



The JSOU *Special Operations Research Topics 2017* represents a list of SOF-related topics that are recommended for research by those who desire to provide insight and recommendations on issues and challenges facing the SOF enterprise. As with the past several years' topics publications, this list is tailored to address priority areas identified by USSOCOM. There are five SOF priorities: Ensure SOF Readiness, Help Our Nation Win, Continue to Build Relationships, Prepare for the Future, and Preservation of the Force and Family. This publication also includes another key document that identifies critical research topics, the Key Strategic Issues List, developed and maintained by the USSOCOM J5 Strategy, Plans, and Policy Directorate. These topics reflect a consensus of the SOF experts who participated in the Research Topics Workshop as particularly worthwhile in addressing immediate SOF needs and in building future capacity for emerging challenges.

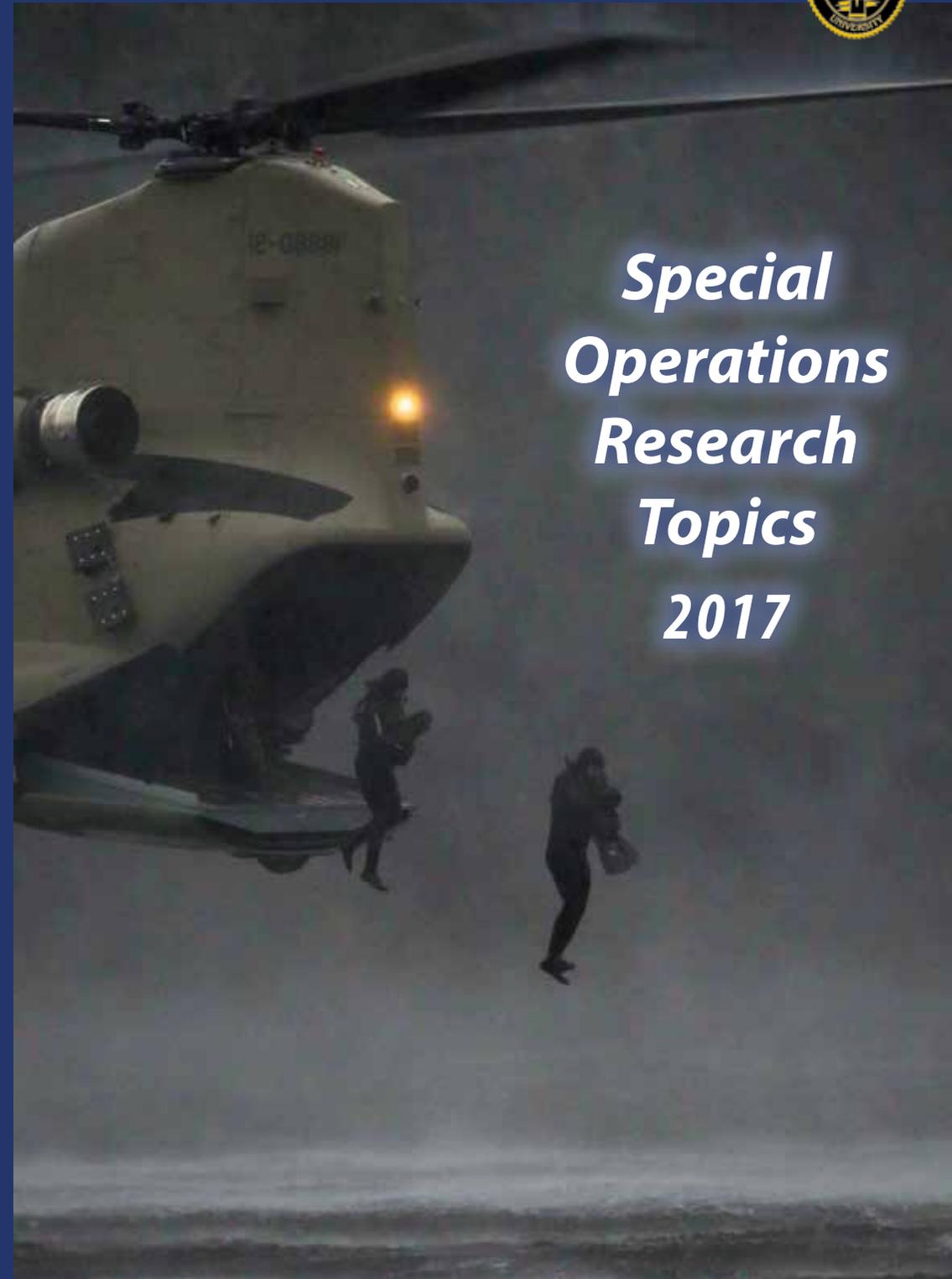
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# *Special Operations Research Topics 2017*





## Joint Special Operations University and the Center for Special Operations Studies and Research

The Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) provides its publications to contribute toward expanding the body of knowledge about joint special operations. JSOU publications advance the insights and recommendations of national security professionals and the Special Operations Forces (SOF) students and leaders for consideration by the SOF community and defense leadership.

JSOU is the educational component of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. The JSOU mission is to educate SOF executive, senior, and intermediate leaders and selected other national and international security decision makers, both military and civilian, through teaching, outreach, and research in the science and art of joint special operations. JSOU provides education to the men and women of SOF and to those who enable the SOF mission in a joint and interagency environment.

JSOU conducts research through its Center for Special Operations Studies and Research (CSOSR) where effort centers upon the USSOCOM mission:

**USSOCOM mission.** USSOCOM synchronizes the planning of Special Operations and provides Special Operations Forces to support persistent, networked, and distributed Geographic Combatant Command operations in order to protect and advance our Nation's interests.

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The JSOU Center for Special Operations Studies and Research (CSOSR) is currently accepting written works relevant to special operations for potential publication. For more information, please contact the CSOSR Director at [jsou\\_research@socom.mil](mailto:jsou_research@socom.mil). Thank you for your interest in the JSOU Press.

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This work was cleared for public release; distribution is unlimited.

**On the cover.** Members of 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group Airborne, and Indian Army Special Forces conduct a helo-casting exercise at Solo Point, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., 21 January 2016. The training prepared Soldiers to be inserted into water and make a beach landing. U.S. Army photo by Specialist Codie Mendenhall.

**Back cover.** A Critical Skills Operator with U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command uses a torch to cut through a metal door to gain entry on a building during Marine Special Operation School's Master Breacher's Course at Stone Bay aboard Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C., 5 August 2015. CSOs learn to overcome obstacles such as walls, fences and doors using a range of breaching methods including mechanical, ballistic, thermal, and explosive during the course. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Scott A. Achtemeier.

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Research Topics Workshop 2017 participants at JSOU Pinewood Campus  
12 January 2016. Source: JSOU photo

# Foreword

The Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) *Special Operations Research Topics 2017* publication highlights a wide range of topics collaboratively developed and prioritized by experts from across the Special Operations Forces (SOF) community. The topics in these pages are intended to guide research projects for professional military education (PME) students; JSOU faculty, fellows, students; and others writing about special operations during this academic year. This research will provide a better understanding of the complex issues and opportunities affecting the strategic and operational planning needs of SOF.

These topics will stir creativity and critical thinking among the best and brightest in our global SOF network to generate new ideas. These new ideas formed after careful research and analysis will lead to the development of innovative solutions for the most pressing issues and concerns that face our community.

Our research topics are organized to address the five SOF priorities as outlined in the *SOF Narrative*. To develop this list of topics, recommendations were solicited from the USSOCOM headquarters staff, the theater special operations commands (TSOCs), component commands, SOF chairs from the war colleges, select research centers, and think tanks. Then, the topic submissions were reviewed, revised, rated, and ranked at the annual Special Operations Research Topics Workshop. That workshop produced the first draft of this comprehensive list of issues and challenges of concern to the greater SOF community. The list was reviewed and vetted by the headquarters, TSOCs, and component commands prior to publication.

I encourage SOF personnel to contribute their experiences and ideas to the SOF community by submitting completed research on these topics to the JSOU Press. If you have any questions about this document or ideas for future topics, contact the director, Center for Special Operations Studies and Research via e-mail at [jsou\\_research@socom.mil](mailto:jsou_research@socom.mil).

As stated in the *SOF Narrative*, “Years of cumulative experience, expertise and special operations know-how form the center of gravity for the success of our operators as well as our SOF logisticians, acquirers, educators, communicators, and analysts—The total Special Operations Force. Our people

are our credentials.” I challenge you to assist the SOF enterprise in shaping the future strategic environment by researching critical issues and using that research to develop innovative solutions and recommendations.

Brian A. Maher, SES  
President

# Introduction

The JSOU *Special Operations Research Topics 2017* represents a list of SOF-related topics that are recommended for research by those who desire to provide insight and recommendations on issues and challenges facing the SOF enterprise. As with the past several years' topics publications, this list is tailored to address priority areas identified by USSOCOM. There are five SOF priorities: Ensure SOF Readiness, Help Our Nation Win, Continue to Build Relationships, Prepare for the Future, and Preservation of the Force and Family. This publication also includes another key document that identifies critical research topics, the Key Strategic Issues List (KSIL), developed and maintained by the USSOCOM J5 Strategy, Plans, and Policy Directorate.

SOF PME students research and write on timely, relevant, SOF-related topics. Such activity develops the individual's intellect and provides a professional and practical perspective that broadens and frames the insights of other analysts and researchers in regard to these topics. This list and the accompanying topic descriptions are a guide to stimulate interest and thinking. Topics may be narrowed or otherwise modified as deemed necessary (e.g., to suit school writing requirements or maximize individual interests and experiences). The researcher should explore and identify doctrine, capabilities, techniques, and procedures that will increase SOF efficacy in addressing them. At the same time, the research on these topics should be used to inform policymakers, the larger military profession, and the public of the issues and challenges facing the SOF enterprise.

Section A (Priority Topics) identifies topics of particular importance. Sections B, C, D, E, and F each focus on one of the SOF priorities. Section G contains the KSIL developed by USSOCOM J5. The KSIL is a set of questions relevant to increasing USSOCOM's understanding of the global security environment and is built around trends expected to continue for the next 10 to 20 years.

These topics reflect a consensus of the SOF experts who participated in the Research Topics Workshop as particularly worthwhile in addressing immediate SOF needs and in building future capacity for emerging challenges. They have been vetted through the USSOCOM headquarters,

TSOCs, and components prior to publication to ensure emerging topics were addressed. Previous years' research topics lists provide a repository of issues that were highlighted in the past. These topics lists may provide prospective researchers with additional ideas for relevant research. Please share these topics with fellow researchers, thesis advisors, and other colleagues, and feel free to submit additional topics for consideration. You may visit our library website to see if JSOU has a publication that relates to your area of interest. We encourage you to send us your completed research on these topics.

# Five SOF Priorities

## Ensure SOF Readiness

### **The right people, skills, and capabilities ... now and in the future**

In an environment characterized by fiscal constraints and ever present security challenges we must balance readiness of the current SOF force with investment in the preparedness for the future force—and, we will be excellent stewards of the precious resources entrusted to us. First and most critical to this balance is ensuring that we maintain superior selection, training, education, and talent management programs for our people. In turn, our people must be supported by timely development, acquisition and sustainment of service-provided and special operations-peculiar equipment and capabilities. We must regain SOF buying power and fiscal agility to allow quick response to current and future requirements. We will continue to press the limits of research and development in our acquisitions to ensure we are identifying the right technologies, equipment, and capabilities required for the future SOF operator. We will mitigate the risk associated with making hard readiness decisions by ensuring transparency with our SOF leadership, mission partners, and other stakeholders.

## Help Our Nation Win

### **Addressing today's challenges and keeping the Nation safe**

The challenges faced by America and her allies are varied and complex, requiring unprecedented agility and situational understanding. It is imperative that we prioritize and synchronize SOF activities globally in order to protect the nation in a world that grows more complex every day. To do this we must present a coherent and unified portfolio of diverse SOF capabilities that meet the immediate needs of our GCCs and complements the contributions of our military, interagency, and international partners. To mitigate the risk inherent in the complex strategic environment, we will constantly reassess the authorities, organizations, capabilities, and relationships required to accomplish assigned missions.

## **Continue to Build Relationships**

### **Global understanding and awareness that creates options**

We will provide strategic options through an enabled and empowered global network of partners that are integrated at every level—increasing transparency, collaboration, synchronization; and achieving exceptional cultural, regional, and global understanding. With support from the Services and in collaboration with our joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational partners we will build collective capability with global reach—connected through the SOF information environment. As we operate with a growing network of partners, we will continually reassess relationships and ensure the transparency needed to succeed.

## **Prepare for the Future**

### **SOF ready to win in an increasingly complex world**

While we focus on the challenges of today, we must also prepare for an uncertain, dynamic, and rapidly evolving future. We will do this through innovative and critical thinking, experimentation, and exercises that identify future challenges and opportunities, and create strategic solutions and options for our leaders. We will focus on developing ideas—concepts, training, doctrine, education, and research—that are future oriented and challenge our current operational constructs. Ultimately, preparing for the future is about ensuring that we match the right people and capabilities with the very best ideas to address our most pressing problems. We must recognize the risk inherent in pushing the “edge of the envelope,” both intellectually and operationally. While we attempt to lead we must always be good listeners and followers, ensuring we are transparent and inclusive in all we do.

## **Preservation of the Force and Family**

### **Short and long-term well-being of our SOF Warriors and their families**

People—military, civilian, and families—are our most important asset. We must always take care of our people, but after more than a decade of war their resiliency and readiness is a primary concern. We will leverage every

resource available—SOF, Service, and community programs to ensure our people are mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically prepared for the demanding tasks that we will ask them to execute. We will pay particular attention to the hard and often invisible challenges that our people and their families face—and ensure that the SOF command environment is one that fosters understanding, respect, and support; and allows our people to thrive. We will mitigate the risks that high operational tempo poses to our force and families by enforcing internal management practices that provide operational predictability and by providing relevant and informed programs that build resiliency throughout our formations. As our people keep faith with our Nation, we will keep faith with them, now and in the future.



## A. Priority Topics

### Topic Titles

#### Ensure SOF Readiness

- A1. Cyberterrorism: Is it real or hyperbole?
- A2.\* How does USSOCOM ensure it has the right people, skills, and capabilities now and in the future?

#### Help Our Nation Win

- A3. Responding early to the enemy's exploitation of the social media environment
- A4. Strategic indicators and warnings in the gray zone
- A5. U.S. Government configuration to address transregional threats
- A6. Modern political warfare/role of SOF in political warfare

#### Continue to Build Relationships

- A7. Establishing regional hubs or multinational basing as economy of force solutions to multi-tiered threats and risks
- A8. Understanding USSOCOM and SOF roles in the modern interagency construct

#### Prepare for the Future

- A9. Comprehensive deterrence: SOF and the whole-of-government approach
- A10. Online recruitment and social network node analysis
- A11. Combating homegrown and lone wolf terrorism in the U.S. by understanding and disrupting OCONUS influences

#### Preservation of the Force and Family

- A12.\* Mitigating SOF suicides: Susceptibility and risk factors
- A13.\* Implications and effects of adopting programs to optimize SOF human performance: Are there limits to enhanced physical and mental capabilities?

## Topic Descriptions

### Ensure SOF Readiness

#### A1. **Cyberterrorism: Is it real or hyperbole?**

Cyberterrorism has become a reality for governments, corporations, militaries, and networks. It is a threat that causes destruction or disruption of service, but how much of a threat? There is general agreement that cyberattacks can target anyone; these attacks can be disruptive for multiple reasons. The U.S. Cyber Command was created to address such threats by defending Department of Defense (DOD) information networks, supporting combatant commands, and defending the nation. What is the difference between cyberterrorism, vandalism, or war? What is the actual threat of cyberterrorism to the United States' counterterrorist actions? What are the capabilities and actions committed by terrorist organizations, and how do they affect Special Operations Forces (SOF)? What is the cost of protective measures, and are they effective? Can personally identifiable information data really be protected? What is the SOF role in counter-cyberterrorism activities? How are activities in this area authorized, and who is the lead organization? What is the SOF role in attacking physical/virtual overseas locations where attacks originate? What is the potential for green-on-blue cyberattacks to deployed SOF?

#### A2. **How does USSOCOM ensure it has the right people, skills, and capabilities now and in the future?**

To ensure SOF readiness now and in the future, there must be an understanding of current readiness and a plan to develop people, equipment, capability, and decision-making. How can SOF leaders develop a more holistic and SOF-centric understanding of the current readiness of SOF, to include critical Service enablers? What knowledge, skills, and abilities are required by SOF operators, civilians, and Service enablers, and how does USSOCOM obtain, manage, and maintain them? How does the command develop a creative, leading-edge research and development process that integrates people, skills, equipment, and capabilities holistically? For equipment and capabilities, how does USSOCOM maintain SOF buying power and establish

fiscal agility? What are the decision-making processes and supporting analytics (particularly risk and causalities) that are required for SOF to organize effectively to prepare for a future defined by unpredictability and increased use of irregular/hybrid modes of warfare by state/non-state actors? How does USSOCOM develop the civilian workforce? With the expanding role of SOF and the new relationship between USSOCOM and the TSOCs, what would be the impact on operations of a cohesive, USSOCOM-managed civilian workforce? How would this be implemented? Which other government workforces could be utilized as a model?

## Help Our Nation Win

### **A3. Responding early to the enemy's exploitation of the social media environment**

Terrorist threat networks and organizations have rapidly capitalized on the use of social media platforms to recruit membership; propagandize friendly, neutral, and opposition target audiences; and antagonize foes (primarily in the West). Western responses, particularly U.S. responses, are slow and often unsophisticated. Unhindered by bureaucratic approval processes and unfettered by ostensible reticence to conduct aggressive influence operations on the Internet, terrorist propaganda machines operate rapidly and extensively against the West, which is burdened by these obstacles. This puts the United States and its Western allies at a decided disadvantage in the digital information environment. The goal of this research is to determine and propose streamlined policies, authorities, and approvals for U.S. and Western influence entities, which will result in not only rapid response to threat propaganda in social media, but also will allow aggressive, proactive engagement in the digital domain. What is the current process for identifying and responding to an enemy's social media attack on the United States or its allies? Does the process identify threat attempts early in the cycle? If not, why not? Are responses developed early in the cycle? What is the process for responding? What are the obstacles and potential solutions? Does mission command offer solutions to the process?

**A4. Strategic indicators and warnings in the gray zone**

The United States and its allies need to recognize the indications and warnings of nascent threats far left of a problem (i.e., during peacetime steady state operations) and apply appropriate mitigation measures before they materialize into national or international crises. To address this topic, the following themes need to be considered:

- Gray zone activities largely take place in the human domain. There is a need to examine how maneuvering in the cognitive space is an important aspect of ‘systematic influence’ on the left side of the operational continuum;
- Gray zones present nuanced security and governance challenges demanding proactive comprehensive deterrence approaches;
- Perceiving security challenges early requires a paradigm shift from passively observing the environment to actively engaging with the environment. SOF cannot wait for security challenges to become clear. They must interact with the security environment to perceive new patterns; and
- An iterative, multidisciplinary, multimodal approach to understanding indicators and warnings is fundamental to furthering understanding of how SOF maneuver in the cognitive space and better compete in the human domain.

How can the future joint force and SOF develop human domain indicators and warnings that inform comprehensive deterrence decisions and enable decision makers to prioritize force readiness to meet security challenges early, particularly in gray zone environments? What political considerations—policies, authorities, ally interests, etc.—constrain, limit, or shape the ability to achieve ‘left of bang’ solutions either broadly speaking or in a specific geography? Many of the crises dealt with originate from a fragility in a gray zone system. If fragile systems unravel when disrupted, how do SOF measure the fragility or robustness of a system (political, social, economic, and environmental)? Can historical case studies be used to help model these systems and their robustness in the face of crises? How do gray zone conflicts look based on SOF’s doctrinal perspective, or does that matter?

**A5. U.S. Government configuration to address transregional threats**

Transregional threats have no respect for nation state sovereignty and 'official' borders. To the contrary, they capitalize on seams between states and regions. The United States and its allies must develop transregional solutions to close those gaps and perceived opportunities. How do they do that? Generally, how do SOF address transregional threats using all the elements of national power when most, if not all, United States Government (USG) departments and agencies are configured along national or regional lines? What constructs exist, or should exist, to synchronize USG transregional efforts below the National Security Strategy level? What is the role of the U.S. country team, who by definition is narrowly focused on a single country, in addressing transregional threats? What current agency/departmen-tal cultures exist that hinder this collaboration, and how do SOF overcome them? How can partner nations be best incorporated in transregional efforts? SOF often operate outside of the theaters of war to achieve a TSOC's campaign support plan objectives. That is often accomplished in conjunction with other USG agencies—whether officially designated or out of necessity for resources and authorities, to achieve mission success. What are the best practices toward attaining interagency cooperation and interdependence? What are the objective barriers to success? What defines mission success versus the success of cooperation? What challenges do SOF personnel face when operating with a whole-of-government approach?

**A6. Modern political warfare/role of SOF in political warfare**

"Political warfare is the logical application of Clausewitz's doctrine in time of peace. In broadest definition, political warfare is the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives. Such operations are both overt and covert. They range from such overt actions as political alliances, economic measures (as an example, the Marshall Plan), and 'white' propaganda to such covert operations as clandestine support of 'friendly' foreign elements, 'black' psychological warfare and even encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states."<sup>1</sup> Economic globalization, nuclear stalemate, and U.S. dominance of traditional warfare (force projection, major combat operations) change the face of warfare for

the foreseeable future. Nation states and non-state groups that possess the elements of national power (i.e., diplomacy, information, military, and economics) are adapting to the environment and circumstances to develop and implement strategies and achieve objectives that would have previously been accomplished through traditional warfare. Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela are executing formal strategies to combat U.S. strengths in order to gain geopolitical concessions, advantages, and advancements. These strategies can best be characterized as political warfare. Since George Kennan's State Department Planning staff defined political warfare in a 1948 memorandum, the United States is still grappling with elements and processes associated with political warfare and how to counter them when adapted by adversaries. How can the U.S. engage more effectively in political warfare? What changes will need to be made for the U.S. to conduct agile political warfare, and what will be the SOF role? How do SOF minimize unintended consequences of UW, such as empowering possible future adversaries?

## **Continue to Build Relationships**

### **A7. Establishing regional hubs or multinational basing as economy of force solutions to multi-tiered threats and risks**

Current conventional, hybrid, and subnational threats have prompted NATO SOF to address security concerns from a regional perspective. As a result of the Crimean annexation, for example, Poland and the Baltic States have polarized SOF assets around Polish SOF command and control (C2). Other regions could follow suit. This approach allows SOF-capable nations to help mitigate security challenges by compensating for a partner nation's SOF capability limitations (perhaps through multinational SOF capability packages). How would historical enmities within a region impact such an approach? Would such an approach provide increased effectiveness from a cost-benefit perspective? How could the U.S. foreign internal defense (FID) mission set support such an approach? What status-of-forces agreement or other legal considerations would need to be addressed? Could theme-focused hubs (as opposed to regional hubs) provide a better solution when addressing transregional threats? What would be the

advantages and disadvantages, constraints, and obstacles associated with multinational SOF basing? What countries and regions are best suited to multinational basing? What lessons can be learned from past joint and multinational basing efforts?

**A8. Understanding USSOCOM and SOF roles in the modern interagency construct**

Today's interagency configuration is derived from more than a decade of transregional conflict featuring an array of threats and non-state actors. With increasing emphasis being placed on whole of government and interagency collaboration, how can USSOCOM encourage potential interagency and international partners to collaborate more effectively? How can gaps in current authorities and capabilities be overcome? With regard to the special operations support team/special operations liaison officer network, how can USSOCOM ensure the right people are being placed in the right agencies and countries? Is USSOCOM's investment in these programs paying off? How can SOF work with or through U.S. and international interagency partners to more effectively counter foreign terrorist fighter efforts and messaging efforts?

**Prepare for the Future**

**A9. Comprehensive deterrence: SOF and the whole-of-government approach**

"Comprehensive Deterrence is a whole-of-government approach that retains the positional advantage of the U.S. by preventing an adversary's action through the existence of credible physical, cognitive and moral threats by raising the perceived benefit of action to an unacceptable risk level."<sup>2</sup> Transregional aspects of competition and conflict require new planning models for comprehensive deterrence, new operational constructs, new ways of thinking, and a fully integrated partner network to rescale security challenges earlier in their trajectory (the gray zone) and at a much lower level of national effort. How do SOF reframe what constitutes strategic power and strategic risk in a complex and unpredictable world? How can these risks, opportunities, and threats be communicated across USSOCOM and other

government organizations in a common language to ensure mutual support? What is the role of SOF as part of a whole-of-government approach to mitigate threats in the nascent stage before they spiral beyond their ability to respond?

**A10. Online recruitment and social network node analysis**

Through social media Salafi jihadist organizations employ global recruitment campaigns to both support a caliphate concept and wage jihad throughout the world. While thousands of social media handles can, in some fashion, connect would-be radicals, there may very well be only a select group of nodes serving as key gateways in advancing jihadist propaganda. Some of these nodes may be unaware of their role and credibility in building a jihadi recruitment base. Defeating jihadi campaigns likely will require identifying these nodes and attacking them directly via counter-messaging. While there are a number of ongoing studies on jihadist social media, what new analytic approaches can yield additional insight on key nodes? How can these approaches better identify and assess threats?

**A11. Combating homegrown and lone wolf terrorism in the U.S. by understanding and disrupting OCONUS influences**

With the recent terrorist events within the United States (Garland, Texas, and San Bernardino, California), U.S. citizens have a growing concern over the likelihood of homegrown and lone wolf terrorist attacks. Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, although concentrated OCONUS, are targeting youth in the U.S. and worldwide to conduct jihad wherever they live. How do SOF contribute to U.S. and global counter-radicalization efforts? What are the current SOF counter-radicalization capabilities? What are the implications of next-generation technology and social media and their capability to disrupt external influences on homegrown and lone wolf extremists? What are the current shortfalls in policies, strategies, and techniques to thwart the influence of OCONUS terrorist organizations and disrupt or deter their ability to spread extremist ideologies conducive to these types of attacks?

## Preservation of the Force and Family

### A12. Mitigating SOF suicides: Susceptibility and risk factors

Suicide in SOF continues to be of concern to senior military and government leaders. A January 2016 *New York Times* article highlighted the suicide of a SOF unit commander, while SOF senior leaders openly addressed it at the 2016 Special Operations Low Intensity Conflict Symposium. Suicides for the rest of the active-duty military have started to decline after years of steady increases. Data from 2015 indicates that SOF suicides continue to happen at a higher rate, even with focused attention on increasing awareness in order to mitigate the risk of suicides throughout the chain of command. What's driving the increase? What has been overlooked? Are the current statistics an anomaly or a gauge for concern? What indicators correlate with susceptibility to suicide? Are there unique risk factors associated with SOF suicides? Are SOF suicides precipitated by different factors among the specialties within the SOF community? What preventive measures can be taken to reduce suicide in the SOF community? Are current outreach programs effective for SOF at risk for committing suicide? Are these programs sufficient to meet their need for support? If not, what additional policies, funding, and/or resources are needed to make these programs more effective? Are SOF veterans and retirees also being considered? Have families been trained on how to detect subtle changes, and do they have immediate access to report possible problems? Have the recommendations that have come out of the numerous suicide studies been implemented? If so, to what effect?

### A13. Implications and effects of adopting programs to optimize SOF human performance: Are there limits to enhanced physical and mental capabilities?

An extensive study directed by a former USSOCOM commander revealed the current operational environment has been more difficult than operators and their families expected, leaving little time for them to adjust to the daily strains of perpetual absences. USSOCOM human performance efforts are currently integrated under the Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) initiative. According to POTFF, there is a gap in empirical data in this area. What is the

value of SOF-specific human performance programs? Should it be a stand-alone program more aligned with operational needs? Should or will the human performance initiative be considered a USSOCOM operational requirement? Why should USSOCOM spend money on such additional programs? What are the limits for the program to research enhanced or augmented physical and mental capabilities? What are the characteristics of human resiliency in SOF operators? Can 'stress resistance capability' be measured biochemically? What are the moral and ethical issues of optimizing mental and physical capabilities through the use of biomechanics, pharmaceuticals, and genetic therapies? Explore the utility and effectiveness of differing treatment methods, therapeutic approaches, and linkages to human performance as part of said treatment. Examine existing data to determine preferred approaches, documented results, and also willingness to sustain enhancement treatment.

## B. Ensure SOF Readiness

### Topic Titles

- B1.\* Training SOF for the future: Identifying skill gaps associated with the next fight
- B2.\* SOF as a strategic instrument of war: How to employ SOF to achieve national security objectives
- B3.\* Beyond stealth to maintain technical overmatch: What do SOF need from future/advanced technologies?
- B4.\* SOF and conventional force integration: How to achieve operational and strategic effects while minimizing risk
- B5. USSOCOM's strategic planning process: Preparing for future conflict
- B6. SOF preparation of the environment: Operational design, best practices, and synchronization
- B7. USSOCOM's expanding roles are changing how it sustains the SOF operator
- B8.\* Adapting the acquisition environment: Technology advances at the speed of the commercial market
- B9. The slippery slope of commercial off-the-shelf

### Topic Descriptions

#### **B1. Training SOF for the future: Identifying skill gaps associated with the next fight**

The future operating environment is defined by an increasingly interconnected global commons paired with the increasing effects of non-state actors. SOF preparing to operate within this environment are bound by fiscal constraint, decreasing resources, and manpower limitations amongst an era of expanding SOF requirements. While the characteristics of warfare within this environment will continue to evolve, what are the skills not yet currently present within special operations that are assessed as necessary for success? How can USSOCOM effectively prioritize training efforts while addressing the risks assumed with inaction? Given the likely requirement for FID and unconventional warfare (UW) missions, how critical are

language capabilities? What are the roles of culture and cultural intelligence? Should training be broadened throughout all SOF or focused on specific SOF specialties?

**B2. SOF as a strategic instrument of war: How to employ SOF to achieve national security objectives**

SOF have become one of the primary military capabilities for senior policymakers and DOD leaders to employ in the uncertain environment of today. This reflects a shift from the use of conventional forces (CF) to a heavy reliance on SOF. What are the implications for U.S. strategy for senior leader reliance on SOF? How should SOF be best employed to achieve national security objectives? What is the effectiveness of SOF: their role, their use as a strategic tool of warfare, and their ability to meet the security needs of the United States and the international community? What are the impacts of CF budget and personnel reductions upon SOF capabilities (equipment and personnel recruitment)? How does the United States determine SOF readiness today? How do SOF improve their capabilities to aggregate and disaggregate around the problem only the assets that are needed to resolve the problem with customized solutions?

**B3. Beyond stealth to maintain technical overmatch: What do SOF need from future/advanced technologies?**

In the fall of 2014, then-Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel announced the Defense Innovation Initiative, an initiative to develop a 'third offset' in technology (stealth was part of the second offset). The third offset is meant to give U.S. forces technological overmatch of its adversaries. Possible examples of this new offset include robotics, autonomy, miniaturization, 3-D printing, big data, and/or swarming. Innovation is not constrained to the defense industry, and the DOD may have to look to the commercial market for breakthrough technologies. What capabilities and/or advances in technologies need to occur to ensure SOF maintain a technological advantage over adversaries? How can SOF capitalize on the third offset? What are the future technology-based threats to SOF operators across the range of military and special operations? Can SOF overcome these threats? How can SOF benefit from these same technologies for operators'

safety and effectiveness? How can SOF use recent technological advances to sustain a force in austere environments, or decrease the footprint of a force in a situation that demands low visibility?

**B4. SOF and conventional force integration: How to achieve operational and strategic effects while minimizing risk**

As budgetary pressure continues to squeeze the military, SOF and CF must continue to find ways to maximize effects through combined efforts and resources. Command, control, and manning, to include type of manning, are important considerations in this process. In addition, the ability to advise and fight against an asymmetric enemy is a key consideration. Recent experience in Iraq and Afghanistan provides examples of SOF and CF integrated operations. How can SOF and CF better leverage each other? For example, how can SOF be value-added to the U.S. Marine Corps' Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs), and how can the MEUs meet SOF theater logistics and mobility needs? How do SOF optimize partnerships and reinforce supported and supporting relationships within SOF; CF; and joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) structural constructs to achieve operational and strategic effects and minimize risk in irregular and traditional operations across the range of military operations? How do SOF bridge critical seams between JIIM partners to conduct operations under Title 10 Authorities, Title 50 Authorities, and/or the Ambassador's Title 22 Authorities to achieve success in complex future operating environments?

**B5. USSOCOM's strategic planning process: Preparing for future conflict**

USSOCOM's missions, roles, and responsibilities include synchronizing plans for global operations against terrorists and their networks. SOF operate in an ever-changing strategic environment where trends and challenges produce changes in the character of conflict. USSOCOM must fully understand and explore the next engagement environment. Are SOF mission requirements driving/equipping force capabilities? Where are these requirements coming from? Is USSOCOM building the force of the future or continuing legacy programs/systems? Are SOF efforts and capacities outpacing their

authorities and appetite to use these resources? Are SOF losing their formation identities—are they becoming too homogeneous? Are new technologies and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) outpacing training programs? What do SOF need from future/advanced technologies?

**B6. SOF preparation of the environment: Operational design, best practices, and synchronization**

Preparation of the environment (PE) is “an umbrella term for operations and activities conducted by selectively trained special operations forces to develop an environment for potential future special operations.”<sup>3</sup> SOF conduct PE in support of geographic combatant command (GCC) plans and orders to alter or shape the operational environment to create conditions conducive to the success of a full spectrum of military operations. Given fiscal constraint, decreasing resources, and manpower limitations, how can SOF continue to conduct effective PE operations amongst an era of expanding SOF requirements? How do SOF design PE operations to achieve both tactical and strategic effects? How do SOF develop a targeting process in support of PE operations, and are there best practices that should be disseminated? Do PE activities vary when conducting the various SOF core operations? If so, how and why? How can SOF leverage key partnerships within the USG or partner nations to further PE efforts? How are SOF PE operations synchronized with USG or partner nations? How do SOF synchronize special activities with other PE efforts? Are joint SOF standardized in how they approach PE so there is common vocabulary amongst the various Service components?

**B7. USSOCOM’s expanding roles are changing how it sustains the SOF operator**

The Nunn-Cohen Amendment to the DOD Authorization Act of 1986 established USSOCOM with the primary mission to organize, train, and equip SOF. Since 1986 the roles and responsibilities of USSOCOM have exponentially expanded as counterterrorism operations have increased over the past decade. Responsibilities further grew in 2013 as USSOCOM assumed combatant command of all TSOCs. Though USSOCOM now has expanded command and support responsibilities

over TSOCS, its authorities, funding, processes, and structure did not adjust to fully support the TSOCs and ultimately SOF operators. How can USSOCOM optimize SOF sustainment operations ensuring support to the TSOCs is fully integrated within the GCC and component logistics concept of operations? Given the complexity of the SOF environment, what authorities and resourcing changes are required to ensure USSOCOM can sustain SOF into the future? What equipment authorization changes are required to sustain the future SOF operator, and is there a better way to manage those authorizations? What USSOCOM headquarters staff/organization changes (logistics leadership rank/grade, logistics operations, engineering, and medical) would enable the headquarters to best support TSOCs in their worldwide mission? How can USSOCOM optimize the integration and interoperability of SOF sustainment with conventional force logistics operations, systems, and infrastructure? GCC concepts of logistics support rarely take into consideration SOF requirements which are often small, unique, and diverse. How can USSOCOM better ensure SOF logistics requirements are being met by GCCs and the CF?

**B8. Adapting the acquisition environment: Technology advances at the speed of the commercial market**

Commercial technology development, and in some cases, government research and development, is occurring at faster rates and often by nontraditional companies that have little or no DOD involvement. How can SOF adapt their current skill sets and regulations to take advantage of these technology advances and continue to upgrade technologies at the speed of the commercial market? How can USSOCOM address its processes as well as Congressional constraints? What is the link between research, development, test, and evaluation/acquisitions and future capability gaps?

**B9. The slippery slope of commercial off-the-shelf**

In the era of fiscal austerity, what is the proper balance between using readily available and affordable commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) solutions versus conducting deliberate research and development (R&D) to field cutting edge technology to SOF operators? Is the pursuit of COTS technologies a viable long-term strategy for USSOCOM

acquisitions? Is reliance on COTS solutions contributing to an erosion of development, test, and evaluation (DT&E) responsibilities? DT&E is the key to improving acquisition outcomes—with COTS the command gets minimal DT&E opportunities to engineer improvement. The USG no longer leads the majority of basic science and technology (S&T) research. How can USSOCOM leverage and adapt COTS technologies for cost savings and unique capabilities? How do COTS technologies impact SOF partner building activities? What are the implications of COTS technology transfer law and SOF partnership building? How can USSOCOM adapt its S&T future casting to invest in leading edge SOF S&T requirements? Do the rapid industry research, development, test, and evaluation efforts unduly influence or undermine SOF creative environment when contractors are embedded in organizations?

## C. Help Our Nation Win

### Topic Titles

- C1. A study of radicalization: Preventing, countering, and disrupting foreign fighter flow
- C2. Sealing the seams and defining SOF C2 in the new security environment
- C3. Digital Green Berets to conduct social media FID: Combating ISIS online
- C4. Transnational organized crime networks: Exploitation of wildlife and other natural resources to fund operations, and use of social media and emerging technologies
- C5.\* How can SOF be optimally employed to shape the strategic security environment?
- C6. What is the appeal of the Islamic State and its message to Muslims in South Asia and Southeast Asia?
- C7. Countering enemy lessons learned to exploit vulnerabilities, block remediation efforts, and inform strategy
- C8. Targeting the terror networks after Afghanistan
- C9. An approach to coalition planning based on the political-military agreed end-states and objectives as a critical framework for future coalition building and operations
- C10. How criminal and terrorist networks exploit free trade zones to generate funds

### Topic Descriptions

- C1. **A study of radicalization: Preventing, countering, and disrupting foreign fighter flow**  
The steady state of foreign fighter flow (FFF) across and into various GCC areas of responsibility continues to be a concern, as an example, into and out of Syria and through neighboring countries. This flow has been attributed to a range of factors, including the recruiting campaigns orchestrated by violent extremist organizations (VEOs) and the ease with which militants from the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe can access this region. The same is true of

FFF across Southeast Asia and South America, and the relationship of VEOs with the FFF phenomenon. This research topic seeks to explore the antecedents of FFF with a focus on the social, environmental, and psychological factors that deter or motivate foreign fighters to join or support extremist causes across GCC areas of responsibility. The research should also document previous studies on organizations such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Al-Nusrah Front to identify similarities/differences in recruitment efforts and candidate reasons for joining various organizations, then to look at various strategies to counter those efforts. What efforts have been made to deter, disrupt, and destroy these foreign fighter threats? Have they been successful? Additionally, the study should address FFF-defeat and countering- FFF operations. How do lethal operations, such as airstrikes, impact these antecedents? How might influence operations weaken these causal factors? What are the information environment's most appropriate leverage points for deterring or disrupting FFF? How do SOF identify, track, and monitor the activities of those foreign fighters that return home to do damage to the home front?

## **C2. Sealing the seams and defining SOF C2 in the new security environment**

Gray zone security challenges are presenting difficult problem sets for U.S. military forces. Strategic problems are no longer confined to sovereign borders or specific regions. Rather, these problems are transregional, spanning the entire globe. Global SOF operations will increasingly involve adversaries who conduct activities and operations across traditional GCC seams within the air, ground, sea, and cyber domains. This will challenge SOF to respond in kind. Recent examples include C2 of SOF aviation (specifically nonstandard aviation; strike; and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets) and SOF teams' pursuits of terrorist networks spanning across GCC boundaries. SOF have unique capabilities to address many of the issues presented by gray zone security challenges. However, the transregional threat presents unique C2 issues as threats cross GCC boundaries and responsibilities. SOF must determine if existing C2 architectures are sufficient to address these challenges. This research

should address current SOF C2 structures to either validate them or determine if they need modification to more efficiently address current threats. The research should also examine support from other functional components such as space, information, and cyber. Does current joint doctrine SOF C2 structure sufficiently address these challenges and the evolving dynamic of cross-GCC, or seam operations? Are the authorities, leadership traits, and technical capabilities required for success currently available? What are some specific recommendations to enhance existing doctrine and/or implement new C2 concepts? What can be learned from historical examples of how C2 of SOF has been established in different campaigns—SOF supporting a conventional force commander, supporting a SOF commander, or supporting the interagency?

**C3. Digital Green Berets to conduct social media FID: Combating ISIS online**

ISIS is extremely adept in using social media and other online venues to recruit, encourage, and direct actions against their enemies. Their materials and approaches are professional and effective. Despite their effectiveness, there are groups such as the Anonymous Hackers who have successfully exploited and disrupted ISIS online activity. The purpose of this topic is to effectively fight ISIS online strategy. What is their strategy, and what are the various online venues that seem so successful? How can the USG/USSOCOM counter the ISIS online strategy for the United States' purposes? Can the United States fight fire with fire by capitalizing on ISIS' successes and strategy to develop a U.S. online offense? Can the United States enlist the assistance of, or team up with, organizations such as Anonymous Hackers to actively fight ISIS on their own online turf? Can/should USSOCOM develop digital Green Berets to combat ISIS and its affiliates online?

**C4. Transnational organized crime networks: Exploitation of wildlife and other natural resources to fund operations, and use of social media and emerging technologies**

Transnational organized crime (TOC) organizations have expanded and modernized their business in a number of ways. They have expanded beyond their well-known narcotics business to exploit

wildlife and other natural resources, and they have modernized their operations to capitalize on the benefits of social media. How do SOF address those initiatives to stave the development, expansion, and prosperity of TOC networks? Specifically:

- Identify where and how criminal/terrorist organizations exploit wildlife and nature resources, such as timber, charcoal, etc., to generate funds for their operations. Discuss how/where/who is creating the demand that encourages this illicit activity. Identify the factors that create a permissible environment for wildlife trafficking and the exploitation of natural resources. Explain the impact this activity has on the local and/or regional populations with regards to their economy, culture, and security. Discuss the local, regional, and transnational security threats posed by wildlife trafficking as well as the exploitation of natural resources. Identify what measures are and/or could be taken by local, regional, and international entities to stop/prevent this illicit activity.
- Identify the most recent social media and communications applications being used by TOC and/or terrorist organizations and explain why (i.e., operational planning, secured communications, financial transactions, etc.). Identify the location and the extent to which these applications are being used (i.e., by country, region) by TOCs and/or terrorist organizations. Highlight any indicators that may help an analyst identify someone who is using these applications (i.e., phone number formats, emails, account addresses, etc.). Identify how certain applications are utilized for nefarious purposes. Identify any application vulnerabilities (i.e., unreliable connections, limited use areas, etc.) that can be exploited by DOD.
- Include research on how corruption creates a permissible environment that allows TOC networks to operate, addressing the challenge of identifying what persons/entities are complicit in doing so. Also, recommend research of how cultural norms associated with different levels of corruption within specific countries or regions factor into creating a permissible environment.

**C5. How can SOF be optimally employed to shape the strategic security environment?**

Special operations actions and activities can have disproportionate affect for the resources and personnel employed, but SOF are a limited resource. How does USSOCOM synchronize and prioritize special operations, actions, and activities globally? Does the command present coherent SOF employment options and recommendations? How can USSOCOM better provide coherent and unified SOF capabilities to the GCCs? How could the command expand the range of available options through requisite authorities, capabilities, and relationships?

**C6. What is the appeal of the Islamic State and its message to Muslims in South Asia and Southeast Asia?**

Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world but seems to be immune to the type of extremism and violent extremist organization groups that other Muslim countries/populations encounter. Admittedly, there are groups operating in those areas and attacks do occur, but not to the extent that they exist or occur in the Middle East and Africa. Is this a true premise or simply a perception? Identify the factors within Indonesia that make it immune—or support the perception it is immune—to those types of groups or attacks. Is this perception true at the regional level with any other countries in South or Southeast Asia? If so, are there similar instances in other areas of the world? That is, are some areas more susceptible or less susceptible to radicalization? If so, why?

**C7. Countering enemy lessons learned to exploit vulnerabilities, block remediation efforts, and inform strategy**

In 2006, the United States Military Academy's Combating Terrorism Center published a study, "Harmony and Disharmony," examining senior jihadi ideologues' internal assessments of lessons learned from jihadi efforts during the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> The enemies' after action reports (AARs) provided insights into jihadi macro-strategy. The study noted striking parallels of jihadi experiences in Syria in the 1970s to al-Qaeda sponsored operations in Iraq in 2006. The current transregional violent extremist effort demonstrates both the jihadists' successful adaptation and their continued struggle to address

specific lessons learned. For example, Abu Mus'ab Al Suri's account of Muslim Brotherhood operations in Syria over 35 years ago provides considerable insight. Contemporary jihadists appear to have learned from Al Suri's AAR, including lessons on the importance of an advanced comprehensive strategy; self-sufficiency; strong internal and external public relations; a well-crafted media campaign; and the benefits of previous experiences. What lessons are today's trans-regional violent extremists learning that will apply to the strategies of the fifth-, sixth-, seventh-, and subsequent generation mujahedeen? How can the United States and its partners identify and exploit enemies' lessons learned and preempt their strategic adjustments?

#### **C8. Targeting the terror networks after Afghanistan**

On 31 December 2014, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) support in Afghanistan transitioned from combat to a train, advise, and assist mission, and is officially known as Operation Resolute Support (ORS). The United States military mission in Afghanistan, the post-2014 follow-on to Operation Enduring Freedom, is known as Operation Freedom's Sentinel. It is part of the NATO-led ORS and consists of two components. One is working with allies as part of the train, advise, and assist mission, and the second is to conduct counterterrorism operations against the remnants of al-Qaeda to ensure that Afghanistan is never again used to stage attacks against the homeland.<sup>5</sup> The terrorist threat worldwide remains high. How will the transition in Afghanistan affect the targeting of terrorist networks worldwide? There are numerous strategic and national-level policies enacted in recent years governing targeting operations, not only in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan, but worldwide. How will they be effected? Are there other considerations for the SOF targeting process? Current events convey significant and violent changes around the globe. Which agency should have the lead? How might interagency responsibilities and mutual assistance be refined? What, if any, authorities gaps exist? How can SOF continue to ensure that counterterrorist efforts outpace terror networks' ability to regenerate?

**C9. An approach to coalition planning based on the political-military agreed end-states and objectives as a critical framework for future coalition building and operations**

Recent U.S.-led military operations enjoyed large coalitions of forces that operated in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq. However large the multinational participation, there were disparities in national goals and objectives of the participating nations; some joined for national reasons, while others joined the coalition in support of the United States. In addition to goals and objectives, they brought caveats on what they could and would not do, that is “to ensure their forces operate in Afghanistan in accordance with their national laws and policies.”<sup>6</sup> This topic should address ways for tackling future crises in which multiple nations have a vested interest and for which the nations are willing to commit forces and resources based on agreed end-states and strategic diplomatic, information, military, and economic objectives. What ways/mechanisms are available for nations to make known objectives, goals, and caveats as input to the strategic and campaign planning process before the plan is finalized?

**C10. How criminal and terrorist networks exploit free trade zones to generate funds**

Free trade zones (FTZs), also called foreign trade zones, are areas “within which goods may be landed, handled, manufactured or reconfigured, and re-exported without the intervention of the customs authorities.”<sup>7</sup> Criminals and/or terrorists exploit those areas to their own benefit for smuggling illicit goods in and out of countries, and in some countries are known as “smuggler’s havens.”<sup>8</sup> Identify FTZs with the most impact on the United States, describe how they function, and how criminals and/or terrorist networks may be leveraging them to engage in trade based money laundering as well as the movement of national security interest goods. Those include: weapons of mass destruction, man-portable air defense systems, small arms, drugs and their precursors, oilfield equipment, nuclear equipment, missile equipment, etc. Discuss how exploitation of FTZs impacts the local and regional populations living in the vicinity of FTZs with regards to their economy and security. Identify what factors within, but not limited to, the political, economic, infrastructure, and

security sectors, allow criminal and/or terrorist networks to exploit FTZs. Identify what local, regional, and/or international efforts exist to prevent the exploitation of FTZ by nefarious actors to support their illicit trade and financial flow operations. Discuss what additional authorities, resources, and/or cooperation between nations are needed to support this effort.

## D. Continue to Build Relationships

### Topic Titles

- D1. Developing an effective network: How do SOF identify, assess, develop, and motivate potential partnerships for various special operations?
- D2. Define how SOF can improve transregional partner information sharing
- D3. Institutionalizing partnerships: Getting beyond personalities
- D4.\* Culture and human nature in building partner capacity of SOF: Why are there different outcomes?
- D5. Unraveling identity: Assessing multiple levels of personal and communal identity and the overlaps within them
- D6.\* Educating SOF partners: Effectiveness, funding, and human rights vetting
- D7.\* Role of USSOCOM in technology procurement for international SOF
- D8.\* Virtually expanding the SOF network: Capacity building by leveraging technology
- D9.\* Enabling a SOF network under conditions of financial austerity
- D10. Air Force Special Operations Command combat aviation advisors growth potential

### Topic Descriptions

- D1. Developing an effective network: How do SOF identify, assess, develop, and motivate potential partnerships for various special operations?**

Most SOF operations require non-SOF support. There are ongoing efforts to develop an understanding of the ‘blue,’ or friendly, network to support USG countering weapons of mass destruction operations, actions, and activities. How do SOF develop similar situational understanding of CF, USG interagency, and international partner forces’ objectives, missions, and purpose to achieve complementary effects for other SOF operations? Who is the primary integrator for the friendly network at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels?

Are there best practices and other mechanisms for understanding, identifying, assessing, developing, and motivating potential partners' behavior, objectives, organization, and composition to successfully partner with SOF? How do SOF mission sets complement the effects of GCC CF? What would a community of action for counterterrorism in Europe look like, for example? What multinational agreements must be in place to allow the network to be effective in times of crisis? Which partnership relationships are most effective and most cost-efficient? What other interests or issues must be considered (stability, capability, etc.) when partnering with others in conducting and supporting irregular warfare? What are the policy and authorities issues pertaining to SOF interoperability with nongovernmental organizations? What are the second- and third-order effects of partnering with a particular actor? What are the left and right limits of such partnerships? What are the measures of effectiveness or return on investment for such partnerships?

**D2. Define how SOF can improve transregional partner information sharing**

Gray zone security challenges are presenting difficult problem sets for U.S. military forces. Strategic problems are no longer confined to sovereign borders or specific regions. Rather, they are transregional and global. To increase effectiveness, SOF must develop purposeful relationships, interact in an informed manner, and facilitate information sharing. How can SOF integrate partner capabilities and improve information sharing among partners to more effectively counter transregional VEOs using a transregional approach? How can SOF share open-source information with partners and encourage partners to share their information and insights to more effectively counter terrorism? What authorities and issues impact open-source and other information sharing? What information can and should be shared with partners, what are the barriers to doing so, and how can these barriers be addressed? How does military use of commercial systems and databases come into play? What can USSOCOM do to establish an effective collaborative information environment to enable information sharing, enhance situational awareness, and support decision-making?

**D3. Institutionalizing partnerships: Getting beyond personalities**

U.S. and partner SOF now have more than a decade of experience fighting in combined operations and coalition contexts. What best practices have been learned and developed as a result of these experiences? What doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, education, personnel, and facilities changes need to be made to institutionalize these lessons in order to better enable future coalition SOF operations and improve interoperability? How can USSOCOM enable partnerships at all levels to better allow partner SOF to train as realistically as possible? How can a decade of lessons learned and best practices inform new directives, initiatives, and partnerships?

**D4. Culture and human nature in building partner capacity of SOF: Why are there different outcomes?**

Competing economic theories (e.g. structuralism, dependency) on the development of nations cite different factors that lead to success. Cultural explanations are sometimes invoked to explain differences in national outcomes. Others have pointed to human nature as a critical factor. Which factors are most salient to building partner capacity, and how should SOF capacity-building efforts address those factors? How do cultural differences affect perceptions of capacity and success in capacity building? How does understanding culture make a positive difference and enhance SOF military effectiveness? Understanding culture frequently refers to the adversary or to other actors and institutions who are residents of a given operational environment. Yet, ongoing emphasis on U.S. interagency and coalition partners (civilian and military) increases the value of understanding the organizational culture and 'sub-cultures' of internal partners (e.g., U.S. Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, the intelligence community, U.S. and foreign law enforcement). There are dominant cultures that exist for both U.S. and foreign actors.

**D5. Unraveling identity: Assessing multiple levels of personal and communal identity and the overlaps within them**

Identity shapes beliefs about appropriate actions and why they have value to a person and a community. As a way of developing greater understanding of context and others' intentions when building

relationships, especially in the fluid arena of the gray zone, what mechanisms exist to locate and assess the importance of competing identities? Why do some identities endure challenges? Why do some identities get folded into or subsumed by others and under what conditions is that likely to occur? These questions are of great importance to combating radicalization among vulnerable populations, as well as building partner capacity to prevent extremist ideas from taking root. They also address a broad operational spectrum from pre-conflict persistent engagement to identify warning signs as they begin, through countering extremist narratives that already seek to overwhelm nonviolent identity tendencies that may exist, all the way to de-radicalization efforts for those leaving groups like ISIS. In order to answer these questions, research into the cultural norms found within political, social, and economic institutions will build rubrics for assessing identity clarity (specificity of values and actions promoted by the identity), predictability (amount and types of anticipated actions by others within the identity group), intensity (importance vis-à-vis other identities), prevalence (breadth of acceptance within the community), durability (ability to withstand counter identities), and flexibility (adaptability with changing contexts). Answering these questions and developing this framework will improve SOF efforts to build better relationships by understanding others' intentions more fully.

#### **D6. Educating SOF partners: Effectiveness, funding, and human rights vetting**

SOF have a lengthy history of involvement in training foreign partners; however, their experience in educating those partners is considerably less extensive. Recent efforts to support education in partner nations have encountered political stumbling blocks. How important are these educational initiatives, and what can be done to expand them? Should SOF support educational initiatives in countries where the military has been implicated in human rights violations or problematic behaviors? What funding sources are appropriate—MFP-11 or security assistance under international military education and training—and under what conditions? What are the essential SOF network partner education requirements for effective partnered operations?

**D7. Role of USSOCOM in technology procurement for international SOF**

USSOCOM has numerous opportunities, but few authorities, for helping foreign partners obtain technology and equipment. Should USSOCOM have a greater role in security assistance when it involves procuring technology for international SOF? How would such a role contribute to interoperability and the expansion of the SOF network? Should USSOCOM receive additional funding and authorities to facilitate acquisition for SOF partners? Should support be limited to SOF in the SOF network? What would be the proper role for USSOCOM in the security assistance process, and how would this effort be coordinated with other DOD and Department of State efforts?

**D8. Virtually expanding the SOF network: Capacity building by leveraging technology**

With increasing demands to counter VEOs, SOF find themselves stretched thin. Can SOF satisfy GCC theater security cooperation and SOF objectives by conducting capacity building activities virtually? What technologies can facilitate virtual interactions? To what extent would it relieve pressure on SOF deployment requirements and durations? What activities can be performed adequately by virtual means, and which require physical presence? Has the spread of modern communications technology reduced the importance of face-to-face contact? What are the limitations to such virtual engagement? How can virtual engagement increase international collaboration at the strategic planning level? From a psychological standpoint, are virtual relationships with no face-to-face interaction as strong or as trusted as those built in person?

**D9. Enabling a SOF network under conditions of financial austerity**

In the U.S. and most of its partner nations, budgetary pressures are constraining the amount of funding available for SOF and international SOF networking. What options are available for sustaining the funding of the SOF network? What aspects of the SOF network are most deserving of funding, and where can cuts be made without seriously degrading the network? How can partner nations be convinced

to make greater contributions? To what extent will greater partner contributions dilute U.S. leadership of the SOF network, and what are the advantages and disadvantages of non-U.S. leadership of the SOF network? How do reductions in CF capabilities affect the SOF network, and how can these problems be mitigated?

**D10. Air Force Special Operations Command combat aviation advisors growth potential**

Currently, United States Army Special Operations Command fields seven Special Forces groups, yet Air Force Special Operations Command has only one active duty squadron dedicated to the FID, security force assistance (SFA), and UW missions. This results in a mismatch of capabilities and missed opportunities with regard to building partnership capacity and partner nation air-to-ground integration. The objective is to determine the feasibility and methodology of growing the combat aviation advisor force to more closely match that of Army SOF. Also, basing locations, including possible collocation at the TSOCs, should be considered. Many partner nations would like additional assistance from SOF in aviation, but budgetary constraints have prevented SOF from completely meeting the demand. What role should SOF aviation play in SFA and FID? In which operational environments can SOF aviation contribute the most? How valuable is SOF aviation assistance to the achievement of U.S. national strategic objectives? How can aviation contribute to the enabling of the SOF network? How does or should SOF efforts mesh with those of other DOD and Department of State efforts?

## E. Prepare for the Future

### Topic Titles

- E1. Preparing for future conflict and Goldwater-Nichols reform
- E2. Implications of being strategically outpaced
- E3. Broadening considerations of strategic risk
- E4. Conducting and assessing military information support operations: Are old media techniques still viable?
- E5. Migration waves and future SOF recruitment and force generation
- E6. SOF challenges and opportunities in future operating environments: Where and how SOF can be decisive
- E7. Hybrid warfare by state and non-state adversaries
- E8.\* SOF successes in preventing wars: Effectiveness of persistent peacetime engagement
- E9. Human aspects of military operations analysis
- E10.\* Agile information systems that enable SOF network partner integration and SOF C2
- E11. Unconventional warfare: Successes and failures from the Cold War to the present

### Topic Descriptions

#### E1. **Preparing for future conflict and Goldwater-Nichols reform**

In December 2015, the nation's top military officer, General Joseph Dunford, called for the Pentagon to revamp combatant commands for the "fight of the future." Current "old plans," he indicated, take too long to execute. Thus, after 30 years of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, the Senate Armed Services Committee is considering reimagining, reorganizing, or consolidating the combatant commands. How should USSOCOM and the global SOF network be structured to resource and organize U.S. and partner SOF of the future? How can USSOCOM ensure unique and varied SOF capabilities are employed to their fullest and most enduring effect by the GCCs? Does current joint doctrine for SOF C2 structure sufficiently address challenges associated with a potential reform? What reorganizing—if any—should occur to address current China and ISIS issues?

**E2. Implications of being strategically outpaced**

Terrorist organizations continue to converge and collaborate as affiliates. Now, they successfully share best practices, lessons learned, personnel, training, funding, and other resources at unprecedented levels. In tandem, the number of under-governed spaces is growing, enabling terrorist cells to proliferate. How can affected governments in these spaces address primary drivers of terrorism (e.g., poverty, inadequate security, poor governance, and lack of employment opportunities) to stop this spread? How do SOF address an enduring threat of increased numbers of foreign fighters that may or may not be outpacing U.S. capabilities?

**E3. Broadening considerations of strategic risk**

Calculating strategic risk (positional advantage, strategic power, influence, governance, access, and cumulative effects) can help define how the U.S. competes for positional advantage in a disordered world, and—with it—determine what strategic success/risk looks like. This includes ensuring sufficient strategic depth and options for an acceptable political/operational outcome for the U.S. and its international partners. SOF are an important part of this calculation, as they provide a critical operational capability within the human domain to expand considerations of strategic risk. Does the U.S. possess sufficient perspective, thinking, and models to consider risk in the current and emerging strategic environment? Does the current and future strategic environment represent a different context for existing threats, or does the U.S. face new threats altogether? Can USSOCOM more effectively develop concepts and conduct joint experimentation with JIIM partners to tackle emerging threats and opportunities?

**E4. Conducting and assessing military information support operations: Are old media techniques still viable?**

Growing fiscal constraints and shifting communication paradigms demand a critical evaluation of traditional military information support operations (MISO)—specifically, a need to reassess application of MISO-driven media to ensure SOF continue to provide combatant commanders with cost-effective options for shaping the human domain. This includes considering costs associated with production,

distribution, dissemination, and evaluation for traditional and web-based MISO at all levels of war, and with it the strengths and weaknesses of current MISO methods for targeted audiences at these levels.

**E5. Migration waves and future SOF recruitment and force generation**

The United States, Europe, and Latin America serve as melting pots for migration waves, a trend likely to increase. Given that the majority of migration waves are triggered by regional instability, these regions are likely places for future SOF deployments. Moreover, pools of migrants can become a source of future SOF recruitment and force-generation. What impacts do these migration waves have on countries experiencing large population losses and gains, notably destabilization? What sub-sets of immigrant populations are best suited to support SOF objectives? What risks are associated with recruiting from these sub-groups? In what capacity would these potential recruits provide the greatest return on investment?

**E6. SOF challenges and opportunities in future operating environments: Where and how SOF can be decisive**

Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. has inexorably moved to a less stable and less predictable global environment. Predicting future instability, conflicts, and direct and indirect threats to U.S. interests remains profoundly important to USSOCOM. What are the projected global hot spots in 5, 10, or 15 years? What future state, non-state, social, and technological ‘game changers’ could impact global U.S. interests? What do SOF need to understand about the myriad projections and predictions regarding the future operating environment so USSOCOM is prepared for the future? Where should USSOCOM focus future ‘Phase 0’ activities to enhance stability and prevent conflict? Should there be increased emphasis on campaign planning and the application of operational design to help develop strategies for activities short of war?

**E7. Hybrid warfare by state and non-state adversaries**

Many deem hybrid warfare as the convergence of TOC networks and terrorist organizations. While some assess the relationship to be

more of a nexus than convergence, most agree there is an increasingly more complex threat to national security as a result of criminal and terrorist organizations working together. How does the United States counter and deter the hybrid warfare employed by state and non-state adversaries during both war and peace across the spectrum of conflict? How can the U.S. optimally respond to hybrid and asymmetric challenges while simultaneously accounting for fiscal limitations and political sensitivity to large-scale operations? What is the best means to fully synchronize JIIM responses to hybrid challenges?

**E8. SOF successes in preventing wars: Effectiveness of persistent peacetime engagement**

SOF are active in scores of countries around the world, emphasizing the importance of shaping the environment during ‘Phase 0’ operations. What are historical examples of SOF deployments and operations in ‘Phase 0’ that prevented instability and conflict, and ultimately protected U.S. interests and the homeland? What conflicts and crises were prevented or ameliorated through persistent peacetime engagement by SOF? How were SOF flexible and adaptable to adjust to changing situations and make valuable contributions in unexpected ways? How can past successes be applied toward understanding future problems?

**E9. Human aspects of military operations analysis**

In the 2013 Posture Statement to Congress, former USSOCOM Commander Admiral William H. McRaven defined the human domain as “the totality of the physical, cultural, and social environments that influence human behavior.”<sup>10</sup> Integrating human aspects of military operations analysis into intelligence analysis can better equip U.S. forces to understand operating environments and produce more informed decisions on forward presence, engagement planning, partner building, and influencing hearts/minds/behaviors. What are the future advanced technologies and cultural social practices for engaging underdeveloped populations in support of partner governments to achieve U.S. interests? What doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, education, personnel, facilities, and policy

actions need to occur to institutionalize human aspects of military operations analysis within SOF?

**E10. Agile information systems that enable SOF network partner integration and SOF C2**

Agile information systems include, but are not limited to: e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, face-to-face stand-up meetings, portal pages, etc. Within these systems, SOF and SOF partners arguably continue to lose the battle over narrative—too slow to respond and often through ineffective messaging. What are the future agile information systems that USSOCOM should be focused on incorporating into the SOF network in the next 15 years? Of these, what processes, systems, and mechanisms can be leveraged to share information with international partners to include differing levels of security classification?

**E11. Unconventional warfare: Successes and failures from the Cold War to the present**

UW consists of activities that are conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area. UW has become an increasingly important tool of U.S. policy as resistance forces in many parts of the globe organize to confront oppressive regimes. This topic should examine the successes and failures of past UW operations and should include: the Office of Strategic Services in World War II, Russian UW in the Ukraine/Crimea, the initial stages of Operation Enduring Freedom with the U.S. in support of the Northern Alliance, Contras in Nicaragua, and the U.S. in Operation Iraqi Freedom in partnership with the Kurdish Peshmerga. How can SOF be better trained and equipped to capitalize on opportunities and enable resistance operations in times and locations of choice as approved by U.S. authorities? In each example of successes and failures of past UW operations, describe the conditions. How was success defined? What were the best practices? Are the American people and political leaders prepared to support UW given ethical questions and the long-term demands of UW?



## F. Preservation of the Force and Family

### Topic Titles

- F1.\* Show no weakness: Addressing the stigma associated with seeking medical and mental healthcare for SOF
- F2. Preventive medicine specialist core competencies in support of SOF in complex environments
- F3.\* Understanding the challenges of social reintegration for SOF
- F4.\* Vulnerabilities and threats to the wellbeing of SOF and their families through social media exploitation
- F5.\* The Care Coalition: “We will keep the faith with you”
- F6.\* Lessons learned from the SOF Family Pilot Program

### Topic Descriptions

#### F1. **Show no weakness: Addressing the stigma associated with seeking medical and mental healthcare for SOF**

The previous USSOCOM Commander, U.S. Army General Joseph Votel, was quoted at a 2015 Washington conference as having sought out counseling in the past: “I have, with my family, sought counseling and assistance ... I did it an earlier time in my career, but it’s been since 9/11, and I encourage everybody to do that,” he stated.<sup>11</sup> Military senior leaders publicly encourage forces to seek medical or behavioral healthcare; however, surveys indicate there remains a stigma associated with it. What else can be done to ‘destigmatize’ SOF operators and their families seeking medical and behavioral healthcare? Are there any adverse consequences to ‘destigmatizing’ medical and behavioral healthcare treatment? What elements of military and SOF culture are present that challenge the effort to balance mental fitness with duty performance? Is a culture that rewards personnel based on how many hours they work, how many days they deploy, and how many sacrifices they make counterproductive to establishing programs that support restoring and maintaining reduced levels of stress? How can a SOF operator take leave, reduce time away from family, and/or seek measures to reduce stress when those efforts are possibly stigmatized as non-productive or perceived as a weakness?

What are the implications of SOF personnel and families seeking outside healthcare under the exigencies of non-disclosure agreements? What roles could a 'SOF-for-Life' program play in assisting active and retired SOF to cope with stressors? Could an analysis of the retired SOF population's coping mechanisms assist in improving current treatment protocols? Are there proactive measures being taken, such as required 'crew rest' for aviators? This policy was meant to be proactive and eventually shifted aviator culture and ultimately saved more pilots' lives and increased mission effectiveness. Could the concept of physical/psychological 'maintenance' be framed as a strategic force multiplier? Even more so, could it be normalized? Is the stigma associated with mental health treatment organizationally or culturally imposed? To what extent do SOF operators contribute to stigmas that prevent them from seeking healthcare or counseling for themselves and their families?

**F2. Preventive medicine specialist core competencies in support of SOF in complex environments**

SOF continue to face challenges associated with long-term, forward, small footprint operations in austere environments. The durations and recurrent nature of these missions pose unique challenges from public health perspectives that are not routinely encountered by CF. SOF preventive medicine personnel must be well-trained and educated in order to apply rigorous technical and scientific assessments and evaluations to develop non-standardized solutions to support the asymmetrical battle space that SOF operators work in. Further, the long-term and repetitive engagements that SOF conduct, specifically in special warfare [FID and UW], require that SOF live and work with host nation and partner forces in extremely close conditions to be effective. The use of U.S. standards and restrictions, such as only authorizing approved food sources for consumption, restriction on use of host nation pesticides and vector control measures, mandating U.S. water and waste management standards, and other policies can result in U.S. personnel being isolated due to the appearance of cultural insensitivity. What additional specialized education and training is required to better prepare SOF medics for operations in austere environments to be prepared for some of these unusual health

threats and illnesses? Should foreign language capable preventive medicine specialists also become SOF qualified?

**F3. Understanding the challenges of social reintegration for SOF**

When SOF deploy, they leave they leave the familiar norms of American society and enter into a foreign culture where they must adapt to local customs, practices, and environments. They also shift from a training status to a fully operational one, which requires them to be in a prolonged heightened state of awareness. With the high-tempo of in-garrison SOF training and repeated deployments over several years, there is no longer a definitive separation of military and civilian lifestyles to decompress; many refer to it as a purely military life. What are the social reintegration challenges of returning SOF? With what frequency should SOF be assessed? Does successful reintegration differ across marital status, race, religion, gender, or Service? If so, how? What makes it difficult to reintegrate socially? What are the challenges of social reintegration, especially for single Service members who do not benefit from programs supporting family reintegration? Is there a propensity for certain SOF specialties to reintegrate better than others, and what lessons can be learned from these successes? What policies, programs, and practices best assist with social reintegration?

**F4. Vulnerabilities and threats to the wellbeing of SOF and their families through social media exploitation**

The proliferation of social media over the last decade and the increased reliance on it for communications, gaming, entertainment, and news has created a potential threat to Service members and their families. Not only can SOF members and their families be identified through social media, but nefarious actors can use that information to harass and threaten them. How does this specifically affect SOF, who could be considered targets of higher value? As the millennial generation and subsequent generations increasingly rely on social media to connect, how will this impact the safety and security of SOF and their families? To what extent has social media already been exploited to track and seek retribution or revenge against Service personnel involved in operations overseas? To what extent does the

dissemination of information identifying SOF by name through YouTube, Vimeo, and Vine impact the safety and security of the forces and their families? What is the threat to the families of SOF based on their postings to social media sites, and how will those posts impact the Service member and his or her ability to perform the mission in an effective manner? With the declassification and release of details of previous SOF missions and operations, what are the implications for the families and descendants of SOF personnel already retired or deceased? How should USSOCOM and the Services address these issues and mitigate their impact on SOF and their families?

**F5. The Care Coalition: “We will keep the faith with you”**

In 2005, USSOCOM established an aggressive program to internally care for SOF wounded, ill, or injured Service members and their families. The stated goal of the Care Coalition is to accomplish the mission by, with, and through government and nongovernment organizations. The program has evolved from immediate care and recovery assistance to include a comprehensive recovery plan, a comprehensive transition plan, and intends to provide direct, lifelong assistance to SOF personnel who are wounded, ill, or injured. In addition to transition assistance and mentoring, an adaptive sports program and fellowships were added. Documenting its history, evolution, and measures of effectiveness are of interest to USSOCOM leadership. How effective is the program? Can it be considered a model advocacy program for the Services? Has it had a direct affect in increasing SOF readiness? What metrics can be considered to measure its effectiveness? With expected future budget constraints, is it a long-term sustainable program?

**F6. Lessons learned from the SOF Family Pilot Program**

Over the last three years, USSOCOM has received unprecedented authorities and funding for POTFF initiatives. The SOF Family Pilot Program is well underway. What metrics should be used for assessing success and efficacy of the program? How do USSOCOM POTFF initiatives compare to U.S. sister Service initiatives? Are there similar or comparable programs in place with partner nation SOF? What are their best practices that USSOF could adopt? Can the sharing

of POTFF lessons and programs be leveraged to ‘thicken’ the SOF network and improve relationships with key SOF partners? Can they be used in partnership capacity building?



## G. USSOCOM J5 Key Strategic Issues List

### Overview

The J5 Strategy Division is responsible for USSOCOM's understanding of the global security environment, which helps articulate appropriate strategy and force development requirements. The Key Strategic Issues List (KSIL) is a set of questions the J5 believe to be relevant in an attempt to support this understanding and is built around trends expected to continue for the next 10 to 20 years. This is a living document and it will change to address other questions as the J5 generates satisfactory answers to some, while identifying additional questions to explore. If individuals are interested in working with the J5 on one of the KSIL topics<sup>12</sup> (with your organization or individually), please contact the J5 via e-mail at [J5KSIL@socom.mil](mailto:J5KSIL@socom.mil).

### Discussion

In addition to using these questions as a method to focus J5 thinking and research, the KSIL functions as a tool to conduct engagements with outside organizations. The list is used to both spur discussion and notify others what USSOCOM interests are. In cases where outside organizations share these interests, the KSIL provides a list of potential research topics. The J5 is building a network intended for sharing insights and research products to better inform strategic thinking, while continuing to look for opportunities to become involved with researchers and receive feedback related to KSIL questions. In some cases, the J5 has sponsored travel to USSOCOM for briefings on the findings of a research project related to the question list to general officer-level personnel.

### KSIL key points

- Aimed at improving understanding of global conditions and trends to enable better strategy for USSOCOM.
- Intended to invite debate among competing perspectives—multiple perspectives on a single question are valuable.

- Relevant for academic inquiry to encourage participation from both civilian universities and professional military education schools.
- Focused around: What should be keeping us up at night when we think about the future?

What follows is a summary list of the KSIL and individual one-page descriptions with objectives and pertinent research themes to support a comprehensive understanding of each strategic issue.

## Topic Titles

- G1. Weapons of mass destruction
- G2. Information/digital age
- G3. Shifting power distribution and diffusion
- G4. Megacities
- G5. Tactical actions versus strategic results
- G6. Conflict prevention
- G7. Human nature versus culture
- G8. Risk management
- G9. Interest-based strategies
- G10. Weapons technology proliferation
- G11. Disruptive and game-changing technologies
- G12. Adaptability and agility
- G13. Capability gaps
- G14. Long-term fiscal constraints
- G15. Strategic constraints
- G16. Demographics
- G17. Energy/other resources

## Topic Descriptions

### **G1. Weapons of mass destruction (WMD)**

Are current policies and actions advancing or undermining our counter-proliferation intentions? Are the incentives for the acquisition and/or use of WMD rising or subsiding at the state level? What about the incentives for transfer of WMD to non-state actors? How

can the U.S. favorably change these incentives? How can USSOCOM better contribute to counter-proliferation efforts?

The objective of this research topic is to develop new insights across the breadth and depth of counter-proliferation efforts. Enabling technology for WMD is increasingly accessible for a range of actors, and counter-proliferation capabilities are not keeping pace. Therefore, incentives/disincentives for acquisition remain paramount. Sanctions have not proven especially effective in deterring some states from developing WMD capabilities. Enforcing global “rules” for possession of such weapons is also difficult in an era where states and populations are especially sensitive to any perceived infringement upon their sovereignty. The United States’ counter-proliferation effort is evolving, and our need for greater understanding of the associated issues is growing. The majority of our current counter-WMD efforts are aimed at nuclear proliferation, while growing evidence indicates that it is other forms of WMD that will be more problematic.<sup>13</sup>

Themes of interest include:<sup>14</sup>

- Evolving incentives for transfer.
- Options for preventing or deterring proliferation.
- Systemic evaluation of the United States’ counter-proliferation program.
- Evolution of WMD policies, especially those associated with rogue states and non-state actors.
- Implications of U.S./United Nations proliferation policies on emerging states.
- Options to manage expanding membership to the ‘nuclear club.’
- Achieving the appropriate balance between nuclear, biological, chemical, cyber, and electromagnetic pulse counter-proliferation efforts.
- Potential advantages of focusing policy on management of consequences of possession.
- Evolving definitions of WMD. What is the next possible WMD? Most dangerous? Most likely?
- Can we adequately survive/recover from a WMD event?

## **G2. Information/digital age**

Does the information/digital age impact the nature of stability? What are the implications of increasingly numerous empowered individuals? How does information transparency affect the interactions of states? What are the implications for our military operations and engagements? Are there opportunities? What are the specific implications for SOF in cyberwarfare?

The objective of this research topic is to develop new insights into how the information and digital age is changing the nature of the global strategic environment. Cyber tools are changing the relationships among and between individuals, informal groups, non-state actors, and states. Individuals and groups have been empowered by the accessibility of the Internet and social media, which has in turn driven rapid social change. States' ability to adapt and respond to powerful narratives that emerge through these tools has been increasingly challenged by their speed, scope, and reach. Governments are also struggling to safeguard state secrets; sensitive information is increasingly vulnerable to disclosure. While the information and digital age may once have been an advantage to the U.S., it now finds itself struggling to keep up with the latest advances quickly spreading across the globe through the private sector.

Themes of interest include:

- Implications for governance and regional stability.
- Falling cost of network development for non-state actors.
- Social media networks and cultural impacts.
- Development and leverage of distributed populations.
- Grievance mobilization; recruitment to causes/networking.
- Influence of 'virtual' leaders.
- Effects on state decision cycles.
- Ability of U.S. to influence narrative/information wars.
- Appropriate versus needed USG authorities in the cyber realm.
- Impacts on the relationship between states and non-state actors.
- Operations security issues and bureaucratic practices (inability to change/update/procure systems appropriately).
- Security of personal information.

- State secrets and malignant disclosure.
- Cost/benefits of open information sharing.
- Crowdsourcing and intelligence analysis.
- U.S. vulnerability to cyberattack, and appropriate military preparation/response.

### **G3. Shifting power distribution and diffusion**

Is the nature of power changing on the international stage? If so, is it doing so uniformly (i.e., is there a common understanding of ‘what matters’ across regions)? Are power shifts creating a higher likelihood of conflict, if so, among and between which groups? Are today’s shifts in power unique or largely similar to historical experience? How does this change how USSOCOM/TSOCs/SOF conduct engagements and the range of SOF activities?

The objective of this research topic is to further develop our insights into how new power relationships are shaping the strategic environment. There are two main areas of interest on this question: internal and external power shifts. Internally, governments are increasingly challenged to meet the demands placed on them by populations that are becoming more aware of their relative circumstances. The disaffected are better able to organize using modern communications capabilities and pressure governments through either violent or non-violent means. Externally, regions with shifting power among states are likely to face turmoil. Even if a rising power intends to do so peacefully, the established power may act to preserve its position through violent means. It becomes more difficult to discern how governments facing multiple pressures both internally and externally are likely to interpret their interests and predict their actions. Stable relationships may degrade quickly under these conditions. Building a stable network of partners requires an alignment of interests; these interests may shift dramatically in the current environment and affect U.S. strategy. How does the U.S. deal with challenges to its power?

Themes of interest include:

- Diffusion of power from traditional centers to new players.
- Associated impacts on interest alignment.

- Changes in the nature/sources of power—regionally or globally.
- Implications for U.S. partners in terms of policy and military activities.
- The role of relative and/or absolute power gains in today’s world.
- Changes in the viability of security umbrellas (conventional and nuclear).
- Evolving constraints on power.
- Evolving utility of the use of force.
- Changing utility of types of military power.
- Approaches to resolving power struggles.
- Changes in the role and influence of international institutions.
- Challenges to Westphalian order, and ability of states to respond.
- Ability of states to resolve internal power struggles.
- The viability of mediator roles for the U.S.
- The relationship between power shifts and U.S. interests and/or security.
- The relationship between business and states’ ability, or inability, to exercise power.
- Implementing effective strategies given changing contexts of power.

#### **G4. Megacities**

Do rapidly growing cities with massive urban slums pose a substantial challenge to vital U.S. national interests? What are the critical distinctions between such cities in developing versus developed nations? What is the basis of control/power/influence within a megacity? Who is most likely to wield it (governments, gangs, tribes, or anarchy)? Is it possible to create advantageous strategic effects under these conditions? Is the megacity environment unique for SOF? If so, what capabilities are required for understanding it and conducting the full range of SOF activities?

The objective of this research topic is to develop new insights and understanding of rapidly growing, hyper-connected megacities. This

effort is based upon creating an understanding of the major trends at work in the early 21st century: population growth, urbanization, littoralization, and vastly increased electronic connectivity. Between 2012 and 2040, the world population is estimated to grow by 2.2 billion, but that growth will not be evenly distributed. Urban environments in littoral areas in the developing world will account for a significant portion of additional population growth, and draw in almost 1 billion rural-to-urban migrants, increasing the developing world's urban population by more than 3 billion. These urban environments will consist of large, densely populated under-governed urban areas with dramatically increased electronic connectivity. Such an environment will account for drastic changes in demographics that are themselves sources of conflict for formal governance and wide opportunities for corruption, violence, and unrest (youth, unemployment, wealth disparity, disease, access to healthcare, sex distribution, etc.). At the same time, greater connectivity between individuals able to share views and import ideas from regions beyond megacities increasingly allows violence, unrest, and extremist views to rapidly spread in densely populated urban areas with negative effects on the stability of megacities.

Themes of interest include:

- Perceptions versus reality on opportunities in megacities.
- Defining U.S. interests in megacities.
- Differences between cities and organized states.
- State's power versus city's local influence and power (preeminence struggle?).
- Role/impact of overlapping jurisdictions.
- Relationship between formal city core and informal periphery.
- Immigration integration/culture clashes.
- Competing methods of informal leadership and influence.
- How to develop relationships with informal leadership structures/players.
- Ability of the U.S. to balance relationships with cities and owning states.
- Role of demographic issues in exacerbating problems (economic, political).
- Natural disaster consequences and response.

- Potential trends that reverse/increase/change migration to cities.
- Stress on surrounding resource system as cities grow.

#### **G5. Tactical actions versus strategic results**

Has there been a disconnect between our tactical actions and our strategic intentions during the war on terror? If so, are we resolving it? What have the strategic lessons been? Can SOF improve their strategic success without making major changes across interagency organizations? What types of strategic metrics should we use? How can SOF better assess and operate using measures of strategic performance?

The objective of this research topic is to further develop our insights into why tactical programs and activities intended to produce certain enduring effects during the U.S. response to the attacks of 9/11 have, by and large, fallen short of those objectives. Assessing the effectiveness of operations has been a deliberate activity since World War II, with a heavy emphasis on quantitative measures emerging in the Vietnam era. Various approaches (systems analysis, effects-based operations, etc.) have fallen short in establishing compelling tactical metrics to desired strategic effects. There are a variety of factors that may contribute to this effect. This topic is intended to spur research into discrete areas, such as the effect of using tactical metrics to drive strategic effects, as well as into cross-cutting analysis that assesses how current thinking on operations assessment may impact strategic progress.

Themes of interest include:

- The benefits and risks of employing immediate/local/objective measures of tactical performance to predict strategic progress.
- The benefits and risks of employing measures which are more subjective, broader in area, and accrue over time in an effort to give a better sense of strategic progress.
- Exploring how prioritizing tactical metrics may undermine strategic objectives.
- Exploring how assumptions of rationality may mislead tactical actions.

- Aspects of human nature as a framework for assessing strategic progress.
- The development of a family of indicators of strategic progress that is naturally occurring, and easily collected and reported.
- The appropriateness of labels (i.e., regular and irregular warfare) for understanding conflicts.
- Comparing and contrasting measures of strategic performance in ‘state-based’ and ‘populace-based’ conflicts.
- What would a counter-UW strategy consist of? Would it be more appropriate than the more traditional responses (e.g., counterterrorism, combatting terrorism, irregular warfare, etc.)?
- Have policy decisions to preserve regimes deemed as good, or remove/replace regimes deemed as bad, created infeasible conditions in the current strategic environment for achieving the strategic goals desired?
- Is stability of governance (requiring changes that may increase short-term risk to U.S. interests) more important than stasis of government for long-term U.S. interests?
- How do changes in the strategic environment affect how we think about the strategies and tactics best suited to secure our interests?

#### **G6. Conflict prevention**

Are the deterrence-based theories behind the U.S. National Security Strategy adequate to address the current and future strategic environment? Are they appropriate for state and non-state actors? Is the competition and conflict we are currently experiencing necessarily detrimental to U.S. National Security Strategy? Is prevention of conflict practical? If so, what would a ‘prevention approach’ entail? How could USSOCOM facilitate a new prevention approach?

The objective of this research topic is to develop new insights into which approaches are appropriate for achieving U.S. national security objectives in the current and future strategic environments. It is possible that a heavy emphasis on a deterrence-based security approach is not adequate or appropriate, given the current and emerging

strategic environment. Further, any potential successes in deterring conflict are difficult to measure or even understand, particularly given information that has come to light from the Soviet archives that indicate our assumptions on their rationality were unfounded. Simply deterring an undesirable event does not necessarily address underlying causes or grievances that may fester under conditions of artificially-imposed stability. The absence of conflict does not indicate the absence of threats to U.S. interests, and the costs associated with maintaining a status quo that is threatened in multiple dimensions grow quickly. A more comprehensive conflict 'prevention approach' may provide a way to complement or replace the heavy emphasis on deterrence. A thorough examination of both approaches is required to improve strategy for the current and emerging strategic environment.

Themes of interest include:

- Viability of modern deterrence strategies in the current/emerging strategic environment.
- U.S. security costs and benefits from conflicts and competition.
- Elements of a prevention-based approach.
- Determining the costs and benefits of a prevention approach.
- Exploring the relationship of prevention and deterrence. Are they complementary or in conflict?
- The role of prevention and deterrence at the tactical and strategic levels.
- Advancing U.S. interests through prevention and/or deterrence.
- Appropriateness of systemic assumptions (i.e., rational, unitary actors).
- Assessing the success of deterrence and/or prevention.

#### **G7. Human nature versus culture**

Have we focused too exclusively on the role of culture in attempting to explain recent crises? Are the problems we will face in the future more firmly rooted in human nature or human cultures? Is the answer to this question important for our strategic approach? For a force that distinguishes itself on understanding language, regional expertise, and culture, how does SOF incorporate/use aspects of fundamental human nature in its activities?

The objective of this research topic is to further develop our insights into a more comprehensive socio-cultural awareness. One must understand the culture where one operates to implement effective tactical programs, but should also explore the possibility that there are common aspects of human nature across cultures that are equally necessary to understand. This would assist in developing strategic concepts and frameworks that lend context and focus to tactical actions. As people become increasingly empowered to informally challenge formal power structures through legal means if available, or illegal means if necessary, an understanding of human nature may help develop a clearer understanding of these types of problems and conflicts.

Themes of interest include:

- The distinctions and commonalities between societies that are stable and unstable.
- The distinctions between ‘naturally’ and ‘artificially’ stable societies.
- Commonalities across cultures with origins in human nature.
- The distinction between political and popular legitimacy in relation to stability.
- The distinction between political and popular sovereignty in relation to stability.
- The sufficiency, value, and role of various legal mechanisms in fostering stability across cultures.
- Is political conflict internal to a system of governance distinct from political conflict between systems of governance? How so, and so what?
- Do aspects of human nature provide strategic indicators for the health/stability of a society?
- How can SOF track strategic indicators while concurrently developing cultural awareness to improve tactical performance?

## **G8. Risk management**

In what areas does the U.S. or USSOCOM face a great deal of risk, given current and projected resourcing? Which areas are critical? In what areas are we able to accept risk? In what areas must we ‘buy

down' risk to maximum extent possible? What are the most effective risk-management strategies available?

The objective of this research topic is to develop insights on the best practices for managing risk and pursuing a strategy in a rapidly changing environment. Globalization has created a more complex world, made up of a tangled web of relationships and other interdependent factors. Accurately predicting the types of threats and unforeseen events we must contend with is increasingly difficult. Current practice across the national security apparatus closely ties risk directly to threats; new 'risks' (interpreted as threats) require new capabilities or programs to counter them. The wider range of potential crises, however, leads to a longer list of capabilities and capacities to optimally respond. Budget constraints prevent the U.S. from mitigating risk simply through identifying additional resource requirements. Though there has been a higher emphasis on 'flexibility' as an approach to mitigate risk in recent years, multi-role platforms and capabilities that possess that trait are increasingly expensive. An approach that provides a better method of assessing risks associated with strategic choices and weighing trade-offs across the options will better support decision-making.

Themes of interest include:

- Opportunity costs.
- Resource management and prioritization.
- Improving risk assessment methodologies.
- Emerging sources of military and political risk.
- Opportunities for controlling risk.
- Errors in risk assessment and response.
- Organizational issues in effective risk management processes.
- Linking risk to strategy.
- Utility of measurements for levels of risk.
- Options to transfer/share risk with partners.
- National security equivalents of diversification or other risk management strategies.
- Multipurpose weapons platforms capabilities and pitfalls.

**G9. Interest-based strategies**

How can the U.S. best position itself to preserve and build upon a network of actors with interests that are congruent with our own? How do we ensure stability of this network as governments change and adjust to the demands of their populations? How should USSOCOM posture itself to support an “interest-based” approach?

The objective of this research topic is to develop insights into an interest-based approach to strategy (national government, Service, or combatant command). This includes examining how interests are derived from organizational values, norms, and morals. If some interests change over time, shaped by evolving cultures, fortunes, and current events, are there vital interests that endure? As the global situation shifts due to power distribution and diffusion, a country’s interests may change to meet the new power arrangements. This can put a country at odds with former “partners” who used to have shared interests and bring former “threats” into closer alignment. Another aim of this topic is to explore relative advantages of other approaches to strategy (e.g., threat-based or influence-based strategies). Lastly, documents such as the National Security Strategy and national defense and military strategies describe U.S. national interests. As a functional combatant command with global reach, USSOCOM is in a unique position to support vital national interests in both direct and indirect manners. How USSOCOM can best provide this support may shift over time as the global environment evolves.

Themes of interest include:

- Defining interests of states, individuals, and other actors.
- Utility of broad ideological versus narrow pragmatic interests.
- Realism versus liberalism.
- Evolution of U.S. grand strategy.
- Influence of partners’ interests on achieving our own interests.
- Incongruence between values and interests or how to better align values and interests.
- Utility of, or problems with, ‘special relationships’ to an interest-based strategy.
- SOF contribution to national interests beyond counterterrorism and counter-WMD.

- Dangers of over-reliance on threat-based strategic approaches to address current events.
- Concept of near-, mid-, and long-term strategy-making to address vital and important national interests.
- Reconciliation of divergent interests with partners.
- Can an interest-based strategy compete in the budgetary process with a threat-based approach?

#### **G10. Weapons technology proliferation**

How are the proliferation of innovation and the falling cost of weapons and dual-use technology changing military balances of power? How does advanced weaponry in the hands of non-state actors change the dynamic for SOF activities?

The objective of this research topic is to develop new insights into how innovation proliferation, low-cost weapons, and dual-use technologies will impact the changing military balances of power. As recent history has proven, innovation and dual-use technologies can be stolen or appropriated by hostile military powers. Similarly, certain non-state actors and individuals will seek to acquire and exploit dual-use technological innovations and low-cost weapons. As the complexity of technological innovations continue to increase at an exponential rate, the universal appetite for these advancements is unlikely to wane. Existing control mechanisms such as international regulations and security arrangements may be insufficient to stem the tide of proliferation over time. The risk associated with the proliferation of certain technologies or weapons could potentially jeopardize global security and stability. Such an environment may compromise the comparative technological advantage enjoyed by the U.S. military and eventually tip the scale of power.

Themes of interest include:

- New applications of emerging technology.
- Impacts of multiple centers of weapons innovation across the globe.
- Sufficiency of international agreements to control detrimental effects.
- Cost-effective responses to new technological challenges.

- Appropriateness of exquisite, multi-role weapon platforms in a world of rapid innovation.
- Areas of the globe at highest risk due to technological innovation in weapons.
- Potential changes to U.S. industrial base.
- How to adapt DOD to benefit from weapons innovation.

### **G11. Disruptive and game-changing technologies**

What disruptive and game-changing technologies have potential global significance? How will these emerging technologies impact future conflict? How does USSOCOM leverage game changing technologies to advance SOF operations? Is USSOCOM's acquisition process positioned to capitalize on rapid fielding of untested, potentially disruptive technology?

The objective of this research topic is to develop new insights into emerging disruptive and game-changing technologies that could have global significance and/or impact on future conflict. Emerging disruptive technologies, particularly ones with broad applications, have the potential to transform existing markets or create new ones. When applied to a military problem, game-changing technologies can disrupt existing doctrines or TTPs and radically alter the balance between competitors. As the pace of technological development continues to accelerate, competitors will strive to integrate innovative technology to gain an advantage. More broadly, opportunities created by new technologies will alter societies in unforeseen ways, as social media has.

Themes of interest include:

- Space exploration.
- Nanotechnology and wetware.
- 3D printing.
- Cyber innovations.
- Human enhancements.
- Multi-nation weapons procurement programs.
- Bioengineering.
- Agro engineering.
- Impacts on position, navigation, and timing.

- A day without ... (pick a technology).

## **G12. Adaptability and agility**

Is the USSOCOM enterprise an adequately flexible system capable of rapid change (in whole or in parts) when required? What ‘best practices’ can be implemented to maximize our ability to generate capacity and capability when needed? How does USSOCOM position itself to provide the widest options possible for policymakers?

The objective of this research topic is to develop new insights into USSOCOM’s ability to generate capacity and its capacity to meet, protect, and advance U.S. national interests. SOF is commonly viewed as the force of choice when considering small footprint, cost-effective tactical operations that create strategic effects. In the last 13 years, the USSOCOM enterprise has grown from 25,000 to nearly 69,000 personnel. This growth has enabled SOF to operate further, in greater capacity, and in more regions of the world than ever before. However, this growth in capacity does not come without consequences ... particularly as the United States enters a period of fiscal austerity. The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review is primarily focused on rebalancing the Joint Force, which includes reducing force structure of the Service. Special operations rely heavily on the Services to provide enabling support. Cuts to the Service’s force structure will impact special operations not only in enabling support, but in recruitment as well. The degree to which these cuts will impact SOF is yet to be determined. However, the USSOCOM enterprise will need to develop innovative approaches to not only maintain its own capability and capacity, but adapt to a leaner Service capacity that could impede USSOCOM’s activities.

Themes of interest include:

- Bureaucratic and Services preferences.
- Barriers to innovation.
- SOF truths versus evolving strategic landscape.
- Developing capabilities and capacities prior to crisis.
- Effects-based management and development of force.
- Defining a SOF narrative for the future (preparing for and preserving peace).

- Small footprint, cost-effective approaches.
- Integrating SOF into Service, and GCC strategies.
- Alternative structures for optimal organization, management, and recruitment of SOF.
- Pushing ‘joint’ down to lower levels in SOF.

### **G13. Capability gaps**

Are the methods the DOD and USSOCOM use to determine gaps in required capabilities adequate and appropriate for the current strategic environment? How do we balance effectiveness and efficiency? Are there widening gaps in any critical capabilities that we have been unable to address?

The objective of this research topic is to develop new insights into how DOD in general, and USSOCOM more specifically, might better anticipate and respond to identified capability gaps. Although many observers of the strategic environment have pointed to fundamental changes that are occurring, the processes by which we prioritize and procure capabilities (materiel or otherwise) have remained basically unchanged for decades. Given lengthening procurement timelines and routine budgetary problems with major weapons systems, the DOD will eventually need to reexamine the methodologies that we employ to appropriately resource our strategies. Further, it is appropriate to explore whether the processes by which gaps are identified are adequately connected to a guiding strategy, and not dominated by more narrow bureaucratic preferences.

Themes of interest include:

- DOD/SOF narrative, determining how best to employ forces.
- Balancing current demands against developing future needs.
- How to best determine/measure gaps. Threats? Opportunities? Other possibilities?
- Identifying and designing capability requirements.
- Role of understanding and design for capability requirements.
- Controlling bureaucratic preferences.
- Innovation in capabilities during fiscal constraints.
- Current, unaddressed capability gaps.

- Approaches in prioritization of requirements (no fail missions, enhancing capabilities, etc.).
- Balancing effectiveness against efficiency.
- The responsiveness of the requirements process.

#### **G14. Long-term fiscal constraints**

Do the growing fiscal constraints in industrialized nations affect their perceptions of their interests and appropriate security postures? Are military alliances and partnerships likely to undergo changes due to fiscal pressures? Will powerful states be less likely to offer security guarantees? What types of military commitments will states be willing/unwilling to make for less than vital interests? Should this affect U.S. policy and basing? Beyond USSOCOM-specific budgetary pressures, how does the wider financial pressure affect USSOCOM/SOF, and are there opportunities upon which to capitalize?

The objective of this research topic is to develop new insights into how growing fiscal constraints across developed nations will impact their security posture and the security environment writ large. Despite a variety of security challenges, the U.S. and other industrial nations are reducing defense spending. Economic recovery from the global recession of 2007-2009 has not been sufficiently robust to avoid spending cuts. Such an environment may force nations to reevaluate the interests for which they are willing to deploy military forces. Reduced commitments and security arrangements among partner nations may shape the strategic environment in unforeseen manners.

Themes of interest include:

- Uneven global economic recovery and security impacts.
- New and shifting regional economic and security agreements important to the U.S.
- Trends in responses to pop-up crises.
- Nuclear aspirant states and the changing role/manner of deterrence.
- The viability of massive weapons programs (e.g., F-35, K-46, Littoral Combat Ship, etc.) in this environment.
- Shifting state perceptions of 'vital national interests' versus 'less than vital.'

- Emerging multi-polarity, or multiple power vacuums?
- Shifts in the nature of military responses in lower-intensity situations (e.g., air power, special operations forces, drones).
- Impacts on the viability/credibility of security umbrellas.
- The effect of this security environment on incentives for other states to acquire conventional or unconventional weapon capabilities.
- Cost-effective strategies for the U.S. and partner nations to protect interests.
- Changes in support to multinational organizations and associated effects.
- The role and relationship of economic power to military power (is this changing?).
- The sufficiency of Goldwater-Nichols today; is there a next step for Service interdependence?
- The viability of burden sharing in a world with widely diverging interests and economic disruption.

#### **G15. Strategic constraints**

Does our strategic culture blind us to potential threats, sources of risk, and opportunities? Does our national security process have a similar effect? How can USSOCOM avoid overly restricted solutions to problems that are poorly defined or understood due to these constraints?

The objective of this research topic is to develop new insights into how the idea of constraints affects strategy development. Constraints can either be self-imposed or forced upon us from the system we operate in. The cultural biases of the military and the DOD influence our strategic performance. Organizational culture theories suggest that our point of view on particular issues restricts our ability to perceive the full array of options available. Without the benefit of considering all relevant possibilities, our strategic performance may be degraded. Additionally, the United States' position as a global leader ties us to the international political system and its processes which put constraints on our actions. Furthermore, our domestic system has legal, moral, political, and social constraints that affect our strategic

outlook and subsequent plans to address national security issues. This topic is intended to assist in identifying sources of potential blind spots and constraints and locating effective and acceptable ways to provide new perspectives and approaches on enduring problems. USSOCOM must recognize the constraints we operate within in order to develop better strategic approaches.

Themes of interest include:

- Definition of constraint and its implications for the military and USSOCOM, specifically.
- The impact of organizational culture on decision-making.
- Improving information-search heuristics.
- Current problems and identifying new perspectives.
- Constraints of the international and domestic systems.
- How does an organization develop a holistic strategy that accounts for constraints?

#### **G16. Demographics**

How does the rise of the middle class in developing nations affect the security threats and opportunities in those countries? What are the most dangerous population shifts or migrations on the horizon? What are the implications of 'youth in revolt' in fragile states (situations in which youth lose touch with their culture as families are torn apart by conflict and respond in ways that separate them from traditional guidance)? Does the changing role of women in unstable regions have USSOCOM implications?

The objective of this research topic is to develop new insights into global demographic trajectories and the resulting implications for U.S. interests. As globalization and other factors create the conditions for a rising middle class in developing nations, it can also support the expansion of conflict. Immigrants fleeing conflict, or moving to regions with better opportunities, can challenge their new governments' ability to respond. More affluent societies with higher educational levels typically have lower birthrates than immigrant groups from developing nations, which contributes to social stresses. Europe is currently experiencing a range of problems associated with an inability to adequately integrate new arrivals. Angry unemployed

youths have frequently taken to rioting, and immigrant groups are often isolated from both the larger society as well as their heritage. Is it possible for the U.S. to favorably shape the trends associated with this challenge?

Themes of interest include:

- Relationship to U.S. interests.
- Interacting system (of demographic trends) or single-factor causality?
- Globalization.
- Education relative to birth rates.
- Transnational organized crime.
- Integration and resolving cultural stresses created by migration.
- Response of organic population to demographic shifts (cultural?).
- Politics of blame and out-groups.
- Perceived opportunities leading to permanent or temporary migration.
- Youth bulges, unemployment, and dissatisfaction—relative to governance.
- Technological empowerment of isolated immigrants.
- Changing patterns in connections across diaspora communities.
- Needs versus demands versus expectations of the growing middle class on basic services, commodities, and energy.
- SOF implications in fragile states and shifting populations.

#### **G17. Energy/other resources**

Will changes in energy harvesting and consumption alter the global security environment? Will rising energy consumption in emerging nations impact the strategic landscape? Will demand for other resources (food, water, etc.) shape conflict in manners that have implications for USSOCOM?

The objective of this research topic is to develop new insights into energy and natural resource trends, the associated regional and global security impacts, and the implication for special operations. Many

consider access to energy and other natural resources a critical element to international relations and assert that it has been a principal catalyst for conflict and war. Continued growing global demand for resources strains current distribution capabilities and depletes known reserves. Other changes in the energy and natural resources strategic environment may also impact the international order, perpetuating old struggles and possibly conflict among a new set of global actors.

Themes of interest include:

- Shifts in regional power and world order.
- Political stress points.
- Economic competition.
- Global corporations.
- Nascent, alternative markets.
- Probable technological breakthroughs (enabling new energy sources or retrograde fuels).
- Cultural and social aspects.
- Nongovernmental organizations and transnational power structures.
- Climate and environmental pressures.
- Developing versus developed nations.
- Trends in self-sufficiency and dependency.
- Sources and distribution networks.
- Vulnerability of critical energy infrastructure.
- Potential humanitarian crisis points.
- U.S. presence and response.
- Opening of 'new' frontiers: Arctic; Antarctica; Amazonia; Andes; Asia; Pacific; space/lunar; etc.

## Appendix A: Acronym List

<b>AAR</b>	after action report
<b>CF</b>	conventional forces
<b>COTS</b>	commercial off-the-shelf
<b>R&amp;D</b>	research and development
<b>C2</b>	command and control
<b>DOD</b>	Department of Defense
<b>DT&amp;E</b>	development, test, and engineering
<b>FFF</b>	foreign fighter flow
<b>FID</b>	foreign internal defense
<b>FTZ</b>	free trade zone
<b>GCC</b>	geographic combatant command
<b>ISIS</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
<b>JIIM</b>	joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational
<b>KSIL</b>	Key Strategic Issues List
<b>JSOU</b>	Joint Special Operations University
<b>MEU</b>	Marine Expeditionary Unit
<b>MISO</b>	military information support operations

<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>ORS</b>	Operation Resolute Support
<b>PE</b>	preparation of the environment
<b>PME</b>	professional military education
<b>S&amp;T</b>	science and technology
<b>SFA</b>	security force assistance
<b>SOF</b>	Special Operations Forces
<b>TSOC</b>	theater special operations command
<b>TTP</b>	tactics, techniques, and procedures
<b>USG</b>	United States Government
<b>USSOCOM</b>	United States Special Operations Command
<b>UW</b>	unconventional warfare
<b>VEO</b>	violent extremist organization

## Endnotes

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12. Note that USSOCOM J5 is not currently contracting for work on these questions.
13. With any project undertaken on the topics discussed throughout this paper, or variations on these topics, we would be interested in discussing and/or reading the authors' perspectives on the implications for USSOCOM and/or the Department of Defense in general.
14. This list is not exclusive. Fruitful avenues that raise issues not discussed in these themes are also of interest and value.