

2026 SOF IMPERATIVES

BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT (BLUF)

In a deliberate departure from previous editions of the SOF Imperatives document—which traditionally outlined specific programs, operational authorities, and niche funding lines requiring Congressional action—the 2026 edition features a singular, overriding focus: **the urgent need to significantly increase the total top-line budget allocated to U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM).**

THE REALITY OF FLAT BUDGETS AND SURGING DEMAND

U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) remain the nation's premier crisis response force, yet they are being asked to do increasingly more with significantly less. To ensure that USSOCOM can simultaneously execute its current operational mandates and modernize for future conflicts, Congress must immediately rectify the severe imbalance between SOF's global demand and its stagnant funding.

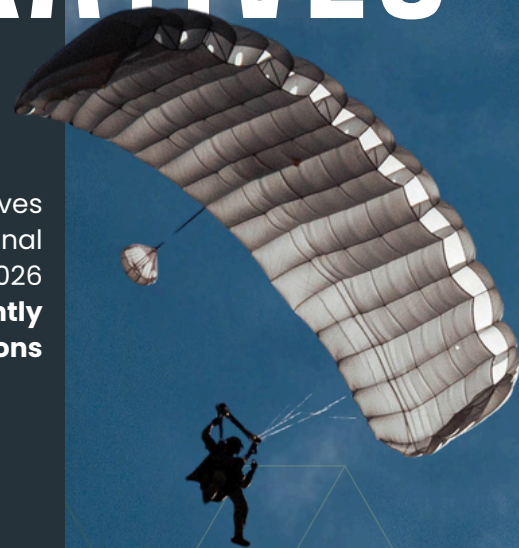
USSOCOM's budget has remained relatively flat for a decade, effectively frozen at 2019 levels. This untenable dynamic has forced USSOCOM to accept significant operational risk.

- Adjusted for inflation, this represents a **14% reduction in actual purchasing power**
- Simultaneously, the demand for SOF from Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCCs) has skyrocketed. Over the past five years, for example, **the operational tempo for crisis response has surged by 300%**
- In the past year alone, the command was forced to deny requests for SOF capabilities by GCCs roughly 70 times **due to a lack of available resources**

THE MODERNIZATION DILEMMA

This relentless operational pace, coupled with diminished buying power, has created a severe internal funding crisis. Because USSOCOM must continually respond to "no-fail" missions and global crises, leadership has been forced to sacrifice modernization and research & development budgets to fund current operations.

The evolving character of warfare requires SOF to rapidly adapt. Without consistent funding for innovation, experimentation, and modernization, the future lethality of the force are put at immense risk.



THE OUTSIZED VALUE OF SOF AND THE NEED FOR A \$24 BILLION TOP-LINE BUDGET

Despite operating persistently in over 80 countries to deter aggression and build partner capacity, SOF makes up only about 3 percent of the Joint Force and consumes less than 2 percent of the entire Department of War (DoW) budget. To put this in perspective, **USSOCOM's total annual funding is roughly equivalent to the procurement cost of a single aircraft carrier.**

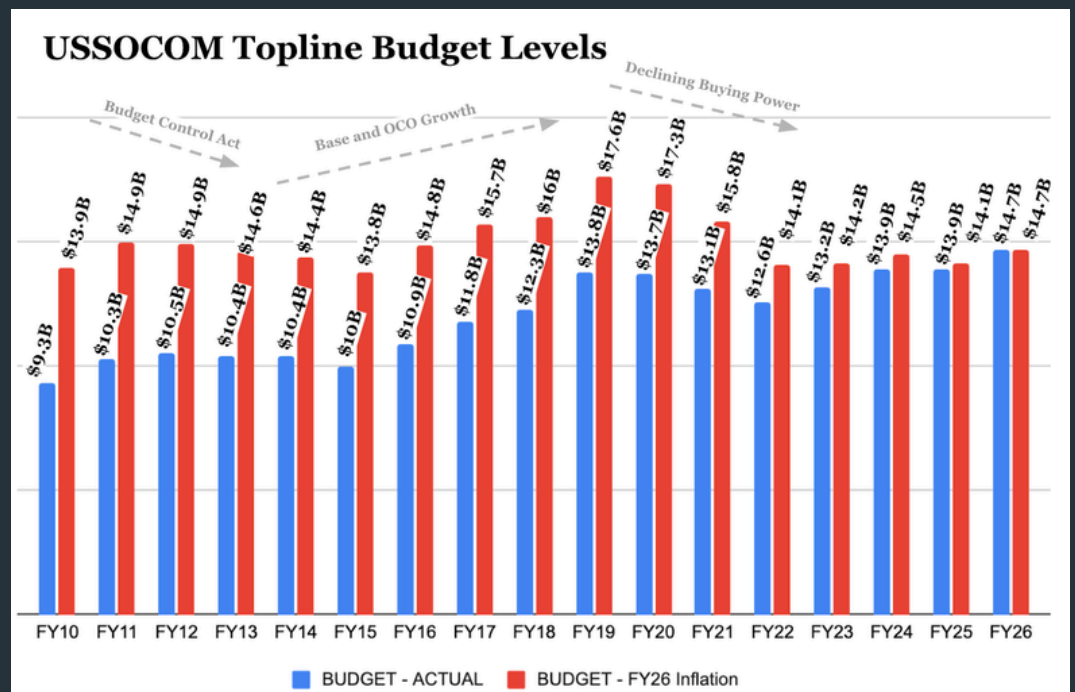
THE DETAILS

SOF now represents less than 1.6% of the DoW budget. We need to build back to an approximate 2% to stop the bleeding, modernize, and be able to compete with increasingly sophisticated adversaries in innovative ways, while also responding to the nation's most pressing operational needs.

USSOCOM Total Obligational Authority (TOA) as a % of DoW													
\$B	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27*	FY28*	FY29*	FY30*	FY31*
USSOCOM	13.8	13.7	13.1	12.6	13.2	13.9	13.9	14.7	18.4	19.3	21.3	22.1	24
DoW	685	713	704	742	773	842	849.8	961.6	1,500	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
% of DoW	2.01%	1.92%	1.86%	1.70%	1.71%	1.65%	1.64%	1.53%	1.23%	1.93%	2.13%	2.21%	2.40%

*Projected DoW budget

We need to increase USSOCOM's budget by at least 5% annually with the ultimate goal of growing to \$24 billion by 2031— this would represent 2% of a \$1 trillion DoW budget.



CALL TO ACTION

SOF provides the nation with an outsized strategic return on investment, but the current financial trajectory is unsustainable. To rectify this imbalance, **it is imperative that Congress place USSOCOM on a path to a steady-state budget of at least \$24 billion annually.**