



U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF)

Background and Issues for Congress

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Engagement opérationnel

Special Operations Forces (SOF) play an important role in U.S. military operations, and in recent years they have been given greater responsibility in the planning and conduct of global counter-terrorism operations. The United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) has approximately 70,000 active duty, National Guard and Reserve personnel from the four services and Department of Defense (DOD) civilians assigned to its headquarters, its four service component commands and eight sub-unit commands.

In 2013, at the request of USSOCOM (with the agreement of the Geographic and Functional Combatant Commanders and the Chiefs and Secretaries of Military Services), the Secretary of Defense assigned command of the Theatre Special Operations Commands (TSOCs) to USSOCOM. USSOCOM is now responsible for organizing, training and equipping TSOCs. Although USSOCOM is now responsible for organizing, training and equipping TSOCs, geographic combat commands will continue to exercise operational control over TSOCs.

Since COSOTs are now classified as sub-unified commands, the services are responsible for providing non-SOTF support to COSOTs in the same manner as they provide support to the geographic combatant command headquarters. The current Unified Command Plan (UCP) states that USSOCOM is responsible for synchronizing the planning of global operations against terrorist networks. This emphasis on planning limits its ability to conduct activities aimed at deterring emerging threats, building relationships with foreign militaries, and possibly developing better access to foreign militaries.

USSOCOM is proposing changes that, in addition to current responsibilities, would include responsibility for synchronizing the planning, coordination, deployment, and, where appropriate, employment of task forces. This would be done with the approval of the

appropriate US Geographic Combatant Commanders, departments and, if necessary, US government agencies. In addition, the proposed amendments would give USSOCOM broader responsibility beyond counterterrorism activities to include activities against other threat networks.

In August 2016, the Obama Administration assigned USSOCOM the lead role in coordinating the DOD's efforts to counter WMD, a mission previously assigned to the United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM). The future of USSOCOM and the US SOF is a potential issue for Congress.

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