



# Special Operations Forces Vision & Strategy



# SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES VISION



## VISION STATEMENT

Create strategic, asymmetric advantages for the Nation in integrated deterrence, crisis and conflict.

### CORE VALUES

- Honor.** Earn the trust of the Nation by doing what is right.
- Courage.** Be steadfast in the face of physical and moral danger.
- Excellence.** Commit to achieving the highest possible standards.
- Creativity.** Seek innovative and novel solutions to the hardest, most complex problems.
- Respect.** Treat our teammates and partners with the highest regard.

### WHO WE ARE

- Innovative problem solvers tackling the most complex challenges and creating strategic impacts through special operations actions and activities.
- Cohesive and disciplined teams committed to our core values and the SOF Truths.
- Mission-ready today, preparing for the future, and inspired by our rich history.
- A community of dedicated and trusted SOF professionals -military, civilian, contractors, and our families.

### WHAT WE DO

- Shape the environment to reduce risk, prevent crises, and set conditions for success in competition and conflict.
- Respond swiftly to crises worldwide and accomplish high-risk, politically-sensitive missions with a low signature and small footprint.
- Cultivate strong relationships with our global network -allies, partners, joint, interagency, multinational, industry, and academia.
- Illuminate irregular threats, foster partners' resilience, and create dilemmas for our adversaries.
- Care for the well-being of our SOF family -mentally, spiritually, and physically.

### WHERE ARE WE GOING

- Balanced force employment and readiness for integrated deterrence, crisis, and conflict.
- Sustainable counterterrorism to safeguard the Nation.
- Modernized formations, concepts, and capabilities leveraging emerging technologies.
- A resilient enterprise capable of conducting integrated all-domain special operations.



# SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES STRATEGY



Since 9/11, Special Operations Forces (SOF) primarily focused on countering terrorists, while our state adversaries sought to counter our capabilities and national interests. Now, the United States faces adversaries increasingly capable of counteracting our gains, threatening our Homeland, reducing our influence, and eroding our advantages globally. To protect and advance our national interests, SOF must adapt our formations, concepts, and capabilities, while strengthening our critical relationships with allies and partners.

Throughout our history, SOF adapted to accomplish the most challenging missions, strengthened by our core values and the SOF Truths. Our foundation and greatest asset is our people - military members, civilians, contractors, and their families. Our people embrace the need for excellence and innovation across SOF. We are proud to lead this dedicated community of SOF professionals into a future marked by growing uncertainty and increased demand for the unique capabilities SOF provide the Nation.

The SOF Strategy provides a framework to guide our evolution from the world's premier Counter Terrorism (CT) force into one optimally suited to support the Joint Force and the Nation as part of integrated deterrence. Across this spectrum, SOF will conduct sustainable, priority CT operations, while supporting integrated deterrence, and preparing for potential high-end conflict. As we face these new challenges, we are confident that the last 20 years have demonstrated our ability to adapt and strengthened our resolve as we continue to defend the Nation.

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## INTRODUCTION

National and Department of Defense (DoD) guidance states the top strategic priority is to maintain a competitive advantage and deter an increasingly assertive People's Republic of China. While China is our number one pacing challenge, the U.S. continues to face numerous advanced and persistent threats globally, including enduring threats posed by non-state actors and other states wishing to undermine U.S. influence, and the current international order. The SOF Strategy provides a framework to build and maintain a force that can compete with and prevail against any adversary. SOF has proven their capability as a premier CT force over the last two decades, and must sustain the capability. However, current and future threats demand SOF evolves into a force capable of creating strategic, asymmetric advantages for the nation as a key contributor of integrated deterrence.

## STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

A convergence of geopolitical, socioeconomic, and technological trends is exacerbating existing societal and ideological divisions. Confidence in government institutions is decreasing in response to a range of challenges, including the escalating climate change crisis, global pandemics, and other

destabilizing events leading many populations to question the rules-based international order. U.S. adversaries are opportunists regularly using misinformation, disinformation, and subversion to sow division, erode existing international norms, and promote authoritarian governance as an alternative system. Their investments in military capabilities aim to counter our warfighting advantages, and limit our ability to secure strategic national interests.

**China** is currently the only nation capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to rival the U.S. and destabilize the international system that has advanced our interests for 75 years. China aims to promote its own authoritarian model of government, coerce regional states to accept its expansive claims, and undermine our global influence and interests, while strengthening its economic power and military capability.

**Russia** continues to provoke instability and sow division among the U.S. and its allies and partners, seizing opportunities to bolster autocratic regimes and gain political, economic, or military benefits. Russia demonstrates determination to use its

considerable resources and capabilities to enhance its global influence, challenge our interests, and disrupt globally.

Furthermore, advanced and persistent threats continue to emanate from **Iran, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea), Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs), and other organized or semi-organized entities.** Iran and North Korea seek advanced technologies and capabilities, threaten our allies and partners, and challenge regional stability. VEOs and terrorist

entities remain an active and persistent threat to the Homeland, our citizens, and vital national interests worldwide. Larger transnational extremist organizations, such as the Islamic State, benefit from coherent ideology, strong organizational structures, and the ability to exploit ungoverned or under-governed territories growing in regions such as North Africa. Local insurgencies, sectarian conflicts, and criminal organizations also threaten stability, and can create conditions that help conceal VEO threats to U.S. interests at home and abroad.

## STRATEGIC APPROACH

**Strategy Framework.** Founded on the SOF Vision, the SOF Strategy establishes a 10-year framework of strategic aims (ends), strategic efforts (ways), and resources (means) to create strategic and asymmetric advantages for the nation in integrated deterrence, crisis, and conflict, as illustrated in *Figure 1 below*.

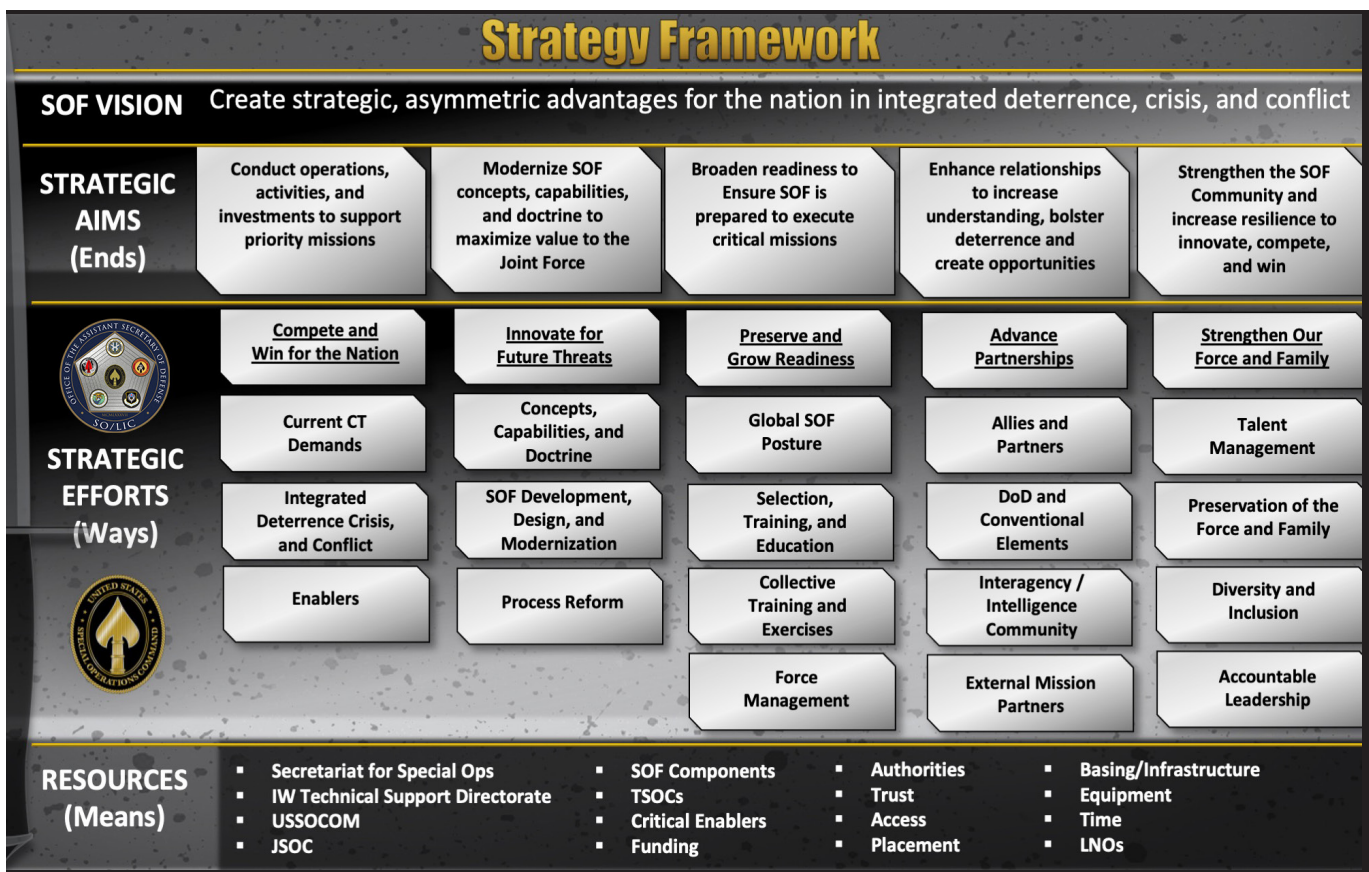


Figure 1. Strategy Framework

**We are modernizing and innovating for the future, and updating our organizational structures and processes for improved performance and affordability.**

## STRATEGIC AIMS (ENDS)

In accordance with national and DoD strategic guidance, SOF must accomplish the following to effectively support and enable the Joint Force, interagency partners, and international partners and allies:

- ▶ Conduct operations, activities, and investments (e.g., force employment, Continental U.S. (CONUS)-based Operational Support, exercises, information operations) to support priority missions in critical locations as part of integrated deterrence, to reduce strategic risk, and to facilitate integration with conventional forces during high-end conflict.
- ▶ Modernize SOF concepts, capabilities, and doctrine to maximize unique value to integrated deterrence.
- ▶ Broaden readiness to ensure SOF is prepared to execute critical missions such as crisis response, priority CT, and Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction; leverage irregular warfare (IW) capabilities in deterrence campaigns; and support the Joint Force in high-end conflict.
- ▶ Enhance relationships with allies and partners, DoD, the Joint Force, the interagency and intelligence community, and external partners to increase global understanding, bolster deterrence, and create opportunities for shared successes.
- ▶ Strengthen the SOF community (active and reserve military, civilians, contractors, and families), and increase our resilience

through focused recruiting and retention of our workforce; the promotion of diversity and inclusion; protecting and caring for our families; and striving to maintain the best talent, knowledge, skills, and abilities to enable SOF to innovate, compete, and win.

## STRATEGIC EFFORTS (WAYS)

The SOF enterprise exercises a range of responsibilities to include: operational employment, Joint Force support to organizational readiness, and institutional development. Accordingly, the SOF Strategy adopts a comprehensive approach seeking to achieve strategic aims by taking prudent and decisive action in the following strategic efforts, organized into five categories: Compete and Win for the Nation; Innovate for Future Threats; Preserve and Grow Readiness; Advance Partnerships; and Strengthen our Force and Family.

**Compete and Win for the Nation.** SOF is committed to meeting current demands, competing globally, setting conditions, and integrating with the Joint Force. SOF employ trained, ready, and certified forces to support campaigns, meet specific operational and operational planning objectives, and forward posture, while retaining Deploy for Purpose forces to provide flexibility and agility in support of emerging requirements. CONUS-based operational support enhances our flexibility by providing key support capabilities for our forward forces. SOF also provide key enabling support to Joint Force and partnered operations by providing unique SOF capabilities — often with our allies and partners — to illuminate and counter threats by imposing costs and creating dilemmas for adversaries.



► **Current Counterterrorism Demands.**

SOF's immediate operational priority is to disrupt VEO's from attacking the U.S., its citizens, and vital national interests. This persistent threat requires an agile and sustainable approach focusing on countering violent extremists capable of conducting external operations, and leverages burden-sharing partnerships to achieve objectives within an acceptable level of risk.

► **Integrated Deterrence, Crisis, and**

**Conflict.** SOF employment as a part of state-level integrated deterrence, while executing priority CT missions requires a balanced approach. SOF will pursue agreements, partnerships, and operations — such as increased foreign internal defense, security force assistance, and counter-threat finance — to illuminate and counter adversary activities and interests.

► **Enablers.** SOF will increasingly integrate and synchronize into our operations non-lethal and other enabling capabilities, which will become increasingly critical for mission

accomplishment. As an example, capabilities such as the Joint Military Information Support Operations Web Operations Center can generate trans-regional effects in support of SOF operations worldwide. Electromagnetic Warfare capabilities provide increased access and flexible targeting options at reduced costs. SOF will also employ expanded information and cyberspace operations, enabled by space capabilities, to exert influence, gain advantage, and deter adversaries.

**Innovate for Future Threats.** Just as SOF adapted to become the world's premier CT force, we will refocus our efforts on current and emerging threats to support integrated deterrence, respond to crisis, and prevail in conflict. As the pace of our operations reaches more sustainable levels, we are entering a critical time to increase investments in innovation. Over the next 10 years, we will modernize SOF, pioneer dynamic and unorthodox approaches (including the full toolkit associated with irregular warfare), leverage emerging technologies to mitigate adversarial activities by China, and create asymmetric advantages for current and future conflict.

► **Concepts, Capabilities, and Doctrine**

**Development.** SOF will develop, advance, and validate SOF operating concepts that support the Joint Warfighting Concept (JWC), supporting concepts, and mission-level concepts through war games, aggressive innovation, experimentation and assessment, and operational experience. To ensure rapid fielding of new capabilities, SOF will



streamline and update processes and procedures to develop, test, acquire, and field capabilities that are innovative, interoperable, reliable, and timely in increasingly contested domains. SOF will prioritize investments in data management, artificial intelligence (AI), AI-enabling technologies, and quantum computing as the force continues to lead in fielding new technologies and concepts required to compete effectively. Additionally, SOF will capture these developments in joint special operations doctrine, and integrate them into SOF leadership development opportunities, training, and education.



► **Force Development, Force Design, and Modernization.** SOF will prioritize modernization efforts to encompass a holistic future force design and experimentation process that integrates the elements of doctrine, organizations, training, materiel, leader development and education, personnel, facilities, and policy. The goal is to develop highly capable and modernized SOF that is employable against multiple problem sets, in all domains, and as part of an integrated Joint Force during crisis, conflict, and integrated deterrence efforts. SOF force development,

design, and modernization will remain a fluid process and continue to adapt as national strategic guidance evolves, operating concepts are tested and refined, emerging technologies mature and are integrated, and the operating environment changes.

► **Process Reform.** The effective management of our Nation's resources requires that we continuously improve our efficiency, reduce costs where appropriate, and increase transparency in administering resources, auditability, and capability development. Given anticipated budget reductions, our budget proposals will reflect deliberate efforts to find efficiencies in our processes and procedures, socialized with the military services. We will seek divestiture opportunities across the enterprise with emphasis on legacy equipment, platforms designed solely for permissive environments, and capabilities that conventional forces can provide in lieu of SOF. We will implement and establish new forums to enhance synchronization, foster better communications, and streamline bureaucratic processes to ensure SOF is employing every dollar to maximum effect.

**Preserve and Grow Readiness.** In the next 10 years, operational and strategic requirements will challenge SOF readiness. SOF will evaluate readiness by how the force supports longer-term, strategic efforts such as the JWC to ensure that we provide forces capable of immediate deployment, and forward postured for integrated deterrence, crisis, and conflict.



► **Global SOF Posture.** SOF will continuously refine global forces, footprints, deployments, and agreements to yield an ideal alignment between SOF's dynamic capabilities and national strategic objectives. Through the disciplined employment of SOF capabilities and robust relationships, SOF will strengthen the U.S. posture to enhance deterrence and better posture the nation's response to emerging threats.

► **Individual Selection, Training, and Education.** Readiness begins with our people, and the SOF enterprise will create opportunities to optimize and enable them. Through our selection, assessment, hiring, training, equipping, and education programs, we will build teams of military, civilians, contractors, and interns that are expertly prepared for current and future challenges, threats, and missions. SOF will leverage the continuum of service options to develop and access critical talent across the active and reserve

components. Finally, SOF will continue to invest in workforce education developing and fostering critical thinking and skills for success in dynamic and often ambiguous environments.

► **Collective Training and Exercises.** Collective training and exercises are the primary methods in which SOF prepare and train for joint and combined operations, supporting global campaign and operational plans. SOF will continue to build relationships and show collective strength through increased training and exercises with both conventional forces and other partners in all domains, as well as in austere conditions to strengthen and demonstrate our combined capabilities.

► **Force Management.** SOF will discipline our force employment and allocation processes to ensure readiness for current operational requirements while preparing for an evolving, complex environment. SOF will sustain the Secretary of Defense (SecDef) directed minimum of 1:2 deployment-to-dwell/1:4 mobilization-to-dwell ratio for the SOF enterprise, and strive to achieve SecDef planning objective of 1:3 deployment-to-dwell/1:5 mobilization-to-dwell.



**Advance Partnerships.** Formal and mutually beneficial relationships are essential to mission success. These relationships — many exercised through an extensive liaison officer (LNO) program — enable SOF access, placement, and influence with partners across DoD, interagency, and globally. Contemporary and future efforts to enhance national interest will occur through diplomatic, economic, and informational instruments of national power, necessitating support to broader and more varied networks. Successful partnerships require dedication, commitment, and time to build trust — we will develop, strengthen, and sustain these relationships.

► **Allies and Partners.** As strategic guidance directs DoD to bolster networks of willing and capable allies and partners, SOF is critical in growing and sustaining those relationships with both partner SOF elements, and other entities within a partner nation. SOF's security cooperation activities and engagements will support DoD, Combatant Command, and interagency priorities to establish access and placement, gain influence, increase interoperability, foster resilience, and build partner capacity. SOF will

prioritize the integration of willing allies and partners into training and education, bilateral and multilateral exercises, exchange programs, capability building programs, and combined operations to increase deterrence capacity, and ensure interoperability between allies and partners.

► **DoD and Conventional Elements of the Joint Force.** SOF relies on strong partnerships with DoD agencies and activities, as well as Conventional Force teammates in the Joint Force to build shared understanding of the strategic environment, develop options for emerging threats, and integrate capabilities and operations, activities, and investments to achieve objectives. SOF will integrate modernization and futures efforts with the Services, advising and advocating for the best use and integration of SOF to share mutually beneficial advances, eliminate duplication of effort, and enhance interoperability.

► **The Interagency and Intelligence Community.** SOF's relationship with interagency partners and the intelligence community is critical to building a deep and nuanced





understanding of the strategic landscape. SOF will invest heavily in our interagency partnerships to support non-military elements of integrated deterrence. SOF will nest with and support diplomatic efforts as they lead and guide national-level objectives, and will collaborate with the intelligence community to pool our combined capabilities and increase our collective operational effectiveness.

► **External Mission Partners.** SOF requirements call for creative approaches to address complicated and complex problems, and our partnerships outside of traditional military sectors expand our diversity of thought and increase our operational effectiveness. Working with external mission partners — international organizations, non-government organizations, private and public sector entities, industry, academia, law enforcement agencies, and indigenous populations and institutions — helps SOF approach challenges in innovative and holistic manners staying abreast of emerging trends.

**Strengthen Our Force and Family.** SOF will continue to uphold high standards of conduct and performance for all SOF professionals. To strengthen the workforce and the human capital enterprise requires the full spectrum of talent offered by the rich diversity of our nation to compete globally.

► **Talent Management.** In full partnership with the Services, SOF focused recruiting, assessing, training, and continuing education

ensures the enterprise strive to attract and retain the most highly developed workforce within DoD with a focus on language, regional expertise, and cultural knowledge. SOF will use lessons learned from the Coronavirus Disease 2019 such as telework and virtual collaboration as both hiring and retention incentives for the workforce. With a commitment to lifelong learning, ethical behavior, leader accountability, and professional development, we will develop and enact programs across the active and reserve components ensuring talent management spans our personnel's entire careers.





► **Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF).** The health and safety of our military members, civilian employees, and their families remains a top leadership priority. Capitalizing on our successful POTFF Program, we will leverage Service, community, and SOF resources to protect our long-term investment in our people. We will continue to support programs focused on physical, psychological, cognitive, social and family, and spiritual well-being to improve human performance, bolster resilience, lengthen careers, and assist in getting those who are injured or otherwise struggling back into the fold.

► **Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives and Programs.** Bias, prejudice, and discrimination directly obstruct national goals



and advancements. SOF's Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan provides a roadmap to increase diversity within SOF formations and ensures every work environment is inclusive fostering the unique strengths of teammates to grow for the shared mission. SOF will harness the contributions of all backgrounds by increasing the diversity of ethnicities, races, beliefs, perspectives, and experiences in our formation to meet the complex challenges facing the nation. SOF will reinforce efforts to seek a diverse and inclusive workforce that meets standards through enhanced hiring practices, training, and education. Ensuring the SOF enterprise attracts, selects, and retains a full array of talents valuing each member of the team makes SOF more flexible, creative, and effective. As such, SOF is committed to improving and sustaining our diversity and inclusion efforts across the entire SOF enterprise.

► **Accountable Leadership.** SOF will continue a long-term institutional approach to develop SOF leaders and uphold integrity by correcting lapses in leadership, accountability, and discipline identified in the Commander USSOCOM's 2019 Comprehensive Review. SOF will decisively implement these recommendations to ensure the community has active and engaged leaders at all levels who are fully accountable for force governance, leadership development, command climate, sustainable tempo, and behavior consistent with SOF values.

**KEY RESOURCES (MEANS).** The SOF enterprise will leverage every resource at our disposal to achieve the strategic aims outlined above. The enterprise will harness SOF critical enablers, equipment, basing and infrastructure, access and placement, funding, authorities, influence, and exquisite SOF capabilities to achieve the SOF Vision and maximize value to the nation. The annual USSOCOM Capabilities and Programming Guidance will provide the specific directions and priorities for executing the budget in alignment with Commander, USSOCOM (CDRUSSOCOM) priorities, guidance, and intent. Additionally, SOF has a responsibility for managing relationships and influence across allies and partners. There are also additional key organizations that have specific enumerated responsibilities for successful execution of this strategy.

**SECRETARIAT FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS (SSO).** The SSO, under the leadership of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD SO/LIC), directly serves SecDef by providing enduring civilian oversight of the SOF enterprise for training, equipping, and organization. SSO staff is a partner with HQ USSOCOM in defining and pursuing SOF objectives. SSO increases SOF's voice within the Joint Force and across DoD.

**Irregular Warfare Technical Support Directorate (IWTSD).** The IWTSD, under the leadership of ASD SO/LIC, directly serves SecDef by identifying and developing capabilities for DoD to conduct IW against all adversaries, and

delivers those capabilities to DoD components and interagency partners through rapid research and development, advanced studies and technical innovation, and provision of support to U.S. military operations.

**HQ USSOCOM.** Implementation of this strategy relies on integrated and coordinated efforts and oversight from the USSOCOM staff directorates. The staff will enable success by providing the relevant concepts, doctrine, plans, funding, and capabilities; and gauge progress through assessments, wargames, experiments, and exercises.

**SOF Service Component Commands.** SOF Service Component Commands provide the critical linkage to the Armed Services for recruiting, training, educating, equipping, and retaining personnel, and provide key enabling capabilities across all joint functions. They remain close to their parent Services to integrate concepts and capabilities development.

**Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC).** JSOC prepares assigned, attached, and augmentation forces, and when directed, conducts special operations against threats to protect the Homeland and U.S. interests abroad.

**Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs).** TSOCs, under the operational control of Geographic Combatant Commands, provide the majority of SOF's access and placement, and exercise many of SOF's authorities abroad. Through the establishment of forward elements such as special operations cells-forward, SOF

liaison elements, joint special operations task forces, or special operations joint task forces, TSOCs have the capability to fulfill all requirements of operations, campaigns, and contingencies.

## RISK

As part of a periodic assessment, ASD(SO/LIC) and CDRUSSOCOM will consider potential hazards, determine risk levels, and make adjustments to ensure a viable and acceptable balance of resources to achieve strategic aims. Select potential hazards to the successful execution of this strategy include:

- ▶ Loss of access, placement, or influence in critical areas of operation or with key allies, partners, or organizations
- ▶ Budgetary shortfalls that directly affect development or advancement of critical capabilities
- ▶ Degradation of agreements and relationships with critical partners that impact our shared strategic awareness and operational effectiveness
- ▶ Insufficient investment in force development and design not yielding necessary SOF capabilities.
- ▶ Authority shortfalls/gaps limiting SOF's ability to support national security interests

- ▶ Force structure/posture that is insufficient or misaligned in achieving SOF's strategic aims
- ▶ Loss of trust in SOF by decision makers and the American people to manage resources, prepare the environment, or execute priority missions ethically in politically sensitive environments

## IMPLEMENTATION

In consultation with Office of the ASD(SO/LIC), implementation of the SOF Strategy will occur through USSOCOM's integrated processes, systems, and products, informed by capstone documents such as the SOF Operating Concept 2040, SOF Modernization Strategy, the USSOCOM Commander's Guidance, the USSOCOM Capabilities and Programming Guidance, the USSOCOM Force Planning Guidance, and a forthcoming update to the Campaign Plan for Global Special Operations.

## CONCLUSION

*Just as our adversaries adapt to and shape the strategic environment, SOF will continue to evolve in order to fulfill the vision of creating strategic, asymmetric advantages for the nation in integrated deterrence, crisis, and conflict. Guided by SOF core values — honor, courage, excellence, creativity, and respect — this strategy establishes the path to achieve that vision.*



## NOTES:





# Special Operations Forces Vision & Strategy