOC’s alleged counterterrorism mission. The USASOC press release notes, “McRaven, a former commander of SEAL Team 3 and Special Operations Command Europe, is the commander of the Joint Special Operations Command. As such, he has led the command as it ‘ruthlessly and effectively [took] the fight to America’s most dangerous and

¹⁶ Information in this section is from “United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012, pp. 20-21.

¹⁷ Amanda Wilcox, “MarSOC Continues Growing Despite Marine Corps Drawdown,” *Jacksonville (NC) Daily News*, November 25, 2012.

¹⁸ “United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012, p. 22.

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.

vicious enemies,' Gates said."²⁰ Reports have also speculated about JSOC's role in the mission to eliminate Osama bin Laden.²¹

NATO Special Operations Headquarters²²

In May 2010, NATO established the NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ). The mission of NSHQ is to serve as the primary point of development, direction, and coordination of all NATO special operations-related activities in order to optimize employment of special operations forces, to include providing an operational command capability when directed by the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR). NSHQ is commanded by an American general officer. The NSHQ is located with the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Mons, Belgium, and will consist of 219 NATO personnel from 28 countries. Eighty nine U.S. service members will be assigned to NSHQ. In addition to traditional headquarters functions, NSHQ also runs the NATO Special Operations Forces School at Chievres Air Base in Belgium.

Organizational and Budgetary Issues

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.

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

²² Information from this section is taken from a briefing provided to CRS by the NATO Special Operations Headquarters Liaison Officer on June 21, 2010.

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.

- Starting in FY2012, purchase light, fixed-wing aircraft to enable the Air Force’s 6th Special Operations squadron to engage partner nations for whose air forces such aircraft might be appropriate, as well as acquiring two non-U.S. helicopters to support these efforts.

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

FY2013 USSOCOM Budget Request²⁶

USSOCOM’s FY2013 Budget Request was \$10.409 billion, 0.6% lower (due to decreases in Operations & Maintenance, Research, Development, Test, & Evaluation, Procurement, and Military Construction funding) than the FY2012 Appropriation of \$10.477 billion. USSOCOM’s FY2013 Budget Request also represented the first year some Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding would be migrated into USSOCOM’s baseline budget request. USSOCOM notes that 80% of funding is apportioned to operational forces and their organic support units—often referred to as “tooth”—and the remaining 20% to the “tail”—other supporting units and functions.

FY2013 USSOCOM Budget Request Breakdown

Table I. FY2013 USSOCOM Budget Request, by Funding Category

Funding Category	Base Budget	OCO	Total
Operations & Maintenance (O&M)	\$5.091 billion	\$2.503 billion	\$7.594 billion
Procurement	\$1.782 billion	\$65 million	\$1.847 billion
Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation (RDT&E)	\$427 million	\$5 million	\$432 million
Military Construction (MILCON)	\$536 million	—	\$536 million
Totals	\$7.836 billion	\$2.573 billion	\$10.409 billion

Source: From U.S. Special Operations Command FY2013 Budget Highlights, February 2012, p. 9: http://www.socom.mil/News/Documents/USSOCOM_FY_2013_Budget_Highlights.pdf.

FY2013 USSOCOM Force Structure Highlights²⁷

In FY2013 USSOCOM plans to grow the command as depicted in the following table. This force structure growth reflects provisions contained in the 2006 and 2010 QDRs.

²⁶ Information in this section is taken from U.S. Special Operations Command FY2013 Budget Highlights, February 2012, http://www.socom.mil/News/Documents/USSOCOM_FY_2013_Budget_Highlights.pdf.

²⁷ Ibid., pp 10-11.

Table 2. Planned USSOCOM Military and Civilian Growth in FY2013

	Military	Civilian	Total
Army FY2012	30,819	2,320	33,139
Army FY2013	32,420	2,479	34,899
Air Force FY2012	14,658	2,555	17,213
Air Force FY2013	15,287	2,524	17,811
Marine Corps FY2012	2,527	0	2,527
Marine Corps FY2013	2,984	138	3,122
Navy FY2012	9,049	1,311	10,360
Navy FY2013	9,524	1,238	10,762
USSOCOM FY2012	57,053	6,186	63,239
USSOCOM FY2013	60,215	6,379	66,594

Source: From U.S. Special Operations Command FY2013 Budget Highlights, February 2012, p. 10
http://www.socom.mil/News/Documents/USSOCOM_FY_2013_Budget_Highlights.pdf, p. 10.

FY2013 Planned Force Structure Additions²⁸

- **U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC):** Increases the authorization for one Special Forces Battalion (the fifth of the five mandated by the 2006 QDR); increases aircrews assigned to the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment; increases 75th Ranger Regiment personnel; increases military personnel for the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade and the 4th Military Information Support Operations (MISO) Group; and increases authorizations for military personnel providing combat support/service support to USASOC.
- **Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC):** Increases authorizations to provide support for the 1st Special Operations Group, 1st Special Operations Wing, 27th Special Operations Group, and 352nd Special Operations Group.
- **Naval Special Warfare Command (NSWC):** Increases authorizations for the Naval Special Warfare Center and School as well as providing increased combat support/service support to NSWC.
- **Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC):** Increases authorizations for combat support/combat service support.

FY2013 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) (H.R. 4310)²⁹

The FY2013 NDAA recommends fully funding the Administration’s FY2013 request and adds an additional \$159 million to fulfill a critical unfunded requirement for high-definition Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance capabilities.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁹House Armed Services Committee, Fact Sheet: FY13 National Defense Authorization Act Highlights of the Conference Report, December 18, 2012.

FY2013 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 4310) USSOCOM Legislative Provisions³⁰

Major USSOCOM-specific provisions are highlighted in the following sections:

SEC. 156. SHALLOW WATER COMBAT SUBMERSIBLE PROGRAM.

(a) INITIAL REPORT.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, in coordination with the Commander of the United States Special Operations Command, shall submit to the congressional defense committees a report setting forth the following:

(1) A description of all efforts under the Shallow Water Combat Submersible program and the United States Special Operations Command to improve the accuracy of the tracking of the schedule and costs of the program.

(2) The revised timeline for the initial and full operational capability of the Shallow Water Combat Submersible, including details outlining and justifying the revised baseline to the program.

(3) Current cost estimates to meet the basis of issue requirement under the program.

(4) An assessment of existing program risk through the completion of operational testing.

(b) SUBSEQUENT REPORTS.—

(1) QUARTERLY REPORTS REQUIRED.—The Assistant Secretary, in coordination with the Commander of the United States Special Operations Command, shall submit to the congressional defense committees on a quarterly basis updates on the schedule and cost performance of the contractor of the Shallow Water Combat Submersible program, including metrics from the earned value management system.

(2) SUNSET.—The requirement in paragraph

(1) shall cease on the date the Shallow Water Combat Submersible has completed operational testing and has been found to be operationally effective and operationally suitable.

SEC. 1062. REPORT ON COUNTERPROLIFERATION CAPABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS.

6 (a) REPORT REQUIRED.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Defense shall provide to the congressional defense committees a report outlining operational capabilities, limitations, and shortfalls within the Department of Defense with respect to counterproliferation and combating weapons of mass destruction involving special operations forces and key enabling forces.

(b) ELEMENTS.—The report required under subsection (a) shall include each of the following elements:

³⁰ Report 112-705, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013, Conference Report to Accompany H.R. 4310, December 18, 2012.

- (1) An overview and assessment of current counterproliferation and combating weapons of mass destruction capabilities, capacity, and limitations of special operations forces and key enabling capabilities provided by other supporting elements of the Department of Defense and other Government agencies.
- (2) An assessment of the unique capabilities of special operations forces to counter a proliferant's ability to develop weapons of mass destruction, including all phases of weaponization.
- (3) An overview and assessment of current and future training requirements and gaps, including the adequacy and availability of training facilities relative to paragraphs (1) and (2).
- (4) An assessment of technical capability gaps relative to paragraphs (1) and (2), including an identification of any gaps that are unique to special operations forces.
- (5) An assessment of interagency coordination capabilities and gaps, including intelligence support to countering weapons of mass destruction.
- (6) An assessment of current international bilateral and multilateral partnerships and the limitations of such partnerships, including an assessment of existing authorities to build partnership capacity in countering weapons of mass destruction unique to special operations forces.
- (7) A description of efforts to address the limitations and gaps referred to in paragraphs (1) through (6), including timelines and requirements to address such limitations and such gaps.
- (8) Any other matters the Secretary considers appropriate.

SEC. 1272. NATO SPECIAL OPERATIONS HEADQUARTERS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subsection (a) of section 1244 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (Public Law 111–84; 123 Stat. 2541), as amended by section 1242 of the Ike Skelton National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011 (Public Law 111–383; 124 Stat. 4405), is further amended—

- (1) by striking “fiscal year 2011” and inserting “each of fiscal years 2013, 2014, and 2015”;
- (2) by striking “section 301(1)” and inserting “section 301”; and
- (3) by inserting “for such fiscal year” after “\$50,000,000”.

(b) ANNUAL REPORT.—Such section, as so amended, is further amended by adding at the end the following: “(d) ANNUAL REPORT.—Not later than March 1 of each year, the Secretary of Defense shall submit to the congressional defense committees a report regarding support for the NSHQ. Each report shall include the following:

- “(1) The total amount of funding provided by the United States and other NATO nations to the NSHQ for operating costs of the NSHQ.
- “(2) A description of the activities carried out with such funding, including—
 - “(A) the amount of funding allocated for each such activity;

“(B) the extent to which other NATO nations participate in each such activity;

“(C) the extent to which each such activity is designed to meet the purposes set forth in paragraphs (1) through (5) of subsection (b); 24 and

“(D) an assessment of the extent to which each such activity will promote the mission of the NSHQ. “(3) Other contributions, financial or in kind, provided by the United States and other NATO nations in support of the NSHQ.

(4) Any other matters that the Secretary of Defense considers appropriate.”.

SEC. 1283. SENSE OF CONGRESS ON EFFORTS TO REMOVE OR APPREHEND JOSEPH KONY FROM THE BATTLEFIELD AND END THE ATROCITIES OF THE LORD’S RESISTANCE ARMY.

Consistent with the Lord’s Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009 (Public Law 111–172), it is the sense of the Congress that—

(1) the ongoing United States advise and assist operation to support the regional governments in Africa in their ongoing efforts to remove or apprehend Joseph Kony and his top commanders from the battlefield and end atrocities perpetuated by his Lord’s Resistance Army should continue as appropriate to achieve the goals of the operation;

(2) the Secretary of Defense should provide intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets, as authorized to be appropriated by other provisions of this Act, to support the ongoing efforts of United States Special Operations Forces to advise and assist regional partners as they conduct operations against the Lord’s Resistance Army in Central Africa;

(3) United States and regional African forces should increase their operational coordination on efforts to remove or apprehend Joseph Kony from the battlefield and end the atrocities of the Lord’s Resistance Army; and

(4) the regional governments should recommit themselves to the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord’s Resistance Army authorized by the African Union.

SEC. 1534. PLAN FOR TRANSITION IN FUNDING OF UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND FROM SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING FOR OVERSEAS CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS TO RECURRING FUNDING UNDER THE FUTURE-YEARS DEFENSE PROGRAM.

Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Defense shall submit to the congressional defense committees a plan for the transition of funding of the United States Special Operations Command from funds authorized to be appropriated for overseas contingency operations (commonly referred to as the “overseas contingency operations budget”) to funds authorized to be appropriated for recurring operations of the Department of Defense in accordance with applicable future-years defense programs under section 221 of title 10, United States Code (commonly referred to as the “base budget”).

Potential Issues for Congress

New Strategic Guidance and SOF

On January 5, 2012, President Obama, Secretary of Defense Panetta, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dempsey publically unveiled new strategic guidance that not only rebalances U.S. strategic posture toward Asia and the Middle East but also will result in a “smaller and leaner” U.S. military.³¹ During this unveiling, Secretary Panetta noted the following:

As we reduce the overall defense budget, we will protect, and in some cases increase, our investments in special operations forces, in new technologies like (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance), and unmanned systems, in space—and, in particular, in cyberspace—capabilities, and also our capacity to quickly mobilize if necessary.³²

While specific details on force structure cuts have not yet been made public, there has been a great deal of speculation that the Army and Marines will undergo significant downsizing over the next decade. With fewer general purpose forces available and USSOCOM’s self-imposed growth limitations to preserve the quality of the force, U.S. SOF might find its operational tempo increased. There are also aspects of this new strategic guidance that require further explanation. For example, defense officials offer that a reliance on smaller teams operating in innovative ways will be a central tenet of this new strategy.³³ This seemingly suggests an expanded role for U.S. SOF although few details have been made available. While DOD has indicated a willingness to increase its investment in SOF, there are limitations on how much SOF can expand due to the stringent standards—particularly for operators—and long training lead times required for most special operations specialties. As part of continued debate on the new strategic guidance, it might prove useful to examine the question of how DOD envisions employing SOF under this new strategy, SOF’s capacity for expansion, and SOF’s ability to take on new mission requirements as general purpose forces are drawn down.

In partial response to this new strategic guidance and also as a means to expand relationships with foreign SOF forged during 11 years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, USSOCOM is reportedly seeking to establish regional SOF coordination centers.³⁴ The basic concept is to adopt a NATO Special Operations headquarters-type construct in conjunction with the existing Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs).³⁵ While such SOF regional coordination centers could prove valuable, particularly in establishing and cultivating new relationships with regional forces, it is not known what types of authorities would be required, if this function would conflict with the geographic combatant command’s engagement plans, and what types of budgetary and personnel resources would be needed for these regional SOF coordination centers.

³¹ DOD News Release, “Statement as Prepared by Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta on the Defense Strategic Guidance,” No. 009-12, January 5, 2012.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Paul McLeary, “U.S. SOCOM Seeks to Broaden Ties With Foreign Forces,” *Defense News*, December 3, 2012.

³⁵ Ibid.

Continued Efforts to Expand USSOCOM Authorities and Control of Deployed SOF³⁶

Reports suggest USSOCOM will continue to push for more control over deployed special operations forces. At present, once U.S. SOF deploys into a region, they are controlled by a geographic combatant commander and USSOCOM can no longer control where they go or what mission they perform. According to USSOCOM officials, “Admiral McRaven is looking for the freedom to move forces where he needs them and when he needs them.”³⁷ This requirement seemingly suggests USSOCOM is currently allocating its SOF units to combatant commands with little to no mission guidance which, in itself, might be considered problematic. Given USSOCOM’s counterterrorism mandate, it would appear that USSOCOM could task these SOF units with missions at the national level, which would be mutually supportive of the combatant commander’s regional missions for the SOF unit. If USSOCOM gets expanded authorities, it would exert enhanced control primarily through TSOCs, which currently work exclusively for each combatant commander, but USSOCOM contends that TSOCs operate “without any greater centrality to recognizing how the actions of one TSOC in his regional area of responsibility can do things that influence another region.”³⁸ If USSOCOM gets the additional authorities it has requested, it could give the USSOCOM Commander the ability to have a direct relationships with the TSOCs. While these enhanced authorities might benefit USSOCOM, they might also violate the principal of “unity of command” despite USSOCOM’s insistence that combatant commanders would have to approve any of USSOCOM’s moves of deployed SOF units.

One report suggests that “turning SOCOM into a global combatant command would create constant friction with regional commands” and that efforts to gain additional authorities were perceived by some as a “power grab.”³⁹ The potential for a dual chain of command could result in unnecessary friction between USSOCOM and geographic combatant commands and host countries, possibly having an unintended detrimental impact on the deployed SOF unit. Because there appears to be a number of contentious issues regarding enhanced USSOCOM authorities, Congress might choose to examine these issues in greater detail.

The Future of Special Operations—Direct versus Indirect Approach⁴⁰

A recent article by Linda Robinson in *Foreign Affairs* offers both observations and recommendations that could prove useful in future congressional debates on the future and “proper” role of U.S. SOF. The author suggests the U.S. approach to counterterrorism over the past decade has relied too heavily on raids by U.S. SOF and the use of armed drones, referred to by many as the “direct approach.” While these raids and drone strikes have been deemed necessary to address dire and immediate threats to the United States, special operations leaders are said to favor complementing these direct actions with working with and through non-U.S. partners to achieve counterterrorism security objectives—referred to as the “indirect approach.”

³⁶ Unless otherwise noted, information in this section is taken from Paul McLeary, “U.S. Spec Ops Head Wants More Control Over Deployed Operators,” *Defense News*, December 3, 2012.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Linda Robinson, “The Future of Special Operations: Beyond Kill and Capture,” *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 91, Number 6, November/December 2012.

⁴⁰ Information in this section is taken from Linda Robinson, “The Future of Special Operations: Beyond Kill and Capture,” *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 91, Number 6, November/December 2012.

The author contends the indirect approach has received only high-level rhetorical support by the special operations community and the past two presidential Administrations and believes the indirect approach offers the prospect of lasting benefits with a smaller footprint and lower cost—important considerations in a time of fiscal austerity.

The direct versus indirect approach debate is by no means a new debate, having been raised a number of times by both military and civilian leadership during the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan and in association with world-wide counterterrorism operations. With the projected end of NATO involvement in Afghanistan in 2014 and the growing belief that the U.S. defense budget will be in a relative state of decline for the foreseeable future, it might be prudent to reexamine the emphasis placed on the indirect approach. Such a re-look of the indirect approach would occur as the United States is shifting its strategic focus to the Asia-Pacific region, largely by means of engagement which, in and of itself, is a type of indirect approach to national security.

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