

**UNITED STATES ARMY  
SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND**



**USASOC Strategy-2035**

April 2016



## **Commander's Foreword**

After nearly 15 years of war, the operational effectiveness of Army Special Operations remains without equal. However, the future operating environment will continue to be populated with numerous state and non-state adversaries that challenge our national interests. The forms of conflict employed by adversaries in the future are expected to be hybrid in nature, blending conventional and irregular capabilities, and will more often challenge the stability of regions through indirect means.

Preventing or deterring hybrid conflict short of all-out war is demanding. It requires constant adaptation, innovation, and institutional agility. In an era of U.S. military force reductions and fiscal uncertainty, ARSOF must provide the Nation with a balanced portfolio of capabilities to address hybrid threats of the future. *USASOC Strategy – 2035* provides guidance for the development of the future ARSOF operational and institutional capabilities that can counter threats across the spectrum of conflict and especially in gray zones between peace and overt war.

The following strategy describes where ARSOF stands today, predicts how the future operating environment will challenge ARSOF personnel and units, and presents guidance for where ARSOF must adapt to succeed in the future. The strategy incorporates ARSOF 2022 initiatives still in progress and builds upon those capabilities already established. This strategy presents objectives for developing future capabilities that will move ARSOF from the force of today to the force of tomorrow.

*Sine Pari – Without Equal*



KENNETH E. TOVO  
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army  
Commanding

## Introduction

*USASOC Strategy-2035* represents guidance for the development of future ARSOF operational and institutional capabilities. It is a document derived from our national strategies, *SOCOM-2035*, and the *Army Operating Concept*. *USASOC Strategy-2035* initiates our Strategic Planning Process and serves as the foundation for the *USASOC Guidance for Employment of the Force*.

A more detailed campaign plan will follow this strategy. It will explain how USASOC will accomplish the objectives contained in this strategy. It will direct and synchronize supporting actions designed to enable ARSOF to provide the balanced portfolio of capabilities that the future requires. *USASOC Strategy -2035* reflects current guidance and fiscal realities and will be updated in response to new guidance as changes occur into the future.



### Where Army Special Operations Forces Stand Today

The ARSOF mission, vision, state of ARSOF 2022, and core competencies are included below. Collectively, these subjects represent where ARSOF stands today and serve as the starting point from which capabilities and focuses must evolve.

### USASOC Mission Statement

The United States Army Special Operations Command mans, trains, equips, educates, organizes, sustains, and supports forces to conduct special warfare and surgical strike across the full range of military operations and spectrum of conflict in support of joint force commanders and interagency partners, to meet theater and national objectives.

### USASOC Commander's Vision

USASOC provides the Nation's premier Special Operations Forces, delivering appropriate and effective capabilities to joint force commanders and interagency leaders across the entire spectrum of conflict and under any operating conditions. USASOC invests in new ideas and capabilities to anticipate changing environments and new demands in order to maintain a competitive edge over our Nation's adversaries.



### The State of ARSOF 2022

ARSOF 2022 restructured specific Army Special Operations formations to optimize existing capabilities and to fill capability gaps for sensitive activities in complex operational environments. The restructure provided USASOC with an organic ability to conduct advanced analysis of resistance potential in target areas and created small highly trained units of action capable of developing unique options for decision makers and joint force commanders in contested environments. The restructure also created planning detachments capable of augmenting TSOC campaign planning efforts, with emphasis on special warfare.

The ARSOF 2022 restructure established 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne) (Provisional) as an Army Division-like headquarters tasked with operational missions and force provider responsibilities. The restructure also established an organic Military Intelligence Battalion and two new staff directorates (Influence and the Office of Special Warfare) within 1st SFC (A)(P). These changes allow 1st SFC (A)(P) to field a deployable and scalable SOJTF headquarters to synchronize SOF effects for joint force commanders. Additionally, each of the five Active Duty Special Forces groups restructured their existing 4th Battalions, creating units of action designed to assist in understanding, defining, and preparing the operating environment. The capabilities established through ARSOF 2022 place emphasis on operations outside, or preceding, major combat theaters. Ultimately, these capabilities add options to the USASOC portfolio of forces designed to address trans-regional threats. ARSOF 2022 also established the Strategic Planning Process (SPP) as the command's single process to develop the future force and its capabilities.

## **Army Special Operations Forces Core Competencies**

Core competencies are the operational and institutional capabilities of an organization that create competitive advantages. Including the USASOC core competencies in this strategy furthers our collective understanding of what makes ARSOF unique. The list also serves as a point of reference as we strive to develop future capabilities that maintain advantages over adversaries.

The ARSOF core competencies are:

- Identifying the right talent through formal assessment and selection processes, making the entry of high caliber candidates the starting point for ARSOF capability development
- Living among, training, advising, and fighting alongside people of foreign cultures (operating in the human-centric and personality-dependent domain)
- Providing precision direct action capabilities, enabled by SOF unique intelligence, technology, and targeting processes in support of theater and national objectives
- Providing joint force commanders with culturally astute professionals who are agile, adaptive, flexible, bold, innovative, and possess a high degree of advanced training
- Providing scalable and tailororable special operations options to address threats and exploit opportunities in peacetime environments, gray zones where hostile entities threaten stability short of war, and areas in overt conflict
- Developing and sustaining rapidly deployable forces with worldwide reach
- Maintaining agile and adaptive learning institutions that support career-long skill development from basic special operations capabilities to the most advanced individual and collective skills



## **The Strategic Context**

**Overview:** The future operating environment will be populated with state and non-state adversaries that employ hybrid forms of conflict to challenge U.S. influence internationally. Although the possibility of overt confrontation remains a persistent aspect of the future environment, adversaries will more likely challenge the stability of regions and U.S. interests through indirect means in the gray zone between peace and overt war. Adversarial actions in gray zones will seek to achieve irreversible gains at the expense of U.S. interests. These adversaries will become increasingly enabled as technology that was once only available to large nation-states becomes cheaper and within reach. Additionally, the hyper connected nature of the global environment will enable hostile entities to influence vulnerable populations and hijack local grievances in ways that threaten regional security. As a result, threats to stability in gray zones will likely emerge more rapidly in the future, requiring the U.S. to have more rapidly employable options available to counter adversarial actions. Ultimately, these challenges dictate that the U.S. not orient exclusively against one type of threat or a single form of conflict.



**Future Adversaries and Competitors:** The future operating environment will continue to be dominated by nation-states, with technologically enabled non-state groups with trans-regional reach wielding more influence than seen in decades past. In the future environment, state and non-state adversaries will attempt to erode U.S. and allied influence internationally. Competing nations such as Iran, Russia, the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea, and the People's Republic of China will challenge the current international security dynamic as they seek greater influence over regional neighbors. Additionally, a variety of violent extremist and criminal organizations will seek to advance their agendas trans-regionally at the expense of populations and established forms of governance. These state and non-state actors will likely exploit opportunities to diminish U.S. military, economic, and/or political dominance until internal conditions or exterior deterrence changes their course.

**Forms of Future Conflict:** The chosen forms of conflict for adversaries of the future are expected to be hybrid in nature, blending conventional, irregular, informational, and cyber capabilities to advance state and non-state agendas. The cyber environment will be central to many adversarial actions as hostile state and non-state actors attempt to influence populations.

Hostile entities will continue to challenge stability in the security environment through actions short of maneuver warfare and approaches that may be indirect in nature. Hybrid forms of conflict offer cost effective means to challenge U.S. influence internationally. Indirect approaches allow adversaries to avoid confronting U.S. power or provoking an international response while seeking irreversible gains in the regional balance of power. As a result, hybrid forms of conflict that challenge U.S. dominance and influence through indirect approaches are the likely choice for adversaries of the future.

#### **Globalization, Technology, and Speed of Threat Development:**

In a world shaped by globalization, unpredictable and rapid technological change will force shifts in political, military, and economic power. The barriers for adversaries to acquire and develop advanced technology, to include cyber and access denial systems, will diminish. The future will also see greater hyper connectivity globally, enabling hostile entities to influence a wider audience and to hijack local grievances within disaffected populations. Adversaries will need minimal investment to employ social media and informational technology to influence vulnerable populations, spread their



ideologies, gather support, fund operations, crowd-source intelligence, and share techniques. Access to advanced technology provides adversaries with viable alternatives to high intensity warfare. It provides a means to initiate less-attributable forms of conflict to offset U.S. strengths, particularly in the gray zone. These aspects of the future environment will accelerate the speed with which threats can develop.

**Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD):** The proliferation of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, high-yield explosive weapons, and the means by which they are delivered will pose an increased threat to U.S. interests and international security in the future. The diminishing costs associated with WMD

technology and the potential for destabilized governments to lose control of weapons will challenge security and interests of nations around the world to an unprecedented degree.

**Decision Space in Gray Zones:** The first, and possibly most important, step to preventing and mitigating threats is detecting emerging threats before they irreversibly erode U.S. influence and destabilize regions. Early understanding of emerging threats will be essential in the future operating environment for national leaders to have adequate decision space necessary to develop policies and plans that counter adversarial

actions. The U.S. will require the means to obtain early understanding of threats (especially in gray zones). The U.S. will also need the capability to control escalation of crisis to deter threats from developing into greater challenges that require a large commitment of national resources.

#### **Implications**

Implications of the future operating environment that must be considered while developing ARSOF capabilities are contained in this section.

- State actors of the future will likely possess advanced access denial and communications detection, denial, and encryption technology while trans-regional non-state actors will employ evolving technology to conceal communications and deliver lethal attacks with minimal personnel. These issues require ARSOF to:
  - Employ targeting processes/systems that maintain advantage over adversaries
  - Avoid or mitigate detection in denied, semi-permissive, and permissive environments
  - Be capable of moving greater distances and with more efficiency (aviation and other mobility capabilities)
  - Employ integrated air defense system penetration capabilities for rotary wing and unmanned aerial systems
  - Employ advanced unmanned aerial systems and intelligence collection capabilities at the tactical level
  - Engage hostile threats over greater distances



► Forms of conflict in the future are likely to be hybrid in nature, blending conventional and irregular capabilities, requiring ARSOF to:

- Advance direct action and hostage rescue capabilities
- Develop and leverage strong joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) partnerships
- Achieve SOF-CF interdependence, interoperability, and integration
- Maintain a balanced portfolio of capabilities across the spectrum of special operations
- Fully understand the aspects of hybrid conflict and codify doctrine for operations to counter hybrid threats
- Evolve intelligence collection, analysis, and synthesis capabilities, particularly with regard to understanding and characterizing the human domain and indicators/warnings for gray zone threats



► Cyber-based technology will become more important in conflict and activities to influence vulnerable populations and governments, while cyber security will become more difficult to guarantee. These issues require ARSOF to:

- Counter threat communications, influence, and operational planning/execution in the cyber realm
- Protect friendly networks from advanced cyber threats
- Integrate cyber capabilities into operations (influence operations, digital deception, communication disruption, and disinformation campaigns)

► Threats to stability in operating environments are likely to emerge more rapidly in the future, requiring ARSOF to:

- Achieve sustainable full spectrum readiness across the force
- Be rapidly deployable to counter emerging threats
- Quickly detect, analyze, and understand emerging threats
- Enable swift/sound decision making processes at the tactical/operational levels
- Establish strong relationships with host nation partners using

advanced language, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities

► Diminishing costs associated with WMD technology and the potential for destabilized governments to lose control of weapons require ARSOF to:

- Be capable of tracking, monitoring, and countering WMD
- Be educated/trained for counter WMD related operations

### **Commander's Guidance to Ready, Mature, and Invest in the Force**

To become the force of tomorrow, this strategy prioritizes objectives under three categories. These categories and related objectives represent the Commanding General's guidance for ARSOF **readiness** to fulfill the requirements of the current operating environment, to **mature** the force to meet future demands under increasingly ambiguous circumstances, and to **invest** in the future capabilities of ARSOF.

**Ready the Force:** Optimize capabilities and processes to better position the force for the demands of the current operating environment.

► Objectives:

- Maintain advanced hostage rescue and direct action capabilities
- Develop and implement new ARSOF Sustainable Readiness Model
- Improve SOF-CF interdependence, interoperability, and integration
- Improve joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) partnerships
- Improve understanding of the full range of ARSOF capabilities with external audiences
- Identify the right ARSOF Active Component/Reserve Component balance
- Invest in language, regional expertise, and cultural capability development
- Identify more responsive mechanisms to deploy forces when needed (e.g. address the slow nature of RFF process)
- Review unfinished ARSOF 2022 objectives; complete valid unfinished requirements

**Mature the Force:** Advance ARSOF capabilities to meet mid-term demands.

► Objectives:

- Adapt ARSOF hostage rescue and direct action capabilities to incorporate improved technology, processes, and techniques

- Develop capabilities to track, monitor, and counter WMD
- Incorporate education/training into ARSOF learning institutions to enable operations that track, monitor, and counter WMD
- Empower decentralized Mission Command (COP and situational awareness via handheld data, blue force tracking systems, and secure communications)
- Increase ARSOF clandestine and low visibility technology (mobility platforms, weapons systems, and communications technology – secure, unsecure, and non-attributable systems)
- Improve ARSOF intelligence collection, analysis, and synthesis capabilities that enable understanding and characterization of the human domain and provide indicators/warnings for gray zone threats
- Codify ARSOF doctrine and education for FID, COIN, CT and support to resistance movements (up to and including UW)



- Invest in education initiatives that prepare operators to develop effective partnerships in foreign cultures and to build partner capabilities
- Create and implement education models that train operators to rapidly integrate into, and excel within, ambiguous environments
- Invest in hybrid conflict research/education within ARSOF institutions
- Integrate IT networks across organizational/institutional boundaries
- Streamline resourcing/capability development processes to be more agile/adaptive

**Invest in the Future Force:** Develop ARSOF capabilities to meet challenges of the future operating environment.

► Objectives:

- Procure the technology and weapons systems that keep ARSOF on the cutting edge

- Procure mobility systems that are agile enough to quickly deploy, resilient enough to operate in austere environments, and require minimal maintenance/logistics
- Procure C2 and intelligence technology that improve the speed and ease with which we process/synthesize information at the tactical and operational levels
- Procure communications and intelligence systems that facilitate rapid collective understanding of the environment, adversarial actions, and emerging threats
- Develop and integrate systems and processes that enable operator/leader level decision making
- Develop and incorporate methods and technology that improve our ability to influence populations and to understand/address how adversaries and their proxies do the same (cyber and related capabilities)
- Integrate cyber capabilities into operations to include influence operations, digital deception, communication disruption, and disinformation campaigns at the tactical and operational levels
- Obtain technology to protect friendly networks from advanced cyber threats
- Obtain next generation unmanned aerial systems that provide longer operational range, over horizon observation, and can be launched/recovered by tactical units
- Obtain the next generation of ARSOF rotary wing capabilities for transport and fire support that have longer range and greater fuel efficiency



- Obtain capabilities for ARSOF rotary wing and unmanned platforms to penetrate integrated air defense systems
- Create the system/opportunities to retain enabler personnel in ARSOF for their entire careers
- Implement alternative military/civilian career models that are more attuned to the demands of the future operating environment



The future operating environment will present challenges that demand ARSOF to be adaptive, flexible, rapidly responsive, and capable of succeeding in ambiguous circumstances. Through deliberate effort, ARSOF will adapt operationally and institutionally to ensure the effectiveness of the force remains without equal for decades into the future. The enterprise will continue to rely upon our specially selected, uniquely trained, and highly motivated Soldiers to succeed in the future. Our no fail mission today is to prepare the right balanced portfolio of capabilities for use by the Soldiers of tomorrow.

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