

2022 SOF IMPERATIVES

Although the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have wound down, the role of U.S. special operations forces (SOF) remains critical to long-term national security. First, the threat of transnational terrorism and violent extremism is still acute. Second, this era of strategic competition means that irregular warfare and grey zone conflict will become more common, not less. Accordingly, the core activities executed by U.S. SOF must be strengthened with sufficient resourcing and investment. We cannot allow SOF capabilities to wither, lest we be caught unprepared by our adversaries at an inopportune time. What's more, recent developments such as the coronavirus pandemic have demonstrated that uncertain environments are the norm for the foreseeable future, and it is the SOF community that trains to thrive in such uncertainty. Special operations remains an essential part of the deterrence toolbox, but also incredibly valuable when actually employed by the nation.

With the recommended priorities and initiatives listed below, the Global SOF Foundation aims to highlight the importance to U.S. Congressional leadership of U.S. and partner nation SOF as among the most capable and affordable instruments in safeguarding our security.





STRATEGIC

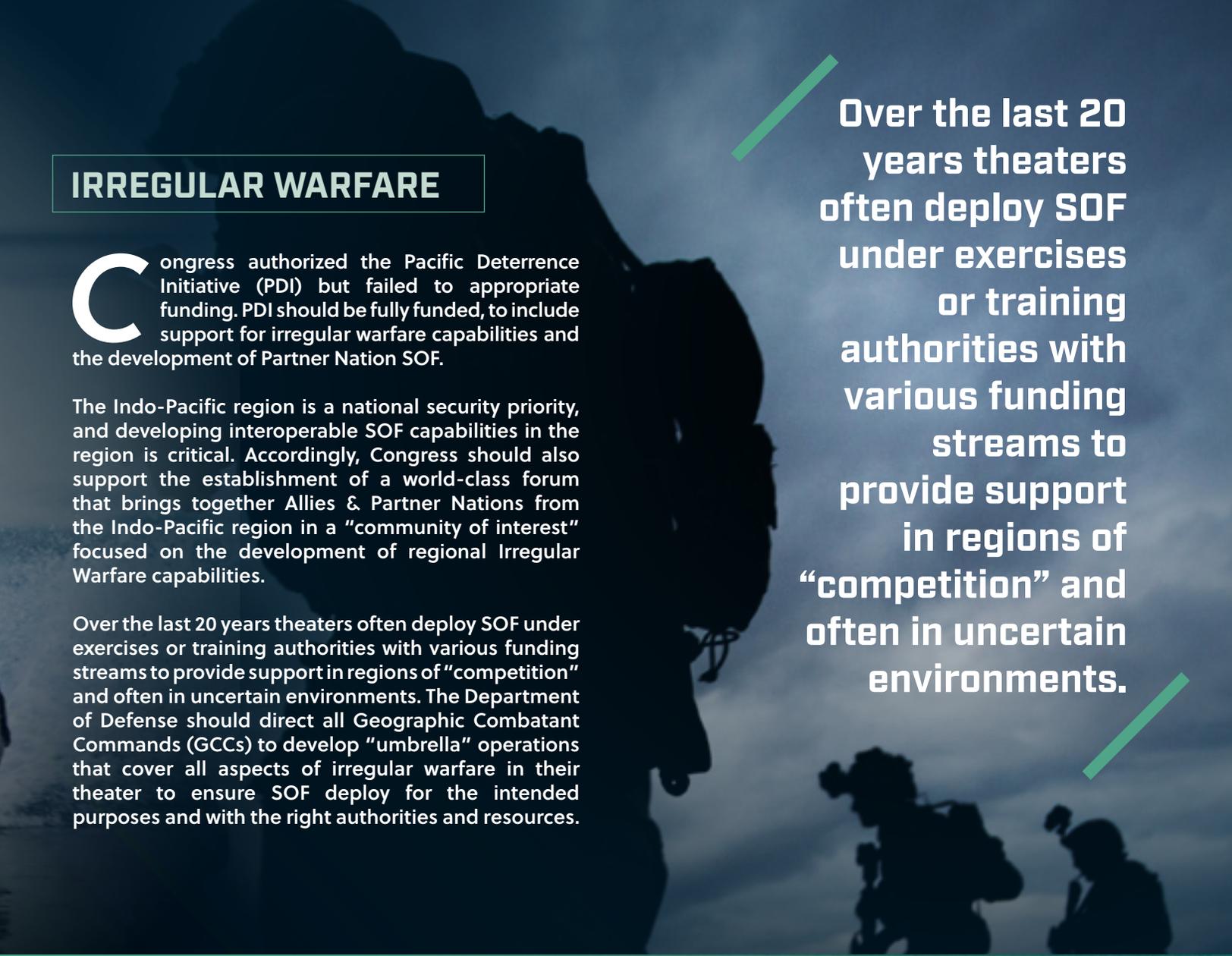
The Biden Administration will soon publish its first National Security Strategy, but it will likely maintain a focus on strategic competition and the shift toward the Indo-Pacific region in particular. And although deterrence is important, our near-peer adversaries are developing and deploying tactics below the threshold of conflict to challenge the U.S. and increase their spheres of influence and control. Accordingly, Congress must appropriate sufficient funding for SOF, Irregular Warfare capabilities, and support for strategic partner nation SOF in the grey zone.

Our conventional and asymmetric competitors are ahead of us in harnessing diversity for tactical and strategic effects across every domain. Our near peer adversaries are comfortable employing not just women, but also diverse and unexpected segments of society for a variety of steady state activities in permissive and semi-permissive environments. Research studies across multiple sectors prove that a conscious and deliberate focus on diversity/inclusion will accelerate innovation while also contributing to improved decision making. Effective Talent Management systems encourage

recruitment and retention of high-caliber performers. Congress should authorize and fund a non-federal entity to execute an "Exit Interview Project" to interview retiring and separating SOF members to gather quantitative and qualitative data on their experiences and assessment of Talent Management throughout the SOF Enterprise.

Although it is essential for U.S. SOF formations to maintain their foundation in the separate Military Services, SOF is distinct and possesses a joint ethos. SOF should be recognized as its own profession and, as such, USSOCOM should design a SOF-specific personnel and career progression system that rewards SOF-specific career choices (as opposed to the current personnel systems that are controlled by the Military Services).

The U.S. no longer has bases in Afghanistan, and there is increased concern over possible resurgence of Al Qaeda and ISIS in the Middle East and Central Asian regions. Congress should increase funding to support emerging SOF operational requirements and changes to regional posture of U.S. forces.



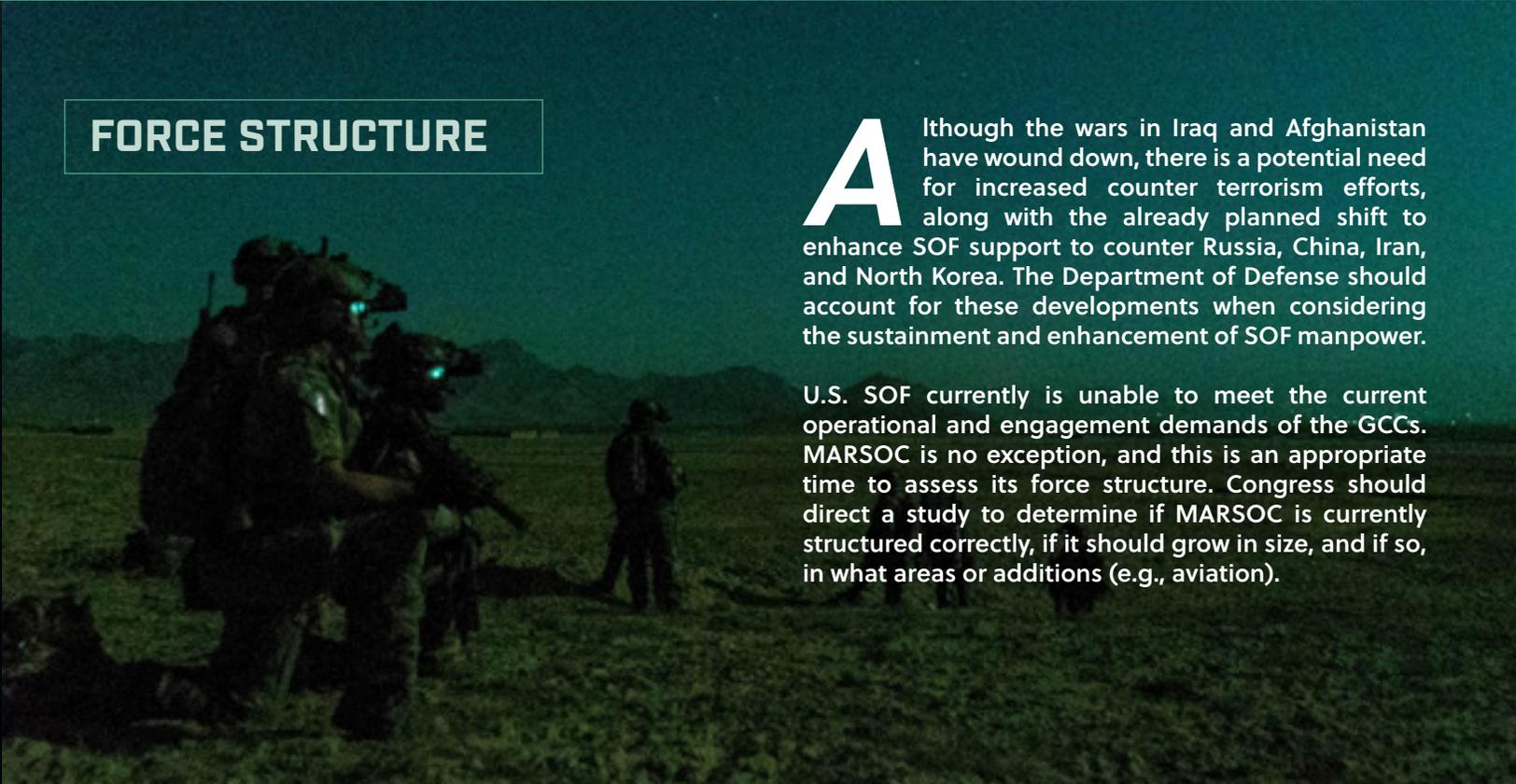
IRREGULAR WARFARE

Congress authorized the Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI) but failed to appropriate funding. PDI should be fully funded, to include support for irregular warfare capabilities and the development of Partner Nation SOF.

The Indo-Pacific region is a national security priority, and developing interoperable SOF capabilities in the region is critical. Accordingly, Congress should also support the establishment of a world-class forum that brings together Allies & Partner Nations from the Indo-Pacific region in a “community of interest” focused on the development of regional Irregular Warfare capabilities.

Over the last 20 years theaters often deploy SOF under exercises or training authorities with various funding streams to provide support in regions of “competition” and often in uncertain environments. The Department of Defense should direct all Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs) to develop “umbrella” operations that cover all aspects of irregular warfare in their theater to ensure SOF deploy for the intended purposes and with the right authorities and resources.

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FORCE STRUCTURE

Although the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have wound down, there is a potential need for increased counter terrorism efforts, along with the already planned shift to enhance SOF support to counter Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea. The Department of Defense should account for these developments when considering the sustainment and enhancement of SOF manpower.

U.S. SOF currently is unable to meet the current operational and engagement demands of the GCCs. MARSOC is no exception, and this is an appropriate time to assess its force structure. Congress should direct a study to determine if MARSOC is currently structured correctly, if it should grow in size, and if so, in what areas or additions (e.g., aviation).

SOF FOR LIFE PROGRAM

The Global SOF Foundation's SOF for Life Program is specially designed to help SOF personnel transition from active duty service to civilian life. The traditional, DoD-wide programs are not comprehensive or tailored for the SOF community. Congress should fund the SOF for Life Program to ensure SOF receive what they need as they leave active duty service.

According to Science Direct, "allostatic load" is the cost on a body of chronic stress and physical demands of a career with the military special operations forces. The military recipe for "burning the candle at both ends" includes high-intensity physical fitness training, the high stress of operations and being away from home, and the trauma of witnessing death, war or injury.

Add in the inability to sleep or eat well, which leads to chronic stress. This adds up to "allostatic overload." Operator Syndrome, then, may be understood as the natural consequences of an extraordinarily high allostatic load. DoD or Congress should establish a commission or issue a grant to draft a report on the medical impact of more than 20 years of sustained combat on SOF operators.

USSOCOM is implementing a program called ORIEN, in conjunction with the John Murtha Cancer Center at Walter Reed, to track cancer rates among SOF. Congress and DoD should support cancer screening and treatment plans for SOF veterans and retirees who have been exposed to a myriad of toxins and also promote the efforts of the ORIEN protocol.

The system by which Imminent Danger Pay and Hostile Fire Pay is based on the designation of geographic combat zones. In addition, tax exemption for military pay only applies to deployments under the auspices of Section 127e of Title 10 and the current IRS Publication 3 tax zone exemptions. The provision of Imminent Danger Pay, Hostile Fire Pay, and income tax exemption must reflect the realities of modern warfare and should be afforded to all service members deployed in harm's way--not based solely on geography--nor whether they are badged operators or support personnel.

SOF service Components have met challenges in meeting this recruitment and retention requirements in recent years. In order to support the recruitment and retention of SOF, Congress should make recruiting and retention bonuses tax free.

In the rapid withdrawal from Afghanistan, thousands of Afghan Commandos and SOF that fought with U.S. and Allied SOF were unable to acquire Special Immigration Visas (SIV). The Afghan SOF partners are now unable to leave the country, and they are being targeted and systematically hunted down and killed or tortured. Congress should enact a truncated SIV program for Afghan SOF partners.



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