



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 is \$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 represents 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.

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. While there are presently few specifics known, this new strategic direction has the potential to significantly affect U.S. SOF. Of potential concern to Congress is that with fewer general purpose forces, SOF operational tempo might increase. While DOD maintains that it is willing to increase its investment in SOF, there are limitations on expansion because of stringent qualification and training standards. In addition, little is known about how SOF would be employed under this new strategy and if it even has the ability to take on new mission requirements. The further downsizing of ground forces (Army and Marines) also brings up concerns that the services might be hard-pressed to establish and dedicate enabling units needed by USSOCOM while at the same time adequately supporting general purpose forces. An examination of proposed force structure in relation to anticipated requirements for enabling forces could prove useful to Congress.

Reports suggest USSOCOM is seeking expanded authority to deploy and position SOF and their equipment in an effort to achieve greater autonomy and increase presence in Asia, Africa, and Latin America—areas in which SOF has not had a large presence over the past decades. Some view this as beneficial to USSOCOM's overall global presence, but reports suggest that geographic combatant commanders and ambassadors have concerns with such a course of action. USSOCOM leadership has stated that no SOF will be deployed into a country without the Chief of Mission's knowledge or approval. This report will be updated.

Contents

Background.....	1
Overview	1
Command Structures and Components	1
Expanded USSOCOM Responsibilities	2
Army Special Operations Forces.....	2
U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command Established	3
Air Force Special Operations Forces.....	3
Naval Special Operations Forces.....	4
Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC)	5
Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC)	5
NATO Special Operations Headquarters	6
Organizational and Budgetary Issues.....	6
2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report SOF-Related Directives	6
FY2013 USSOCOM Budget Request	7
FY2013 USSOCOM Budget Request Breakdown.....	7
FY2013 USSOCOM Force Structure Highlights	8
FY2013 Planned Force Structure Additions.....	8
Potential Issues for Congress.....	9
New Strategic Guidance and SOF	9
Impact of Army and Marine Corps Downsizing on Enabling Units	9
New Authorities for Deploying SOF?	10

Tables

Table 1. FY2013 USSOCOM Budget Request, by Funding Category	7
Table 2. Planned USSOCOM Military and Civilian Growth in FY2013	8

Contacts

Author Contact Information.....	11
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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.¹

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.² 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.³

¹ For a detailed description of ASD/SOLIC responsibilities, see <http://policy.defense.gov/solic/>.

² Information in this section is from "United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012," USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012. 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.

³ "United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012," USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012, p. 22.

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.⁴ 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.”⁵ In October 2008, USSOCOM was designated as the DOD proponent for Security Force Assistance (SFA).⁶ 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),⁷ 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.⁸

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.⁹ The Army expects that the last of these new Special Forces battalions will be operational by FY2013.¹⁰ Two Army National Guard Special Forces groups are headquartered in Utah and

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

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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).

⁸ “United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012, p. 14 .

⁹ Sean D. Naylor, “Special Forces Expands,” *Army Times*, August 11, 2008.

¹⁰ Association of the United States Army, “U.S. Army Special Operations Forces: Integral to the Army and the Joint (continued...)”

Alabama. An elite airborne light infantry unit specializing in direct action operations,¹¹ 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.

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 (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 Established¹²

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 Forces¹³

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

(...continued)

Force,” *Torchbearer National Security Report*, March 2010, p. 3.

¹¹ 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.

¹² Michael Hoffman, “Interview: Brig. Gen. Kevin Mangum,” *Defense News*, May 2, 2011, and U.S. Army Special Operations Command Fact Sheet, May 2011.

¹³ 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.

(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)¹⁴ for the CV-22.¹⁵ USSOCOM plans for all 50 CV-22s to be delivered to AFSOC by 2015.¹⁶ 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."¹⁷ 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 Forces¹⁸

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

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ The CV-22 is the special operations version of the V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft used by the Marine Corps.

¹⁶ USSOCOM Acquisitions and Logistics office, <http://www.socom.mil/soal/Pages/FixedWing.aspx>.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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.

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

Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC)¹⁹

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.

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.”²⁰ 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.²¹ JSOC’s primary mission is believed to be identifying and destroying terrorists and terror cells worldwide.

¹⁹ Information in this section is from “United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012, pp. 20-21.

²⁰ “United States Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012,” USSOCOM Public Affairs, January 2012, p. 22.

²¹ 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.

A news release by the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) News Service that 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 vicious enemies,' Gates said."²² Reports have also speculated about JSOC's role in the mission to eliminate Osama bin Laden.²³

NATO Special Operations Headquarters²⁴

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 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.

Organizational and Budgetary Issues

2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report SOF-Related Directives²⁵

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

- To increase key enabling assets²⁶ for special operations forces.
- To maintain approximately 660 special operations teams;²⁷ 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.

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 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.

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ Information in this section is from Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review Report, February 2010.

²⁶ Enabling assets are a variety of conventional military units that are assigned to support special operations forces.

²⁷ 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 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.

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 Request²⁸

USSOCOM’s FY2013 Budget Request is \$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 represents the first year some Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding will 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.

²⁸ 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.

FY2013 USSOCOM Force Structure Highlights²⁹

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.

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 Additions³⁰

- **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.

²⁹ Ibid., pp 10-11.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

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.

Impact of Army and Marine Corps Downsizing on Enabling Units³⁴

On January 6, 2011, then 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 the Marines would lose anywhere between 15,000 to 20,000 Marines. The Administration’s January 5, 2012, issuance of new strategic guidance suggests additional downsizing for ground forces over and above those directed in 2011 by Secretary Gates. While Congress has directed that USSOCOM and the services to agree on an annual basis on how enabling forces will be dedicated to USSOCOM, there are factors that might adversely affect the provision of enabling forces. Because USSOCOM

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

draws its 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 from which to draw its members, including some members that would be assigned to organic USSOCOM enabling units. Also, in light of anticipated ground force cuts, the services might be hard-pressed to establish and dedicate enabling units to support USSOCOM while at the same time providing support in kind to general purpose forces. As part of ground force reductions and the likely expansion of SOF missions and responsibilities, an examination of anticipated USSOCOM enabling force requirements in relation to proposed force structure could prove beneficial not only for mission planning purposes but also in terms of future resource investments.

New Authorities for Deploying SOF?

Reports suggest that USSOCOM is seeking expanded authority to deploy and position SOF and their equipment in an effort to achieve greater autonomy and increase presence in Asia, Africa, and Latin America—areas in which SOF has not had a large presence over the past decade.³⁵ It has been suggested deploying up to 12,000 SOF personnel on a worldwide basis to conduct training, liaison, and information-gathering operations to help USSOCOM better address national security risks could prove beneficial under the Administration’s new strategic approach. Others note, however, that regional combatant commanders “fear a decrease in their authority,” with some ambassadors in certain key areas reportedly have “voiced concerns that commandos may carry out missions that are perceived to tread on a host nation’s sovereignty.”³⁶

During a March 6, 2012, hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Admiral McRaven was asked by the committee to discuss the implications of reports alleging USSOCOM’s pursuit of greater deployment authority.³⁷ In response to a question by Senator Kay Hagan on this matter, Admiral McRaven stated:

Every two years, the joint staff goes through a staffing drill to look at the Unified Command Plan, the UCP, which is, defines the roles and responsibilities, the missions of the combatant commanders. And every year, we go through a review of the forces for which talks about the assignment of forces to those, those co-coms [Combatant Commands].

What we at USSOCOM have done is we are participating in that staffing process, and right now, it is an internal process. My recommendations have not even gotten to the chairman, much less the Secretary or the Commander-in-Chief yet, so I think it’s premature to talk about what my recommendations are in an open forum.

However, having said that, what I would like to set the record straight is that we will never deploy forces to a geographic combatant command without that geographic combatant command’s approval, we never go into another country without getting clearance from the Chief of Mission, and the Chief of Mission always has a vote on whether or not the U.S.

³⁵ Unless otherwise noted, information in this section is taken from Eric Scmitt, Mark Mazzetti, and Thom Shanker, “Admiral Seeks Freer Hand in Deployment of Elite Forces,” *New York Times*, February 13, 2012, and Rick Nelson and Michael Stieg, “Implications of the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance for U.S. Special Operations Forces,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., February 13, 2012.

³⁶ from Eric Scmitt, Mark Mazzetti, and Thom Shanker.

³⁷ Information in this section is taken from CQ Congressional Transcripts, Senate Armed Services Committee Holds Hearing on the Proposed Fiscal 2013 Defense Authorization as it Relates to the U.S. Central Command and U.S. Special Operations Command, March 6, 2012.

forces arrive in the nation that he or she is setting in. So there is nothing in my recommendations now nor will there ever be that talks about circumventing any of the geographic command or the Chief of Mission.³⁸

From Admiral McRaven's testimony, it can be inferred that at some point in time he plans to share his recommendations during a closed session with committee membership on what types of additional authorities he is seeking. As part of this anticipated discussion, Members might choose to examine the process USSOCOM uses to notify and obtain country clearance from the Chief of Mission. Also as part of this discussion, Congress might chose to examine how USSOCOM and Chiefs of Missions resolve differences in instances where the Country Team has concerns about deploying SOF in a particular country. Members might also wish to inquire if there are any special circumstances or exigencies where USSOCOM might insert its personnel into a country without Chief of Mission knowledge or approval and the legal basis for such actions.

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³⁸ Ibid., pp 58-59.