



July 2015

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

Opportunities Exist to
Improve Transparency
of Funding and
Assess Potential to
Lessen Some
Deployments

Accessible Version

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-571](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

SOF are specially organized, trained, and equipped to conduct operations in hostile or politically sensitive environments. Since 2001, DOD has increased the size and funding of SOF and emphasized SOF's importance to meet national security needs. SOF deployments have focused on the Middle East and placed significant demand on the force during this period.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014 included a provision that GAO review SOF force structure. This report examines (1) trends since FY 2001 in authorized special operations military positions; (2) the extent to which DOD has determined total funding for SOF; and (3) the extent to which DOD has taken steps to manage the pace of SOF deployments, among other issues.

GAO analyzed data for FYs 2001 through 2014 on SOF authorized positions, funding, and deployment data. GAO reviewed data on service-provided SOF funding and policies and other documentation and interviewed officials regarding processes for managing SOF deployments.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD improve visibility in total funding to support SOF and determine whether opportunities exist to balance deployments across the joint force. DOD partially concurred, stating that existing processes that guide funding and force allocation decisions are appropriate, but that it would review these processes and consider opportunities for improvement. GAO continues to believe that actions are needed, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-15-571](#). For more information, contact John Pendleton at (202) 512-3489 or pendletonj@gao.gov.

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Opportunities Exist to Improve Transparency of Funding and Assess Potential to Lessen Some Deployments

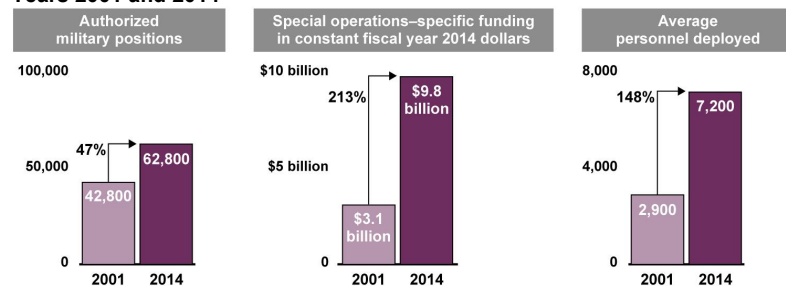
What GAO Found

GAO analysis of the resources devoted to U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) found that the number of authorized special operations military positions increased from about 42,800 in fiscal year (FY) 2001 to about 62,800 in FY 2014, which includes combat and support personnel. Even with this growth, special operations military positions constituted less than 3 percent of the military services' FY14 total authorized force levels.

Special operations-specific funding has increased markedly, but the Department of Defense (DOD) has not determined the total funding used to support special operations forces (SOF). Funding provided to SOCOM for special operations-specific needs has more than tripled from about \$3.1 billion in FY 2001 to about \$9.8 billion in FY 2014 constant dollars, including supplemental funding for contingency operations. However, these totals do not include funding provided by the services, which SOCOM estimates is more than \$8 billion annually. GAO found that DOD has little visibility over total funding to support SOF, primarily because it has not established a requirement or methodology to capture and report this information. Until DOD has more complete information on total funding to support SOF, decision makers will be unable to effectively identify and assess resource needs or weigh priorities and assess budget trade-offs.

DOD has taken some steps to manage the increased pace of special operations deployments, but opportunities may exist to better balance the workload across the joint force because activities assigned to SOF can be similar to activities assigned to conventional forces. Average weekly deployments of SOF personnel have increased from about 2,900 in FY 2001 to about 7,200 in FY 2014. SOCOM has taken steps to manage the effect of SOF deployments, but DOD reported that some portions of the force are still heavily deployed. GAO identified two factors that inhibit DOD's ability to potentially share the burden of SOF deployments with the conventional force. First, DOD has not evaluated since 2003 whether activities performed by SOF could be conducted by conventional forces. Second, DOD's current force-allocation process provides the Joint Staff with criteria to validate force requests, but does not systematically consider whether conventional forces could serve as an appropriate alternative to meet some requests for SOF. Unless the department more fully assesses whether opportunities exist to better balance demands across the joint force, the demand for SOF and the high pace of deployments that results is likely to continue.

Increases in Special Operations Military Positions, Funding, and Personnel Deployed, Fiscal Years 2001 and 2014



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) and U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) data. | GAO-15-571

Contents

Letter	1
Background	5
Authorized Positions for SOF Have Increased since 2001 but Remain a Small Portion of the Military Services' Total Force Levels	8
Special Operations—Specific Funding Has Increased Markedly since Fiscal Year 2001, but DOD Does Not Have Information on the Total Funding to Support SOF	14
DOD Has Not Fully Considered Opportunities to Alleviate Increased SOF Deployments	22
Conclusions	31
Recommendations for Executive Action	32
Agency Comments and Our Evaluation	33

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology	37
Appendix II: Resources at U.S. Army Special Operations Command	42
Appendix III: Resources at U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command	45
Appendix IV: Resources at U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command	48
Appendix V: Resources at U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command	51
Appendix VI: Special Operations—Specific Funding in Nominal Dollars	54
Appendix VII: U.S. Special Operations Command's Service Component Commands' Organizational Structure Descriptions	58
Appendix VIII: Comments from the Department of Defense	60
Appendix IX: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments	63
GAO Contact	63
Staff Acknowledgments	63

Appendix X: Accessible Data	64
Accessible Text and Data Tables	64
Agency Comments	74

Tables

Table 1: Descriptions and Examples of Service-Provided Funding to Support Special Operations Forces (SOF)	17
Table 2: Special Operations–Specific Funding for U.S. Special Operations Command’s Service Component Commands, Fiscal Years 2005 through 2014	54
Table 3: Special Operations Command Funding, Fiscal Years (FY) 2001 through 2014 (Dollars in millions)	57
Table 4: Organizational Descriptions of U.S. Special Operations Command’s Service Component Commands	58
Data Table for Highlights Figure: Increases in Special Operations Military Positions, Funding, and Personnel Deployed, Fiscal Years 2001 and 2014	64
Data Table for Figure 2: Number of Authorized Special Operations Military Positions and Key Events Driving Changes, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014	64
Data Table for Figure 3: Percentage of Total Authorized Special Operations Military Positions by Military Service, Fiscal Year 2014	65
Data Table for Figure 4: Authorized Special Operations Military Positions as a Percentage of Total Military Positions, by Service, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014 (Percentage end strength)	65
Data Table for Figure 5: Special Operations–Specific Funding for Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014, in Constant Fiscal Year 2014 Dollars (Millions of dollars)	66
Data Table for Figure 6: Average Weekly Number of Special Operations Forces Deployed, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014 ⁶⁷	
Data Table for Figure 7: Average Number of Special Operations Forces Personnel Deployed in Support of the Geographic Combatant Commands, Fiscal Years 2006, 2010, and 2014 ⁶⁷	
Data Table for Figure 9: Authorized U.S. Army Special Operations Command Active, Reserve, and Civilian Positions, Fiscal Years 2002 through 2014	67
Data Table for Figure 10: Fiscal Year 2014 Authorized Military and Civilian Positions by U.S. Army Special Operations Command Organization	68
Data Table for Figure 11: Special Operations–Specific Funding for U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Fiscal Years 2005 through 2014 (Millions of dollars)	68

Data Table for Figure 13: Authorized U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command Active, Reserve, and Civilian Positions, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014	69
Data Table for Figure 14: Fiscal Year 2014 Authorized Military and Civilian Positions by U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command Organization	70
Data Table for Figure 15: Special Operations—Specific Funding for U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command, Fiscal Years 2005 through 2014	70
Data Table for Figure 17: Authorized U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command Active, Reserve, and Civilian Positions, Fiscal Years 2006 through 2014	71
Data Table for Figure 18: Fiscal Year 2014 Authorized Military and Civilian Positions by U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command Organization	71
Data Table for Figure 19: Special Operations—Specific Funding for U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, Fiscal Years 2006 through 2014 (Millions of dollars)	71
Data Table for Figure 21: Authorized U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command Active, Reserve, and Civilian Positions, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014	72
Data Table for Figure 22: Fiscal Year 2014 Authorized Military and Civilian Positions by U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command Organization	73
Data Table for Figure 23: Special Operations—Specific Funding for U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command, Fiscal Years 2005 through 2014 (Millions of dollars)	73

Figures

Figure 1: Special Operations Command Organization Structure	6
Figure 2: Number of Authorized Special Operations Military Positions and Key Events Driving Changes, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014	10
Figure 3: Percentage of Total Authorized Special Operations Military Positions by Military Service, Fiscal Year 2014	11
Figure 4: Authorized Special Operations Military Positions as a Percentage of Total Military Positions, by Service, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014	13
Figure 5: Special Operations—Specific Funding for Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014, in Constant Fiscal Year 2014 Dollars	16
Figure 6: Average Weekly Number of Special Operations Forces Deployed, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014	23

Figure 7: Average Number of Special Operations Forces Personnel Deployed in Support of the Geographic Combatant Commands, Fiscal Years 2006, 2010, and 2014	24
Figure 8: U.S. Army Special Operations Command's Organizational Structure (Interactive graphic. Refer to Appendix VIII for accessible data.)	42
Figure 9: Authorized U.S. Army Special Operations Command Active, Reserve, and Civilian Positions, Fiscal Years 2002 through 2014	43
Figure 10: Fiscal Year 2014 Authorized Military and Civilian Positions by U.S. Army Special Operations Command Organization	43
Figure 11: Special Operations–Specific Funding for U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Fiscal Years 2005 through 2014	44
Figure 12: U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command's Organizational Structure (Interactive graphic. Refer to Appendix VIII for accessible data.)	45
Figure 13: Authorized U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command Active, Reserve, and Civilian Positions, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014	46
Figure 14: Fiscal Year 2014 Authorized Military and Civilian Positions by U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command Organization	46
Figure 15: Special Operations–Specific Funding for U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command, Fiscal Years 2005 through 2014	47
Figure 16: U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command's Organizational Structure (Interactive graphic. Refer to Appendix VIII for accessible data.)	48
Figure 17: Authorized U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command Active, Reserve, and Civilian Positions, Fiscal Years 2006 through 2014	49
Figure 18: Fiscal Year 2014 Authorized Military and Civilian Positions by U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command Organization	49
Figure 19: Special Operations–Specific Funding for U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, Fiscal Years 2006 through 2014	50

Figure 20: U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command's Organizational Structure (Interactive graphic. Refer to Appendix VIII for accessible data.)	51
Figure 21: Authorized U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command Active, Reserve, and Civilian Positions, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014	52
Figure 22: Fiscal Year 2014 Authorized Military and Civilian Positions by U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command Organization	52
Figure 23: Special Operations–Specific Funding for U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command, Fiscal Years 2005 through 2014	53
Accessible Text for Figure 1: Special Operations Command Organization Structure	64
Accessible Text for Appendix VIII: Comments from the Department of Defense	74

Abbreviations

DOD	Department of Defense
SEAL	Sea, Air, Land
SOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command
SOF	special operations forces

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July 16, 2015

Congressional Committees

After more than a decade of war, the United States has emphasized the importance of reshaping the armed forces while ensuring agility, flexibility, and readiness to address the full range of potential contingencies. U.S. special operations forces (SOF) have been an essential part of the Department of Defense's (DOD) global response efforts. These forces serve not only as a crisis response and contingency force, but are uniquely organized, trained, and equipped to conduct operations in hostile or politically sensitive environments. Over the past decade, DOD strategy has emphasized the importance of SOF to meet global national security needs and has indicated that SOF will continue to play a prominent role in support of the defense strategy. For example, the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review report states that the investment in SOF supports DOD's ability to sustain operations against terrorist networks, counter other transnational threats, and build the capacity of partner-nation security forces.¹ Consistent with its strategy, DOD has increased funding allocated for SOF and the overall size of the force in the last decade. For example, in 2006 DOD directed an increase in SOF personnel to create additional Army Special Forces and Navy Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) units. In 2010, DOD again directed an increase in SOF as well as certain conventional force capabilities to support SOF, such as communications and intelligence assets. DOD plans to maintain the size of SOF generally at fiscal year 2014 levels, even as the department has begun to reduce the size of conventional military forces.

Since 2001, SOF deployments have focused on operational needs in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as in other areas. DOD has recognized that these deployments have placed significant demands on SOF and it has initiated several programs to monitor the health of the force. For example, the department has placed an emphasis on managing time away from home and on the well-being of forces following a deployment. In recent posture statements and budget requests, DOD has continued to indicate its intent to prioritize special operations activities to build partner capacity,

¹Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014* (Mar. 4, 2014).

such as training indigenous forces in partner nations. In doing so, DOD anticipates that SOF will be relied upon to deploy in small numbers into politically sensitive and highly challenging operating environments. Moreover, U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) officials stated that as operations in Iraq and Afghanistan began to wane, subsequent operational needs, such as DOD's response to the emergence of the entity known as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, have created unexpected requirements on the force.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, section 1086,² directed the Secretary of Defense to submit to the congressional defense committees a review of the SOF organization, capabilities, structure, and oversight. Section 1086 included a provision that we submit to the congressional defense committees an evaluation of DOD's report. In September 2014, we issued a report that assessed the extent to which DOD's report addressed the mandated reporting elements.³ We found that DOD's report to Congress on SOF and SOCOM addressed or partially addressed the eight required reporting elements, but that the report did not include additional details on the analysis that underpinned the department's conclusions with regard to several reporting elements. For example, DOD's report concluded that current and future special operations—peculiar⁴ requirements could be met by using current and planned resources, but it did not specify the special operations—peculiar requirements of the geographic combatant commands and the Theater Special Operations Commands⁵ that will be needed to meet special operations missions.

Section 1086 also included a provision that we review how the special operations force structure is aligned with conventional force structures

²Pub. L. No. 113-66, § 1086 (2013).

³GAO, *Special Operations Forces: DOD's Report to Congress Generally Addressed the Statutory Requirements but Lacks Detail*, [GAO-14-820R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 8, 2014).

⁴The term "special operations—peculiar" is defined as equipment, materiel, supplies, and services required for special operations missions for which there is no service-common requirement.

⁵Theater Special Operations Commands are headquarters organizations that support the geographic combatant commands with logistics, planning, and operational control of SOF in their assigned regions.

and any other matters determined to be relevant. This report examines (1) trends since fiscal year 2001 in authorized positions for special operations military personnel and how special operations force levels have compared with the military services' total force levels; (2) the extent to which DOD has determined the total funding to support SOF; and (3) the extent to which DOD has taken steps to manage the pace of SOF deployments.

To examine the trends in special operations military personnel since fiscal year 2001 and how force levels have compared with the military services' total force levels, we obtained and analyzed available data on authorized military positions from fiscal years 2001 through 2014. We assessed the reliability of the data by interviewing DOD officials, incorporating data-reliability questions into our data-collection instruments, and comparing the multiple data sets we received from SOCOM and its service component commands against each other to ensure that there was consistency in the data that the commands provided. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes of describing the trends in authorized special operations positions. We compared the size of SOF military positions to that of conventional force military positions to determine the portion of the conventional force that SOF constituted, using the military services' total force levels reported in the annual national defense authorization acts for fiscal years 2001 through 2014. We also reviewed documents, including DOD's quadrennial defense review reports and briefings on force structure changes and discussed the data with SOCOM and service officials to understand the reasons for the trends.

To evaluate the extent to which DOD has determined the total funding to support SOF, we obtained and reviewed data on the special operations-specific funding provided to SOCOM. Using available data, we described trends in special operations-specific funding for fiscal years 2001 through 2014. Unless otherwise noted, we reported all funding in constant fiscal year 2014 dollars.⁶ We assessed the reliability of the data by interviewing DOD officials, incorporating data-reliability questions into our data-collection instruments, and comparing the multiple data sets we received from DOD components against each other to ensure that there was

⁶Throughout this report, we adjusted funding for inflation using the deflator for the fiscal year 2014 chain-weighted gross domestic product price index.

consistency in the data provided. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes of describing trends in funding for SOF. We further interviewed officials from the military services and obtained available information to determine other categories of funding that can be used for SOF needs. We reviewed approaches used by DOD for documenting and reporting SOF funding in light of internal controls and federal accounting standards that outline the need to have information on the full cost of federal programs and a high level of knowledge to guide decision-making efforts.⁷

To evaluate the extent to which DOD has taken steps to manage the pace of SOF deployments, we analyzed trends in the deployment of SOF from fiscal years 2001 through 2014. We reviewed available data for inconsistencies and discussed the data with DOD officials. Our assessments of data reliability revealed some concerns that are discussed in this report; however, we concluded that the data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes of describing the deployment trends for SOF. We also discussed the effect of past and planned deployments with officials from SOCOM and its service component commands in light of special operations deployment policies and documentation that describe goals for SOF deployments.⁸ We further obtained and reviewed guidance, such as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff manual that describes DOD's process for filling force requests.⁹ We also reviewed prior DOD efforts to analyze SOF missions to determine the extent to which the department had considered options for deploying conventional forces in support of missions designated for SOF. We interviewed military service and SOCOM officials to identify opportunities for potentially reducing demand on SOF with conventional forces, and we examined the Joint Staff's role in considering these alternatives in the process of sourcing department-wide force needs.

We conducted this performance audit from March 2014 to July 2015 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

⁷Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget, *Statement of Federal Financial Accounting Standards Number 4* (July 31, 1995).

⁸U.S. Special Operations Command, *Policy Memorandum 14-08: Force Rotation Duration and Deployment-to-Dwell/ Mobilization-to-Dwell Ratio Thresholds* (May 28, 2014).

⁹Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3130.06A, *Global Force Management Allocation Policies and Procedures* (Mar. 28, 2014) (Change 1, Nov. 21, 2014).

Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. Further details on our scope and methodology may be found in appendix I.

Background

SOCOM Roles and Responsibilities

In 1986, Congress called for the establishment of a joint service special operations capability under a single command.¹⁰ In April 1987, the Secretary of Defense established SOCOM with the mission to provide trained and combat-ready special operations forces to DOD's geographic combatant commands. SOCOM is a unified combatant command that performs service-like functions and has military department-like responsibilities and authorities. Under U.S. Code Title 10, sections 164 and 167, SOCOM's commander has the responsibility to organize, train, and equip SOF for current and future challenges. In this capacity, SOCOM develops special operations strategy and doctrine and is responsible for employment of forces, requirements validation, acquisition of special operations—peculiar equipment, and intelligence support. SOCOM is also responsible for providing resources in the form of funding and special operations—specific equipment for SOF. As a result, SOCOM is a unique organization within the department because it has both combatant command responsibilities and service-like functions of training and equipping its forces.

Section 167 further directs that the commander of SOCOM be responsible for and have the authority to conduct the following special operations activities: (1) direct action, (2) strategic reconnaissance, (3) unconventional warfare, (4) foreign internal defense, (5) civil affairs, (6) military information support operations, (7) counterterrorism, (8) humanitarian assistance, (9) theater search and rescue, and (10) other activities such as may be specified by the President or the Secretary of Defense.¹¹ Special operations missions are often conducted in hostile,

¹⁰Pub. L. No. 99-591, § 9115 (1986) (codified as amended at 10 U.S.C. § 167).

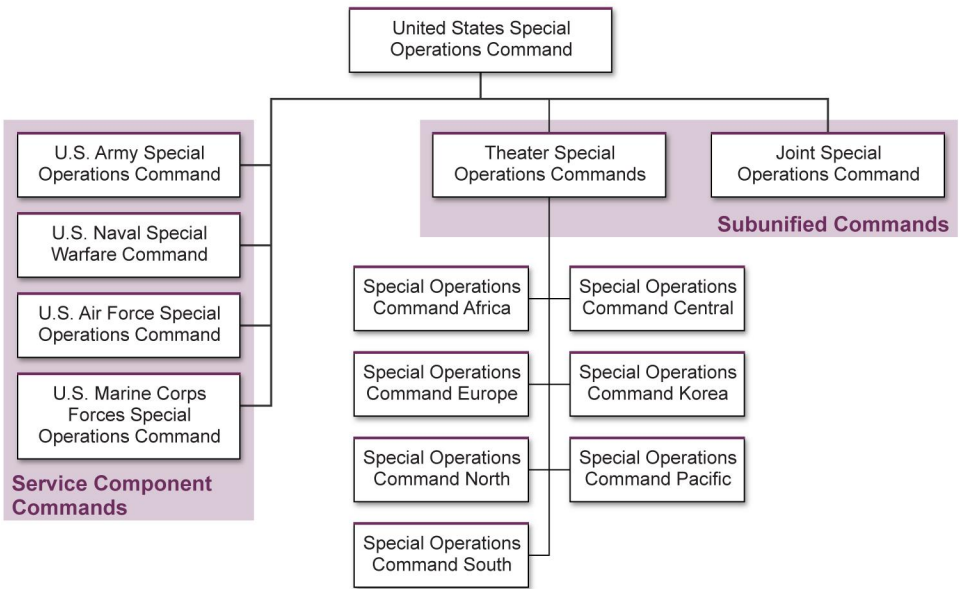
¹¹See 10 U.S.C. § 167 (i) for special operations activities.

denied, or politically sensitive environments, and can be generally characterized by time-sensitivity and a higher degree of risk, among other characteristics. To respond to these activities, DOD relies on special operations units assigned to SOCOM, such as Army Special Forces, SEAL units, and Air Force Special Tactics Squadrons.

Organization, Oversight, and Funding of Special Operations Command

SOCOM comprises a headquarters organization; four service component commands, including the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, and U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command; and various subunified commands. The subunified commands include the Joint Special Operations Command, which is charged with studying special operations requirements and techniques, ensuring interoperability and equipment standardization, planning and conducting special operations exercises and training, and developing joint special operations tactics; and seven Theater Special Operations Commands, which are responsible for performing broad, continuous missions uniquely suited to SOF capabilities. Figure 1 illustrates the current command structure of SOCOM.

Figure 1: Special Operations Command Organization Structure



Source: Department of Defense (DOD). | GAO-15-571

SOCOM has authority, direction, and control over all forces and commands assigned to it, to include organizing and employing forces and assigning tasks,¹² but the military services retain certain responsibilities as they pertain to SOF. As outlined in memorandums of agreement between SOCOM and the military departments, the military services retain responsibility for compensation, promotion, and professional development of SOF; recruiting of personnel to meet special operations needs; support for military construction projects; providing the baseline level of service-common installation services and facilities sustainment support required to support SOF; and programming and budgeting military personnel funds associated with military end strength for SOF, among other responsibilities. Specific to military personnel funding, each special operations position is part of the end strength of one of the four military services. As such, any changes in SOF end strength are included in the military services' end strength.

As outlined in section 167(e) of Title 10, U.S. Code, the commander of SOCOM is responsible for and has authority to (1) prepare and submit to the Secretary of Defense program recommendations and budget proposals for SOF assigned to SOCOM and (2) conduct development and acquisition of special operations—peculiar equipment. In this capacity, SOCOM has its own budgetary authority and responsibilities through a separate major force program category and executes funding in operation and maintenance; procurement; research, development, test, and evaluation; and military construction accounts.¹³ SOCOM receives these special operations—specific appropriations to provide fully capable SOF to conduct special operations activities and to acquire equipment or modify service common systems to meet special operations—specific requirements for which there is no broad conventional force need.

¹²DOD Directive 5100.01, *Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components* (Dec. 21, 2010).

¹³See Title 10 U.S.C. §167 (e)(2)(B). A major force program is an aggregation of program elements that reflects a force or support mission of DOD, such as special operations, and contains the resources necessary to achieve a broad objective or plan relating to that mission. Throughout this document we will refer to MFP-11 funding as special operations—specific funding.

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict is the principal staff assistant and civilian advisor on special operations matters. The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict is responsible for representing SOCOM and SOF by, among other things, developing, coordinating, and overseeing the implementation of policy for special operations activities and providing overall supervision of the preparation and justification of SOF programs and budget. According to SOCOM officials, SOCOM works with the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict in the same manner as any other service would work with its service secretariat.

In 2014, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict established a Special Operations Policy and Oversight Council to provide special operations policy guidance and oversight to SOCOM and coordinate special operations–related matters across the Office of the Secretary of Defense. The council is also intended to address key issues related to special operations policies and operational priorities, budget execution, force employment, legislative changes, and required capabilities. Specific tasks as outlined in the council’s charter include developing and improving policy, joint processes, and procedures that facilitate the development, integration, implementation, and sustainment of DOD’s special operations capability efforts.

Authorized Positions for SOF Have Increased since 2001 but Remain a Small Portion of the Military Services’ Total Force Levels

Authorized special operations military positions increased by about 47 percent between fiscal years 2001 and 2014, and they constitute just under 3 percent of military services’ total force levels.

Authorized Special Operations Military Positions Have Increased since 2001

Our analysis of data provided by SOCOM and its service component commands shows that the number of authorized special operations positions¹⁴ for military personnel increased from approximately 42,800 in fiscal year 2001 to approximately 62,800 in fiscal year 2014. These military positions constitute about 91 percent of total special operations positions. Civilian personnel constitute the remaining estimated 9 percent of special operations positions. The number of authorized special operations civilian positions increased from about 2,800 in fiscal year 2001 to about 6,500 in fiscal year 2014.¹⁵

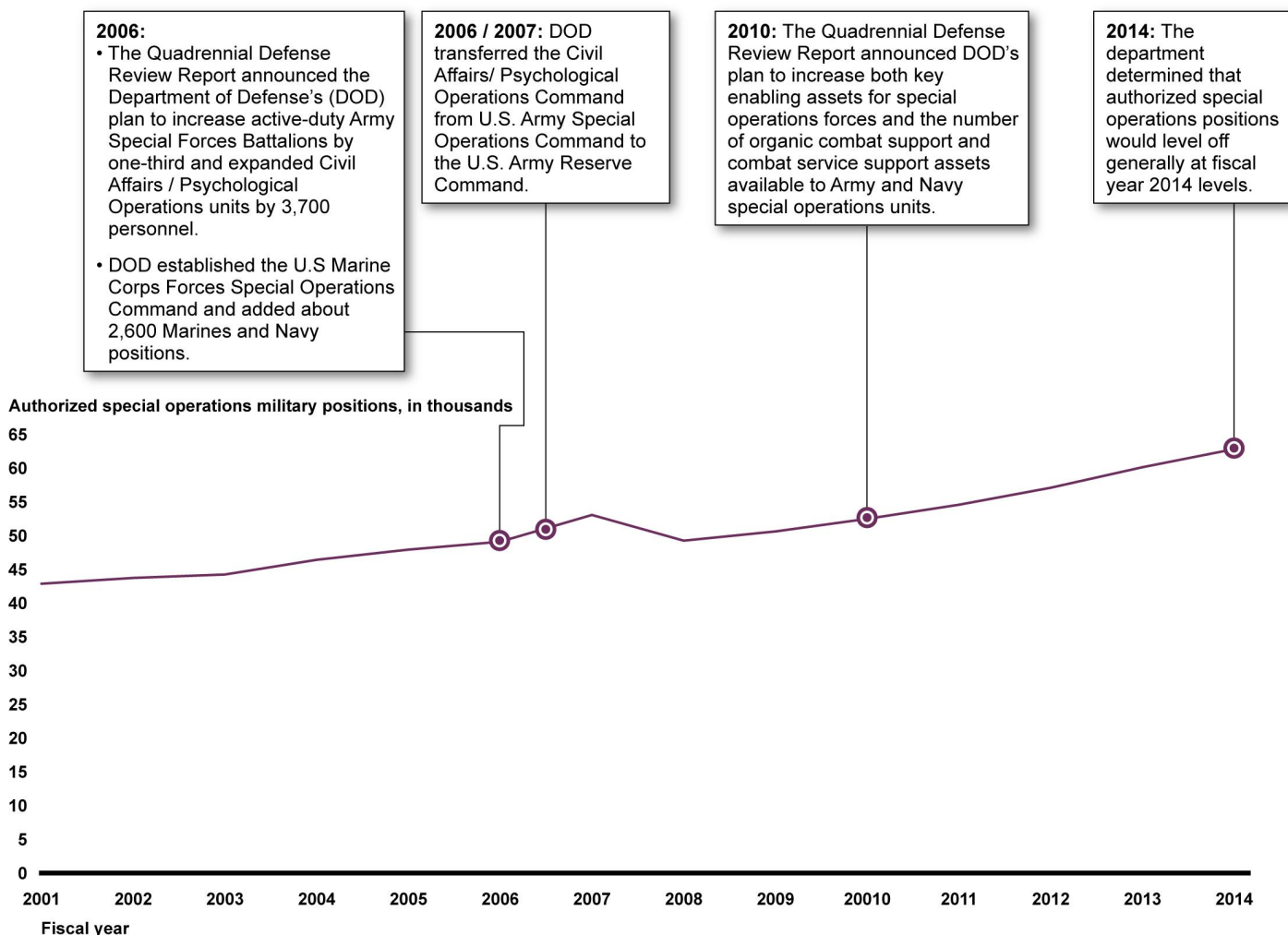
The increasingly prominent role of SOF as outlined in DOD's strategic guidance has driven the increase in authorized military and civilian special operations positions. DOD's past three Quadrennial Defense Review reports specifically addressed changes to the size and structure of SOF. For example, the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review recommended increasing active-duty Special Forces Battalions, expanding the Civil Affairs / Psychological Operations units, and establishing the Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command. The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review subsequently proposed increasing certain capabilities that support SOF, as well as the number of special operations combat support and combat service support forces—for example, logisticians, communication assets, and intelligence experts—available to both Army and Navy SOF units. DOD relies on special operations personnel because they possess highly specialized skill sets, including cultural and regional awareness. Moreover, officials noted that increases in civilian positions were driven partly by DOD's attempts to rebalance workload and become a cost-efficient workforce, namely by converting positions filled by military personnel or in-sourcing services performed by contractors to civilian positions.

¹⁴For purposes of this report, authorized special operations positions refer to those positions that have been approved by DOD components for funding for a specific fiscal year.

¹⁵This report does not include an analysis of SOCOM contractor positions. In 2014, we found that the combatant commands had taken varied steps to collect data on contractor full-time equivalents, but that the availability of data on the number of personnel performing contract services varied, and thus trends could not be identified. GAO, *Defense Headquarters: DOD Needs to Reevaluate Its Approach for Managing Resources Devoted to the Functional Combatant Commands*, [GAO-14-439](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 26, 2014).

Figure 2 describes key events driving changes to the trends in special operations positions from fiscal years 2001 through 2014.

Figure 2: Number of Authorized Special Operations Military Positions and Key Events Driving Changes, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014



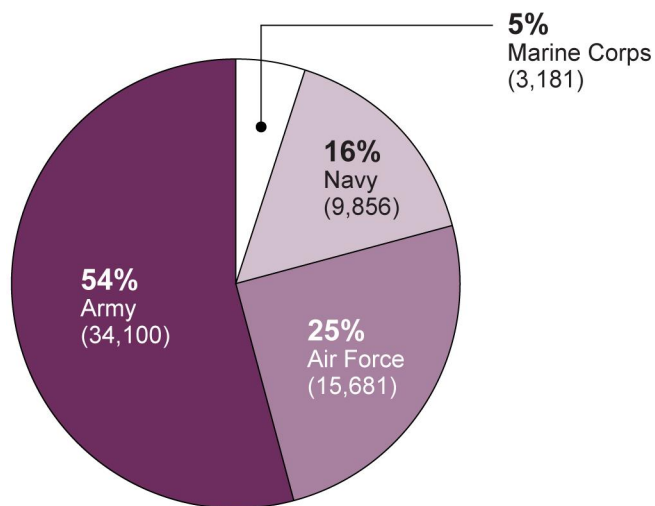
Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) and U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) data. | GAO-15-571

Note: Our analysis is focused on authorized special operations military positions. Some of the key events outlined above also include adjustments to authorized civilian positions, but these are not captured in this figure.

More than half of the special operations military positions are Army positions, with the remainder allocated to the other services. Specifically, in fiscal year 2014, about 34,000 authorized special operations positions

were Army positions (about 54 percent of the total authorized SOF positions). Figure 3 outlines the percentage of total authorized special operations military positions funded by each military service in fiscal year 2014.

Figure 3: Percentage of Total Authorized Special Operations Military Positions by Military Service, Fiscal Year 2014



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) and U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) data. | GAO-15-571

Authorized special operations military positions grew across the four service component commands—U.S. Army Special Operations Command, U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, and U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command—from fiscal years 2006 through 2014. Additional details on the number of positions at each of the service component commands can be found in appendixes II through V.

SOCOM's headquarters organizations grew even more substantially than growth in overall special operations military positions. As we reported in June 2014, SOCOM's authorized military and civilian positions at the command's headquarters organizations more than doubled—from 1,885

in fiscal year 2004 to 4,093 in fiscal year 2013 (a 117 percent increase).¹⁶ We reported that, according to SOCOM officials, this increase is partly attributable to increases in authorized positions at the Special Operations Research, Development, and Acquisition Center and increases in authorized positions to support recent and emerging missions.¹⁷

Military positions at the Theater Special Operations Commands, which plan and have responsibility for command and control of operations in support of the geographic combatant commands, also increased, from about 430 in fiscal year 2001 to just below 1,400 in fiscal year 2014 (a 226 percent increase). In May 2013, we reported that authorized positions grew at each of the geographic combatant commands' Theater Special Operations Commands largely to fulfill increased mission requirements, such as operational requirements in the Middle East and increased demand for SOF in Africa.¹⁸ In addition, during this review officials noted that the establishment of two new Theater Special Operations Commands in support of the U.S. Africa Command and U.S. Northern Command areas of operation resulted in an increase in authorized military positions. In February 2013, the Secretary of Defense reassigned command of the Theater Special Operations Commands from the geographic combatant commands to SOCOM. This reassignment provides SOCOM with the authority to organize, train, and equip the Theater Special Operations Commands, while the geographic combatant commands retained operational control of the commands. SOCOM officials told us that they were in the process of reallocating positions from the headquarters to the Theater Special Operations Commands.

¹⁶Our 2014 report captured data on authorized positions devoted to SOCOM's headquarters and the headquarters organizations of SOCOM's subordinate unified commands and direct reporting units.

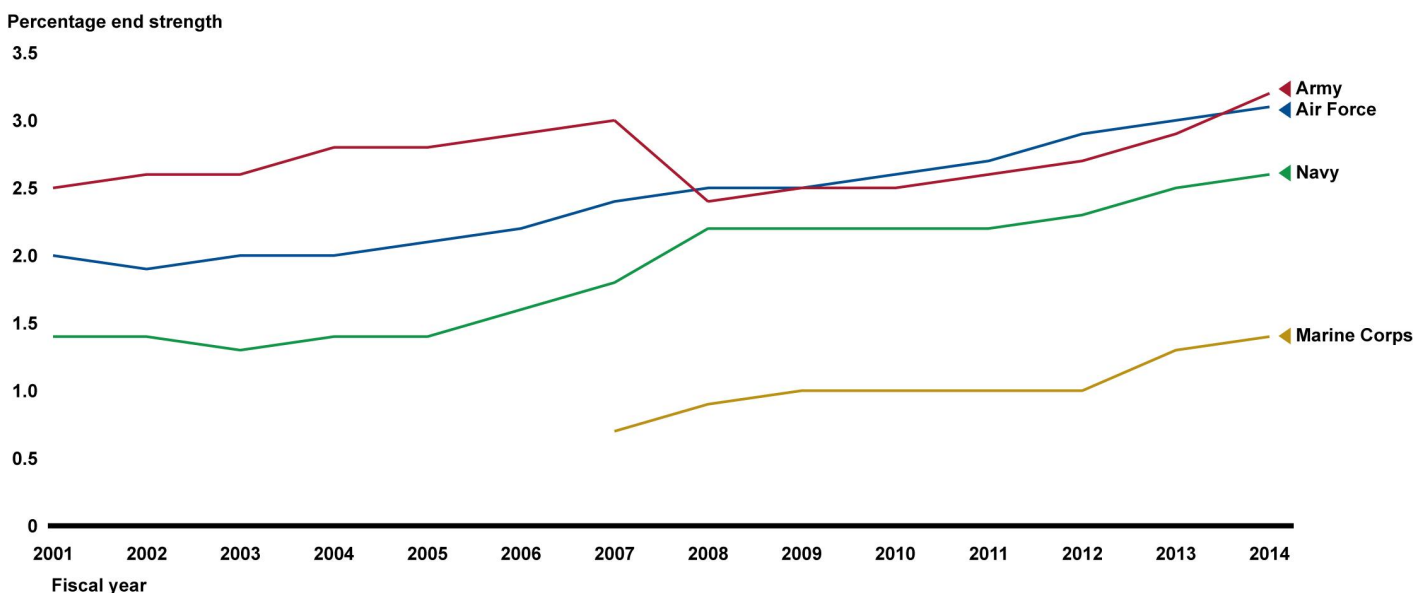
¹⁷[GAO-14-439](#).

¹⁸The Special Operations Research, Development, and Acquisition Center conducts research, development, acquisition, procurement, and logistics of special operations-specific equipment. GAO, *Defense Headquarters: DOD Needs to Periodically Review and Improve Visibility Of Combatant Commands' Resources*, [GAO-13-293](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 15, 2013).

Special Operations Military Positions Constitute a Small Portion of the Military Services' Total Force Levels

Even though the number of special operations military positions has grown, special operations positions continue to constitute a small percentage of the military services' total authorized force levels. In fiscal year 2001, special operations military positions constituted 1.9 percent of the services' total authorized force levels. This number increased to 2.9 percent by fiscal year 2014. The percentage of special operations military positions in each service's total authorized force level varied slightly by service. In fiscal year 2014, Army and Air Force special operations military positions constituted the greatest amount of the services' total authorized force levels with just over 3 percent, and the Marine Corps' special operations military positions constituted the least amount with less than 2 percent. Figure 4 shows the percentage of authorized special operations military positions for each military service for fiscal years 2001 through 2014.

Figure 4: Authorized Special Operations Military Positions as a Percentage of Total Military Positions, by Service, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) and U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) data. | GAO-15-571

Note: U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command was not established until 2006.

Over the next few years, special operations military positions will likely constitute an increasing percentage of the services' authorized force levels should conventional forces be reduced. DOD projects that authorized special operations military positions will remain at

approximately 63,000 through fiscal year 2019. However, overall force levels for the military services are expected to be reduced. Specifically, DOD's fiscal year 2015 budget request outlines a plan to cut more than 125,000 active-duty positions and approximately 63,000 reserve and National Guard positions by the end of fiscal year 2019. As the military services' authorized positions are reduced, special operations military positions would constitute a larger proportion of the services' total authorized force levels, but are likely to remain a relatively small portion of the overall force.

Special Operations— Specific Funding Has Increased Markedly since Fiscal Year 2001, but DOD Does Not Have Information on the Total Funding to Support SOF

While the size of SOF has increased by about 47 percent since fiscal year 2001, our analysis shows that the special operations—specific funding to support the force has more than tripled. We found that SOF—specific funding increased from about \$3.1 billion in fiscal year 2001 to about \$9.8 billion in fiscal year 2014. However, these figures may significantly understate the department's total investment in SOF because the department does not fully track how much it costs the military services to support SOF. SOCOM relies on the military services to provide funding for their respective SOF, to include pay and benefits, service common equipment and goods, and support programs and services, but the military services do not track these costs, and DOD has no clear methodology for tracking this funding.

Special Operations— Specific Funding Has Increased Considerably since Fiscal Year 2001

Special operations—specific funding is used to exercise and perform the special operations—peculiar¹⁹ authorities, responsibilities, and activities as assigned to SOCOM under section 167 of Title 10, U.S. Code, to include organizing, training, and equipping SOF. This funding also includes the acquisition of special operations—specific equipment, materials, supplies, and services for SOF. Examples of special operations—specific equipment include the light tactical all-terrain vehicle and the selected rotary-wing aircraft that SOF uses. SOCOM also relies on special operations—specific funding to modify service-common systems to meet special operations—peculiar requirements for which there is no broad conventional force

¹⁹Special operations—peculiar is limited to items and services initially designed for, or used by, SOF until adapted for service-common use by one or more military service; standard items used by the military services but modified for SOF; and items approved by the Commander, SOCOM, as critically urgent for the immediate accomplishment of a special operations mission.

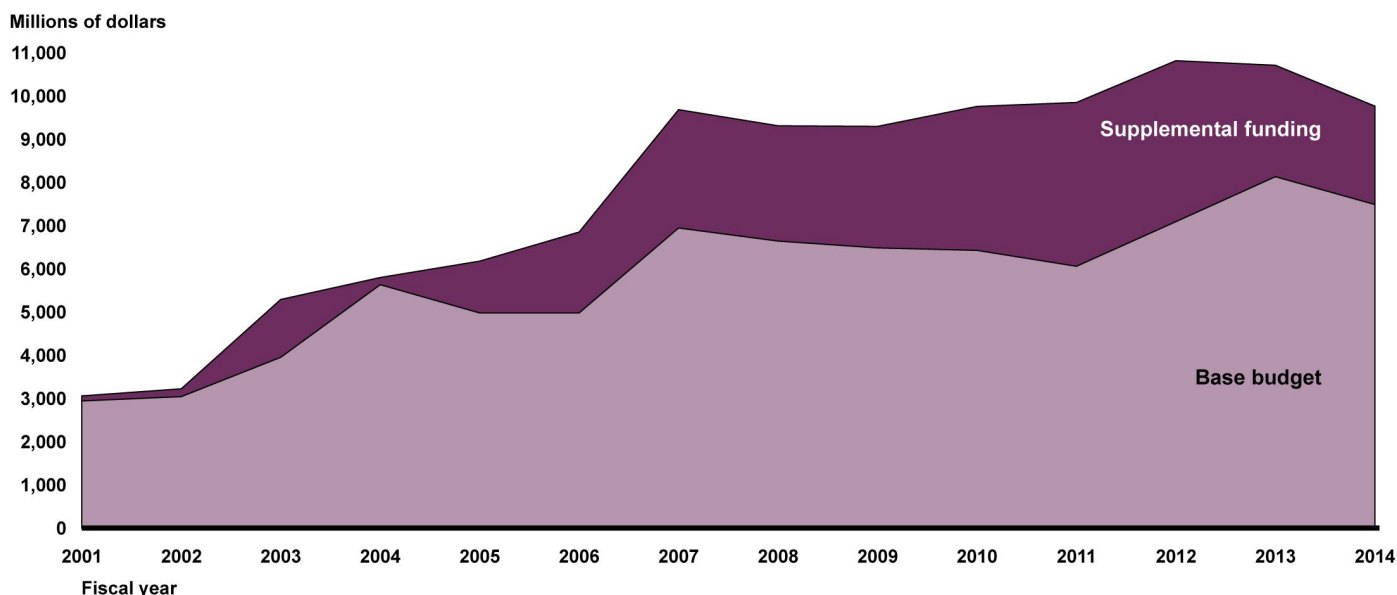
need, such as special operations–specific modifications to the C-130 aircraft. This funding is also used for some military construction projects, civilian manpower, selected training, and aircraft flying hours.

Our analysis shows that special operations–specific funding increased from about \$3.1 billion in fiscal year 2001 to about \$9.8 billion in fiscal year 2014, with a peak of \$10.8 billion in fiscal year 2012 (see fig. 5).²⁰ These amounts include funding from the base budget and supplemental appropriations, to include overseas contingency operations funds.²¹ More specifically, our analysis found that special operations–specific funding in the base budget increased from approximately \$2.9 billion in fiscal year 2001 to \$7.5 billion in fiscal year 2014, with a peak of approximately \$8.1 billion in fiscal year 2013. SOCOM received considerable supplemental funds as well to support its activities over the period, including \$2.3 billion in fiscal year 2014.

²⁰These amounts are reflected in constant fiscal year 2014 dollars.

²¹Supplemental appropriations laws are a tool available to policymakers to address needs that arise after annual appropriations have been enacted. Supplemental appropriations provide additional budget authority for government activities for the fiscal year already in progress, over and above any funding provided in regular appropriations laws, continuing resolutions, or omnibus appropriations. See GAO, *Supplemental Appropriations: Opportunities Exist to Increase Transparency and Provide Additional Controls*, [GAO-08-314](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 31, 2008).

Figure 5: Special Operations–Specific Funding for Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014, in Constant Fiscal Year 2014 Dollars



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) and Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) data. | GAO-15-571

Note: See app. VI for special operations–specific funding in nominal dollars.

Additional details on increases in special operations–specific funding for SOCOM’s service component commands can be found in appendixes II through V.

Services Also Provide Considerable Support to SOF

SOCOM relies on the military services to provide support to SOF. Special operations may differ from conventional operations in degree of strategic, physical, and political or diplomatic risk; operational techniques; modes of employment; and dependence on intelligence and indigenous assets. As outlined in DOD guidance, special operations can be conducted independently, but most are coordinated with conventional forces and interagency and multinational partners. Moreover, SOF needs support from the conventional force to perform most of its missions. For example, SOF rely on a range of capabilities from the conventional force, to include logistics and maintenance support and intelligence assets. In 2015, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict noted that these service-provided capabilities and support

mechanisms are not only vital to special operations mission success, but also to the readiness and well-being of the SOF community.²² SOCOM has established agreements with each military department on the roles and responsibilities for special operations—specific and service-provided non—special operations—specific funding to support SOF. For example, SOCOM is responsible for funding special operations—peculiar requirements, such as special operations training and transportation, while the military services provide funding for service-common basic and recurrent training, equipment, materiel, programs, and services at a rate not less than what the services provide to conventional military forces.

Based on our analysis, we identified the following three broad categories in which the services’ funding supports SOF: (1) pay and benefits, (2) service-common equipment and goods, and (3) support programs and services. These funds are spread across multiple appropriations, programs, functions, and organizations. For example, pay and benefits for SOF military personnel are funded through the services’ military personnel appropriations, while equipment—such as service-common equipment, large acquisition programs, and major weapon systems—are funded through the services’ procurement and research, development, test, and evaluation appropriations. Moreover, services and programs, and some civilian pay, among other expenses, are funded through the services’ operation and maintenance appropriations. Table 1 provides descriptions and examples of the categories of funding for SOF provided by the military services.

Table 1: Descriptions and Examples of Service-Provided Funding to Support Special Operations Forces (SOF)

Service provided	Description	Example
Pay and benefits	Includes funding for the costs of salaries and compensation for military personnel as well as personnel-related expenses such as costs associated with training, bonuses, and retired pay accrual.	Basic pay for SOF; bonuses; and special pays.

²²Honorable Michael D. Lumpkin, Assistant Secretary of Defense, Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, statement before the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, 114th Cong., 1st sess., March 18, 2015.

Service provided	Description	Example
Service-common equipment and goods [Note A]	Includes equipment, materiel, programs, and supplies adopted by a military service for use by its own forces and required to support SOF. These items are to be made available to SOF at a rate not less than provided to conventional units. Some service-common items provided to SOF, such as aircraft and ships, may be modified for SOF using special operations-specific funding, but the largest portion of the costs for these items is incurred by the services.	Large acquisition programs / major weapons programs—for example, C-130, CV-22 Ospreys, and MQ-9 unmanned aircraft—and commodities—for example, ammunition for service-common weapons such as M4 carbines.
Support programs and services	Includes SOF support programs funded by the services and others.	Administrative and logistical support to include: base operating support—for example, facility operations and logistics services, civilian personnel management, intratheater lift, deployment costs, and technology services; training—for example, initial military training, professional military education, flight training, specialized skill training, and training ranges for initial and recurring qualifications; military construction costs, to include family housing; and medical services.

Source: GAO summary of Department of Defense (DOD) information. | GAO-15-571

Note A: Equipment, materiel, programs, and services adopted by a military service for use by its own forces and activities. These include standard materiel items, base operating support, and the supplies and services provided by a military service to support and sustain its own forces, including those assigned to the combatant commands.

DOD Has Little Visibility over Total Funding Devoted to SOF

Information on funding to support SOF exists, but funding data are tracked and managed across various organizations in a decentralized manner, and neither DOD nor the military services have systematically collected, estimated, or reported total SOF funding needs. In the absence of a department-wide effort to determine the allocation of military service funding to support SOF, SOCOM has attempted to estimate the level of funding provided by the military services. Specifically, the command has estimated the allocation of military service funding to support SOF to be roughly \$8 billion annually. This amount, which exceeds SOCOM's fiscal year 2014 base budget of \$7.5 billion, is in addition to the \$9.8 billion that SOCOM receives through its base and supplemental special operations-specific funding. SOCOM developed an approach for calculating these amounts but, according to a command official, the methodology provides only a rough estimate of total funding to support SOF and does not include all funding. For example, according to this official, SOCOM's estimate for base operating support funding does not include all facilities, restoration, sustainment, and modernization funding. In 2013, Congress cited concerns with visibility into SOCOM's budget due to a lack of detail. Lacking such detail, Congress reported that it was unable to analyze

changes and trends over time in SOCOM's budget requirements, conduct comparative analysis with similar DOD budget requirements, or have any understanding of or visibility into changing requirements in the year of execution.²³ In the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014, Congress directed DOD to provide greater detail for SOCOM's operation and maintenance budget request beginning in fiscal year 2015.²⁴ The command included greater detail in its fiscal year 2015 budget justification but did not provide details beyond special operations–specific funding.

GAO's Standards for Internal Controls in the Federal Government state that managers need financial data to determine whether they are meeting their accountability goals for effective and efficient use of resources.²⁵ Further, the Handbook of Federal Accounting Standards suggests that agencies should provide reliable and timely information on the full cost of their federal programs aimed at assisting congressional and executive decision makers in allocating federal resources and making decisions to improve operating economy and efficiency.²⁶ Moreover, we have previously concluded that transparency—shedding light on the amount of spending, what it is spent on, who receives the funds, and what the results of that spending are—is essential to improving government accountability. Transparency allows policy decision makers and the public to access important information—including information they could use to judge program effectiveness—and provides opportunities for increased oversight.²⁷

²³H.R. Rep. 113-113 at 94–95 (2013) accompanying H.R. 2397, Department of Defense Appropriations Bill, 2014.

²⁴Specifically, the agreement directed that budget activities be established for the Special Operations Command operation and maintenance budget in fiscal year 2015 and that the Commander, Special Operations Command, submit an OP-5 Operation and Maintenance Detail exhibit and OP-32 Summary of Price and Program Changes exhibit for each budget subactivity. 160 Cong. Rec. at H600 (daily ed., Jan. 15, 2014).

²⁵GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#) (Washington, D.C.: November 1999).

²⁶Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget, *Statement of Federal Financial Accounting Standards Number 4* (July 31, 1995).

²⁷GAO, *Telecommunications: FCC Should Improve the Accountability and Transparency of High-Cost Program Funding*, [GAO-14-587](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 22, 2014).

The underlying reason why DOD, the military services, and SOCOM cannot estimate the full costs to support SOF is that DOD has no clear methodology for tracking this funding, because there is no requirement to do so. The services typically include funding to support SOF in their requests that also support the conventional forces, and at times it can be difficult to differentiate funding purposes. For example, Marine Corps officials noted that service-specific support to its special operations component command is built into the service's overall plan for allocation of resources along with all other non-special operations requirements. As a result, the military services' budget justification materials do not provide details on the level of resources required by the military services and other components specifically to support SOF.

While SOCOM estimated that the military services provide about \$8 billion annually to support SOF, this provides only a rough estimate of total funding to support the force and does not include, for example, all facilities, restoration, sustainment, and modernization funding. Because of the lack of detailed information available from DOD and the military services, we were also unable to comprehensively estimate the military services' funding to support SOF. Within the three categories of service funding to support SOF shown in table 1, we were only able to identify some examples of funding used to support SOF, as shown below.

- Funding for pay and benefits: We estimated funding for the total authorized special operations military positions for fiscal year 2014 using existing service documentation and the fiscal year 2014 annual DOD composite rate.²⁸ Based on these analyses, we calculated that SOF pay totaled approximately \$5.3 billion. This figure includes funding for receipt of some bonuses and special pays, such as foreign language proficiency, which both conventional forces and many SOF operators receive.²⁹ However, SOF operators may receive additional

²⁸The annual DOD composite rate includes the following: military personnel appropriation funding; average basic pay plus retired pay accrual; Medicare-eligible retiree health care accrual; basic allowance for housing; basic allowance for subsistence; incentive and special pay; permanent change of station expenses; and miscellaneous pay for fiscal year 2014. The annual DOD composite rate is not the fully burdened cost of military personnel.

²⁹Incentive and special pays for officers include incentive pay for hazardous duty and special pay, such as active-duty physicians, dentists, optometrists, and so forth, and certain designated officers in positions of unusual responsibility that are of a critical nature to the service concerned. Incentive and special pays for enlisted personnel include: hazardous duty special duty assignment pay; reenlistment bonus; enlistment bonus; educational benefits; and loan repayment program.

SOF-specific bonuses and allowances not included in these calculations. For example, Air Force SOF operators traditionally receive one or more special or incentive pays based on the requirement to maintain proficiency in certain skills or deploying on assignments with difficult duties. The Air Force has more than a dozen special and incentive pays, including aviator pay, dive pay, and special duty assignment pay, that can range from \$125 a month to as much as \$1,000 a month.

- Funding for service-common equipment and goods: Documentation provided by the Army noted that, in fiscal year 2014, the Army funded approximately \$138 million for 12 Gray Eagle unmanned aircraft systems for SOF. An Army official further noted that the Army funded approximately \$1.2 billion to purchase 72 Black Hawk helicopters for the Army's Special Operations Aviation Regiment from fiscal years 2007 through 2013. In addition, according to Navy documentation, the service will fund eight Small Tactical Unmanned Aerial Systems to support SOF. Combining operation and maintenance; procurement; and research, development, test and evaluation funds, the Navy expects to provide approximately \$189 million in support of SOF through fiscal year 2019 for the systems.
- Funding for support programs and services: Documentation provided by the Air Force noted that in fiscal year 2014, the service funded \$4.8 million for utilities and rent and \$6.5 million for base and headquarters communications support for SOF. According to military service officials, however, the SOF portion for some costs, such as base operating support on bases where SOF reside, is difficult to quantify, primarily because these costs are often shared with conventional forces. These costs can include the portion of information technology and facility services used to support SOF.

According to SOCOM and military service officials, more complete information on total SOF funding would be useful for senior-level DOD and congressional decision makers, particularly as the military services face force reductions and decreasing budgets and as the size of SOF continues to constitute a greater portion of the total force size. According to its charter, the nascent Special Operations Oversight Council, established in 2014, is tasked with adjudicating SOF resource-management issues, among other areas, but it must do so with incomplete information on the total costs to support SOF. According to officials, in a fiscally constrained environment, having information on total funding to support SOF would help the oversight council and others determine whether needs are realistic and feasible within constraints. For example, Navy officials noted that while SOCOM has been working to provide predictability to the services in terms of capabilities that SOF

needs, the requests are evaluated, prioritized, and compete against other Navy programs. Specifically, SOCOM requested an afloat forward staging base³⁰ as a persistent and dedicated SOF platform to support geographic combatant command requirements. However, providing this capability represents a significant capital investment for the Navy. Given that the Navy is building only three multimission platforms that can also be used as afloat forward staging bases, the service needs the platforms available for missions other than those dedicated to support SOF. In addition, an Army official noted that SOF requirements are not always known well enough in advance for inclusion in Army budget estimates, but SOF is generally considered a higher priority. As such, funding is provided to support SOF and the Army is left to rebalance a smaller available funding level for other needs. Ultimately, visibility into total funding to support SOF would enable decision makers to fully determine the level of investment needed in the force and to plan to support SOF during times of budget uncertainty and service force reductions.

Until DOD has more complete information on the total funding necessary to support SOF, decision makers will be unable to effectively identify and assess justification materials for future funding needs, or weigh priorities and assess budget trade-offs within anticipated declining resources. Moreover, the lack of visibility into current spending and future funding plans impede DOD's ability to provide Congress with information needed to facilitate oversight, and afford congressional decision makers the opportunity to analyze changes and trends over time in the budget provided to support SOF or to conduct a comparative analysis with other DOD budget requirements.

DOD Has Not Fully Considered Opportunities to Alleviate Increased SOF Deployments

SOF deployments have increased since fiscal year 2001 and are not expected to abate, but DOD has not fully considered whether additional opportunities exist to reduce the demand for SOF. Between fiscal years 2001 and 2014, the average number of SOF personnel deployed nearly tripled, primarily to meet operational needs in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. DOD expects this high pace of deployments to continue in the near future even as focus shifts to other parts of the world. Recognizing the need to manage the effect of repeated deployments on

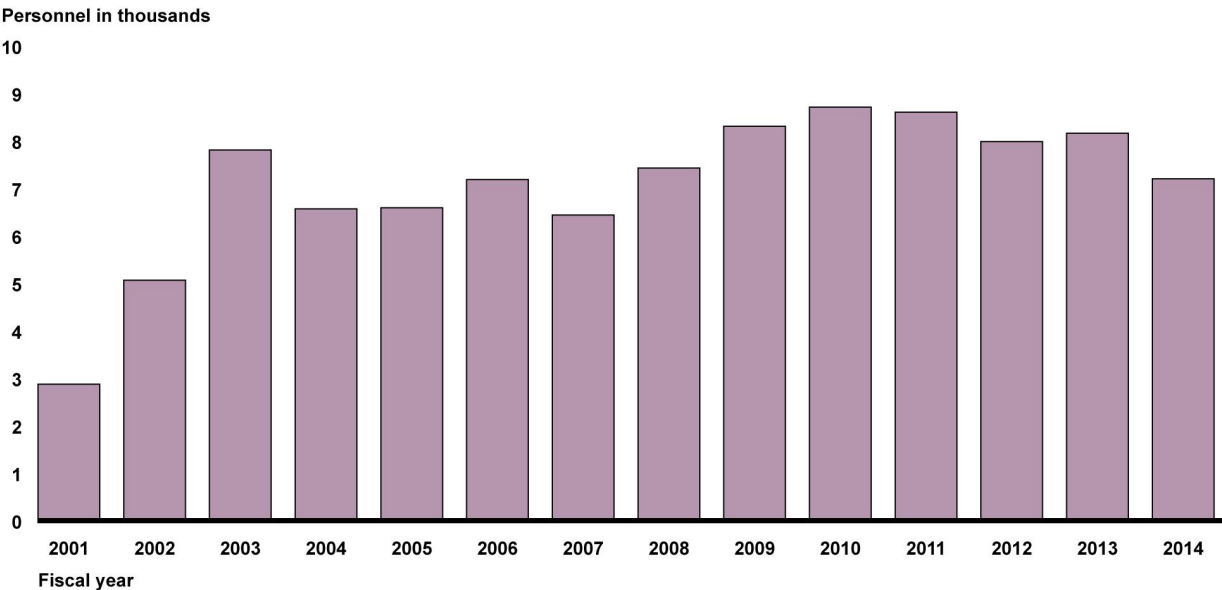
³⁰An afloat forward staging base is a ship designed to remain on station overseas for long periods, providing support to other naval forces, such as special operations units, patrol craft, and minesweepers.

the force, DOD has taken some actions to try to manage the pace of SOF deployments by establishing a series of policies to manage deployments. However, the department has not taken steps to examine whether additional opportunities exist to reduce the high demand on SOF by sharing some activities with conventional forces.

SOF Deployments Have Increased to Support Operations in the Middle East, but Focus Is Beginning to Shift to Other Regions

SOCOM's historical deployment data reflects a command that experienced a surge of deployments after 2001 followed by a sustained high deployment level. Comparing fiscal years 2001 through 2014, the average weekly number of deployed SOF nearly tripled in that time frame, from approximately 2,900 personnel to approximately 7,200 personnel deployed weekly, with a peak of about 8,700 personnel deployed weekly in fiscal year 2010 (see fig. 6). Given the relatively small size of SOF—about 53,000 deployable personnel—at any given time a high proportion of total SOF is either deployed, preparing to deploy, or just returning from deployment.

Figure 6: Average Weekly Number of Special Operations Forces Deployed, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014

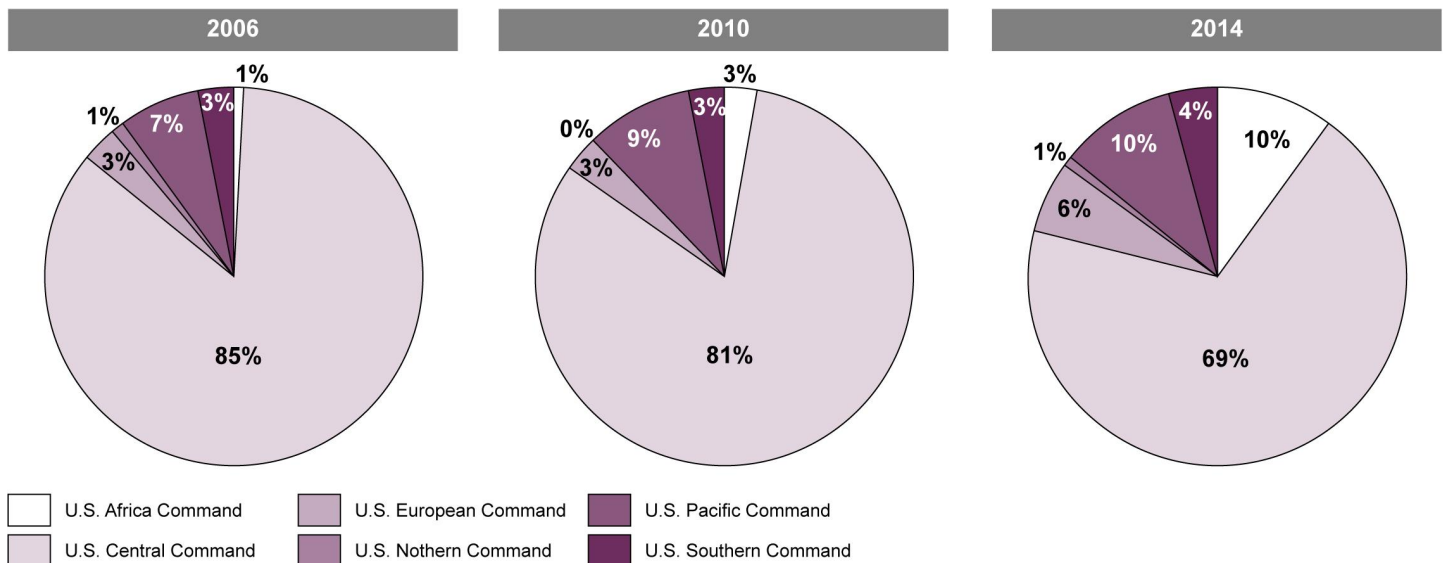


Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) data. | GAO-15-571

Our analysis shows that past SOF deployments were driven by Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq. According to officials, operational deployments in support of U.S. Central

Command lessened SOF's availability to meet demands in other theaters, such as conducting foreign internal defense and providing security force assistance to U.S. partners—traditionally a SOF role. In recent years, SOF are increasingly deploying in support of other geographic combatant commands (see fig. 7). Specifically, in 2006, 85 percent of deployed SOF were supporting needs in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, while only 3 percent and 1 percent, respectively, were supporting needs in the U.S. European Command and U.S. Africa Command areas of responsibility. In 2014, the portion of deployments in support of U.S. Central Command decreased to 69 percent, while deployments in support of U.S. European Command and U.S. Africa Command increased to 6 percent and 10 percent, respectively.

Figure 7: Average Number of Special Operations Forces Personnel Deployed in Support of the Geographic Combatant Commands, Fiscal Years 2006, 2010, and 2014



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) data. | GAO-15-571

According to officials, the total weekly number of deployed SOF is not expected to change significantly in the near future, although officials expect that the location where SOF are deployed may continue to shift based on emergent needs in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and the Pacific.

SOCOM Has Taken Steps to Manage the Effect of SOF Deployments, but Some Portions of SOF Are Still Heavily Deployed

In a May 2014 report to Congress, DOD noted that SOF personnel have come under significant strain in the years since September 11, 2001.³¹ Both the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict and the commander of SOCOM acknowledged in 2015 that SOF have sustained unprecedented levels of stress during the preceding few years.³² Specifically, the SOCOM commander has testified that as SOF continue to deploy to meet the increasing geographic combatant command demand, the high frequency of combat deployments, high-stake missions, and extraordinarily demanding environments in which forces operate have placed not only SOF but also their families under unprecedented levels of stress. According to the SOCOM commander, the high pace of deployments has resulted in both increased suicide incidents among the force and effects on operational readiness and retention due to a lack of predictability.³³ This is consistent with our prior work, which has found that a high pace of deployments for SOF can affect readiness, retention, and morale.³⁴ The military services have also acknowledged challenges SOF face as a result of operational demands. For example, in 2013, Air Force officials reported that a persistent special operations presence in Afghanistan and elsewhere, increasing requirements in the Pacific region, and enduring global commitments would continue to stress Air Force special operations personnel and aircraft.³⁵

Recognizing the significant demands and subsequent stress on SOF, DOD and SOCOM have established a series of policies to manage

³¹Department of Defense, *Review and Assessment of United States Special Operations Forces and United States Special Operations Command* (May 5, 2014).

³²Honorable Michael D. Lumpkin, Assistant Secretary of Defense, Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, statement before the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, 114th Cong., 1st sess., March 18, 2015 and General Joseph L. Votel, U.S. Army, Commander, United States Special Operations Command, statement before the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, 114th Cong., 1st sess., March 18, 2015.

³³See, for example, General Joseph L. Votel, statement before the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives.

³⁴GAO, *Special Operations Forces: Opportunities to Preclude Overuse and Misuse*, [GAO/NSIAD-97-85](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 15, 1997) and *Special Operations Forces: Several Human Capital Challenges Must Be Addressed to Meet Expanded Role*, [GAO-06-812](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 31, 2006).

³⁵Department of the Air Force, *U.S. Air Force Posture Statement 2013* (Apr. 12, 2013).

individual and unit deployments. In general, the policies have been based on the concept of deployment-to-dwell ratios that seek to keep personnel at home station for at least as much time as that spent while deployed. For example, in August 2005 SOCOM issued a policy that required active-duty SOF personnel to remain at home for at least an equal amount of time as they were deployed for operations and training (a deployment-to-dwell ratio of 1:1). In 2006, we reported that the service component commands had not consistently implemented this policy, in part because the policy lacked clear implementation guidance and reliable data to track deployments of personnel.³⁶ DOD partially concurred with our recommendation to require SOCOM to clarify the methodology that its service components used for enforcing the deployment policy and to take steps to ensure that the service components had tracking systems in place that utilized reliable data to meet the requirements of the policy. DOD noted that SOCOM leadership and all of its service components had implemented the command's deployment policy, but that the service components had interpreted the intent of the policy requirements inconsistently. Consistent with our recommendation, SOCOM subsequently clarified the requirements of the policy in January 2007.

In 2008, SOCOM again updated its deployment policy, reiterating that forces shall remain at home for an amount of time at least equal to that for which they were away from their home station for activities such as operations and training. The policy noted that SOCOM's service component commands should strive to go beyond this minimum ratio and achieve a ratio that has active-duty personnel at home twice as long as they are deployed for operations and training (a deployment-to-dwell ratio of 1:2). The guidance outlined a long-term goal of having forces home at a ratio of 1:3. In May 2014, SOCOM again revised its deployment guidance, stating that units, detachments, and individuals should strive to be in dwell for at least twice as long as they are operationally deployed (a deployment-to-dwell ratio of 1:2). Both DOD and SOCOM policy requires Secretary of Defense approval for the deployment of units when they will fall below 1:1. According to officials, this policy is designed to minimize and manage the disruptive effects of emerging requirements. SOCOM's deployment guidance does not prescribe a system for tracking deployment data, and officials noted that therefore the command relies on the service component commands to report whether units are complying

³⁶[GAO-06-812](#).

with the deployment policy. Service component command officials told us that they use a range of tools, including spreadsheets and other systems to track unit deployment data. Officials also stated that emerging requirements—of which there were more than 100 in fiscal year 2014—exceed the already planned rotational force requirements and challenged the commands’ ability to meet goals outlined in the deployment guidance. Officials stated that, in many cases, these emergent requests for forces become part of the command’s steady-state requirements, increasing the annual number of deployed SOF.

SOCOM and the service component commands could not provide precise historical deployment data, but officials stated that certain unit types had historically high deployment rates.³⁷ For example, a U.S. Army Special Operations Command official stated that its Civil Affairs, Military Information Support Operations, and Army Ranger units have been heavily stressed due to the high pace of operations. Additionally, officials noted that some Marine Corps Special Operations Support Group forces, which include logistics personnel, explosive ordnance disposal technicians, and mechanics, have been unable to meet deployment goals.

Other types of units have been sized to better align with SOCOM’s steady-state deployment goals. For example, officials stated that Naval Special Warfare forces, Air Force Special Tactics Squadrons, and Marine Corps Special Operations Teams are all structured to be at home at least twice as long as they are to be operationally deployed. However, this deployment tempo is generally predicated on a steady-state environment without factoring in all emergent requirements, which according to some officials was not always realistic given the continuing demands on the force.

³⁷In 2006, we reported that officials with SOCOM’s Army and Navy service component commands expressed concerns regarding the reliability of their information required to track deployments. [GAO-06-812](#). Since then, SOCOM updated its deployment guidance and now requires that commanders track personnel tempo—or the days individuals are away from their permanent duty station—through the Defense Ready system of record. However, there is no system of record for tracking unit, detachment, or individual operational deployments.

DOD Has Not Fully Assessed Opportunities to Reduce the Demand for SOF

Opportunities may exist to better balance the workload across the force because the activities assigned to SOF can be similar to the types of activities assigned to conventional forces. Conventional forces have been expanding their capabilities to meet the demand for missions that have traditionally been given to SOF, such as stability operations, security force assistance, civil security, and repairing key infrastructure necessary to provide government services and sustain human life. For example, in 2012 we reported that the services were taking steps and investing resources to organize and train conventional forces capable of conducting security force assistance based on identified requirements.³⁸ Recently, DOD began establishing conventional forces, such as the Army's regionally aligned forces with more extensive language and cultural skills that could conduct activities previously performed primarily by SOF. The Army reported that its regionally aligned forces helped train approximately 8,500 peacekeepers from 10 African countries in fiscal year 2014. According to Army officials, regionally aligned forces are prepared to meet the myriad of requirements across the range of military operations—from small teams participating in theater security cooperation with partner nations to large formations undertaking major combat operation. However, SOCOM officials stated that the command has not coordinated with the Army's regionally aligned forces to determine what activities, if any, could be transferred to or shared with those forces.

The goal of DOD's force-allocation process is to consider all DOD components to identify and recommend the most appropriate and responsive force that can meet identified requirements.³⁹ According to DOD's force-allocation guidance, geographic combatant commanders are to submit requests for forces to the Joint Staff and specify whether SOF or conventional forces are being requested. The Joint Staff is then responsible for validating combatant commanders' requests for forces—including both SOF and conventional forces—before assigning each

³⁸GAO, *Security Force Assistance: Additional Actions Needed to Guide Geographic Combatant Command and Service Efforts*, [GAO-12-556](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 10, 2012).

³⁹Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3130.06A, *Global Force Management Allocation Policies and Procedures* (Mar. 28, 2014).

request to a joint force provider.⁴⁰ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3130.06A outlines the validation criteria the Joint Staff applies to force requests. These criteria focus on such factors as the availability of funding and assuring that the request has not been previously decided or that the capability is not already available in the operational theater. DOD joint doctrine states that SOF are not a substitute for conventional forces and, in order to preserve SOF capabilities, should not be employed to conduct operations where conventional forces could be used to achieve the same objectives.⁴¹ Limited resources and extensive planning require a commander to selectively employ SOF for high-priority operations. DOD guidance further states that the department's force-allocation process should determine what forces are best able to meet a combatant commander's request based on a comprehensive assessment across all service force capabilities.⁴²

Our work identified two factors that inhibit the department's ability to share the burden of SOF deployments with conventional forces. First, the department has not recently evaluated whether some activities being conducted by SOF could be conducted by conventional forces. DOD last studied opportunities to alleviate some SOF deployments in 2003, as forces were beginning to heavily engage in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, to determine what types of special operations activities could be transferred to or shared with conventional forces. At the time, DOD determined that there were opportunities to share the burden of SOF deployments with conventional forces, including for certain counterdrug missions and foreign conventional force training. However, officials noted that DOD has not conducted a similar formal assessment since 2003 to determine whether the demand on SOF could be mitigated, even though SOF have continued to perform activities that could be conducted by other forces, such as performing noncombatant evacuation missions typically conducted by Marine Corps conventional forces. According to DOD officials, the department implemented its current force-allocation

⁴⁰Joint force providers are organizations responsible for recommending to the Joint Chiefs of Staff trained and ready capabilities and forces for allocation by the Secretary of Defense to support combatant command requirements. SOCOM is the joint force provider for SOF, and the Joint Staff is the joint force provider for conventional forces.

⁴¹Joint Publication 3-05, *Special Operations* (July 16, 2014).

⁴²Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3130.06A, *Global Force Management Allocation Policies and Procedures*.

process with the intent that it would validate the most appropriate military force to meet combatant commanders' needs. During the course of our review, however, officials from SOCOM and its service components repeatedly expressed concerns about whether it was appropriate to continue to deploy SOF at such high rates while admitting that they were reluctant to turn down deployments even if they felt the need could be met with other, conventional forces. Without conducting an evaluation of what activities should be performed by SOF versus the conventional force, the department cannot be assured that it is using SOF only in those situations where conventional forces could not be used for the same purpose.

Second, DOD's current force-allocation process does not systematically consider whether conventional forces could serve as an appropriate alternative to meet requests for SOF. Our analysis found that while DOD's force-allocation process currently provides validation criteria that the Joint Staff is to apply to force requests, the validation criteria focus primarily on administrative matters related to the request, such as the current availability of funding and forces in theater. The validation criteria do not include a requirement to determine whether the tasking of SOF is the most appropriate means to address combatant commanders' requirements, given the broader demands on the force. As the joint force provider for conventional forces, which involves coordinating with the military services and combatant commanders to identify the most appropriate conventional forces to meet force requests in the force allocation process, the Joint Staff has visibility over the types of conventional forces available in the department and whether these forces could potentially be used to meet SOF requests.

However, the Joint Staff's role in the process has been limited. This is because, according to officials, SOCOM has worked directly with the geographic combatant commands and theater special operations commands to draft requests for SOF forces that are SOF-specific. In the absence of a requirement for the Joint Staff to determine whether the tasking of SOF is the most appropriate means to address combatant commanders' requirements, we were told that the Joint Staff passes these requests directly to SOCOM for sourcing once they are administratively validated. According to a Joint Staff official, SOCOM can either source a requirement for SOF or close the requirement without sourcing. The official noted that when identifying military forces for combatant commanders' validated requirements, officials can consider whether conventional forces can serve as a substitute for SOF.

Unless the department has a requirement to more fully assess whether opportunities exist to better balance operational demands across the joint force, the demand for SOF—and the high pace of deployments that results—is likely to continue. Officials stated that SOF leaders and personnel want to deploy frequently, and thus they are reluctant to decline deployments even when they are under stress. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that, according to officials, combatant commanders often express a preference for SOF because they are responsive, flexible, highly skilled, and well-funded. However, the Joint Staff's role provides it with visibility over the capacity and capabilities of both SOF and conventional forces and enables the Joint Staff to lead efforts to determine whether certain combatant commander requests for SOF could be met by conventional forces.

Conclusions

Since 2001, SOF have become a prominent part of U.S. military forces as they have often been called upon for high-priority and time-sensitive military missions that have a high degree of risk. DOD has grown its SOF to meet such demands as well as made other portions of the force more SOF-like by adapting their training, among other actions.

While the size of SOF has grown by about half since 2001, the funding devoted specifically to the force has tripled to nearly \$10 billion annually. DOD officials point out that SOF-specific funding is a relatively small portion of DOD's overall budget, but that funding total understates the true costs because the military services support SOF in myriad ways, some of which are not easily quantified. DOD estimates that this additional support is around \$8 billion annually, but this rough estimate excludes many costs. DOD cannot provide a more precise estimate because it does not have a methodology to gather such data. Supporting SOF is likely to remain a high priority in the future, so these largely hidden costs to support the force could divert funding from other service priorities, especially if supplemental funding is decreased. As budget pressures mount, better transparency over the total costs to support SOF will become increasingly important both to DOD decision makers and to justify budgets to Congress.

The average number of deployed SOF has also tripled since 2001, and the pace of these deployments is not expected to decrease. DOD and SOCOM and its service component commands have recognized the strains these deployments have placed on the force, such as increased suicide rates and effects on readiness and retention, and have set goals to limit deployments and get better information about the length and

frequency of deployments. However, setting goals and obtaining better information may not solve the underlying problem—the high demand for SOF. To ease the strain on SOF, the department may have to reexamine how it is meeting operational demands. The Joint Staff is in the best position to assess whether conventional forces could do more to alleviate the high demands on SOF. However, DOD has not formally assessed opportunities to transfer or share certain activities between SOF and conventional forces since 2003, and DOD's current validation process is largely an administrative exercise that does not validate whether some requests for SOF could be met with conventional forces. These gaps are not consistent with DOD doctrine, which says that SOF should be employed for high-priority operations and not to conduct operations where conventional forces could be used to achieve the same objectives. Moreover, the current force-allocation process may miss opportunities to take advantage of the growth in conventional forces with SOF-like skills. Unless the department evaluates force requests with a goal of balancing the workload across the larger force, the high pace of SOF deployments is likely to continue.

Recommendations for Executive Action

In order to improve the budget visibility over the funding for SOF needed to guide departmental and congressional decision making and to better balance operational deployments across the joint force, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense take the following three actions:

Direct the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), in consultation with the military service Secretaries and SOCOM, to develop a mutually acceptable methodology to track and report funding to support SOF, possibly as part of annual budget justification materials.

Direct the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in consultation with SOCOM and the military services, to

- evaluate whether opportunities exist for certain types of activities traditionally conducted by SOF to be transferred to or shared with conventional forces and
- revise the validation criteria outlined in Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3130.06A to include a requirement that the Joint Staff consider whether conventional forces could serve as an appropriate alternative to meet requests for SOF before validating combatant commander requests.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to DOD for review and comment. In its written comments, DOD partially concurred with our three recommendations. DOD's comments are summarized below and reprinted in their entirety in appendix VIII. DOD also provided technical comments, which we incorporated into the report, as appropriate.

DOD partially concurred with our first recommendation that the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), in consultation with the military service secretaries and SOCOM, develop a mutually acceptable methodology to track and report funding to support SOF. In its comments, DOD stated that the department maintains full visibility of service funding to support SOF through manpower and acquisition accounts as well as special operations-specific funding. DOD noted that while there are indirect service costs to support SOF, these costs are service responsibilities and do not generally influence the department's decisions on SOF capabilities or end strength. DOD further stated that it would review the current methodology to track and report funding to support SOF and consider any changes based on incremental costs incurred by enhanced audit and reporting procedures balanced against potential benefits for decision making on SOF resourcing. With respect to DOD's first point, our report recognizes the distinction between service-provided funding to support SOF and special operations-specific funding provided directly to SOCOM. We reported that data on funding to support SOF are tracked and managed across multiple appropriations, programs, functions, and/or organizations in a decentralized manner. However, neither DOD nor the military services have systematically collected, estimated, or reported total SOF funding needs because there is no requirement to do so. Our report notes that SOCOM has developed an approach for calculating service-provided funding amounts, but it provides only a rough estimate of funding needs. In our view, these efforts do not constitute having full visibility of total funding to support SOF. Regarding DOD's point about potential benefits for decision making, we continue to believe that having information on total funding to support SOF would help officials determine whether needs are realistic and feasible within identified budgetary constraints. More complete information on the total funding necessary to support SOF would also enable decision makers to more effectively identify and assess justification materials for future funding needs or weigh priorities and assess budget trade-offs within anticipated declining resources.

DOD partially concurred with our second recommendation that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in consultation with SOCOM and the military services, evaluate whether opportunities exist for certain types

of activities traditionally conducted by SOF to be transferred to or shared with conventional forces. DOD stated that it believes that the current Global Force Management process appropriately balances assignments of missions and requirements between SOF and conventional forces. DOD further stated that it would consider any changes to the current decision process that could improve allocation of missions and requirements between SOF and conventional forces as part of the department's ongoing review of the Global Force Management process. DOD's decision to evaluate the current decision process on the allocation of missions and requirements between SOF and conventional forces is a positive step. As we stated in this report, conventional forces have been expanding their capabilities to meet the demand for missions that have traditionally been given to SOF, but since a 2003 review, the department has not conducted a formal assessment of whether some activities being conducted by SOF could be conducted by conventional forces. Furthermore, as we stated in our report, officials expressed concern about whether it was appropriate to continue to deploy SOF at such high rates given that some operational needs assigned through the current force allocation process could be met with conventional forces.

DOD partially concurred with our third recommendation that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in consultation with SOCOM and the military services, revise the validation criteria outlined in Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3130.06A to include a requirement that the Joint Staff consider whether conventional forces could serve as an appropriate alternative to meet requests for SOF before validating combatant commander requests. DOD stated that it believes that the current Global Force Management validation process considers the appropriate allocation of missions and requirements between SOF and conventional forces. DOD further stated that the Joint Staff is currently reviewing the Global Force Management process for improvements and will consider revising validation procedures outlined in the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3130.06A, as necessary, to ensure that missions and requirements are appropriately assigned to SOF and conventional forces. We continue to believe that DOD should adjust the validation criteria outlined in DOD guidance to include a requirement that the Joint Staff consider whether conventional forces could serve as an appropriate alternative for SOF. Our report recognizes that DOD's Global Force Management validation process is intended to consider the appropriate allocation of missions and requirements between SOF and conventional forces. However, as we noted in our report, the process currently provides validation criteria that focus primarily on administrative matters related to force requests. The criteria do not include a requirement for the

Joint Staff to determine whether the tasking of SOF is the most appropriate means to address combatant commanders' requirements. Without such an explicit validation step, DOD may miss opportunities to take advantage of conventional forces with SOF-like skills while lessening some SOF deployments.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Defense, the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, and the Secretaries of the military departments. In addition, this report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-3489 or pendletonj@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix IX.



John Pendleton, Director
Defense Capabilities and Management

List of Committees

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman
The Honorable Pete Visclosky
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

We conducted this work in response to a provision in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, section 1086, to review organization, capabilities, structure, and oversight of special operations forces (SOF).¹ This report (1) examines trends since fiscal year 2001 in authorized positions for special operations military personnel and how special operations force levels have compared with the military services' total force levels, (2) evaluates the extent to which the Department of Defense (DOD) has determined the total costs to support SOF, and (3) examines the extent to which DOD has taken steps to manage the pace of SOF deployments.

To conduct this work and address our objectives, we identified sources of information within DOD that would provide data on the resources devoted to U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) and its corresponding service component commands—U.S. Army Special Operations Command, U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, and U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command.

To examine the trends in special operations military personnel since fiscal year 2001 and how force levels have compared with the military services' total force levels, we obtained and analyzed available data on authorized military and civilian positions from SOCOM and each of its service component commands from fiscal year 2001 through 2014. We focused our review on authorized positions, as these reflect the approved, funded manpower requirements at each of the service component commands. We assessed the reliability of the data by interviewing DOD officials, incorporating data-reliability questions into our data-collection instruments, and comparing the multiple data sets received from SOCOM and its service component commands against each other to ensure that there was consistency in the data provided. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes of describing the trends in authorized special operations positions. We further obtained and reviewed data and documentation provided by SOCOM's service component commands to determine the composition of SOF for each respective service. To determine how special operations force levels compared with the military services' total force levels, we used the active and reserve component authorized end strength force-level data from the

¹Pub. L. No. 113-66, §1086 (2013).

National Defense Authorization Acts for fiscal years 2001 through 2014 and compared these overall force levels with the number of active and reserve component authorized SOF positions for fiscal years 2001 through 2014. We also reviewed documents, including DOD's Quadrennial Defense Review reports and briefings on force structure changes and discussed the data with SOCOM and service officials to understand the reasons for the trends.

To evaluate the extent to which DOD has determine the total funding to support SOF, we obtained and reviewed documentation on special operations–specific funding provided to SOCOM for necessary SOF-unique capabilities and items.² We obtained data and described trends in obligations for SOCOM for fiscal years 2001 through 2014 for base and supplemental funding.³ We further provided an analysis of funding trends in base and supplemental obligations for SOCOM's service component commands, but since historical data were unavailable in some cases, we limited our analysis of trends for the service component commands to fiscal years 2005 through 2014. Unless otherwise noted, we reported all costs in this report in constant fiscal year 2014 dollars.⁴ To assess the reliability of the data, we interviewed officials from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) and SOCOM and incorporated data-reliability questions into our data-collection instruments. We also compared the multiple data sets received from SOCOM and its service component commands against each other to ensure that there was consistency in the data provided. We determined the data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes of describing trends in funding for SOF. We further interviewed officials from SOCOM and the military services and obtained available information to determine other categories

²Special operations–specific funding does not include the costs associated with military personnel basic pay and allowances and other military personnel costs. It does include obligations provided for DOD's supplemental funding to include overseas contingency operations.

³Supplemental appropriations laws are a tool available to policymakers to address needs that arise after annual appropriations have been enacted. Supplemental appropriations provide additional budget authority for government activities for the fiscal year already in progress, over and above any funding provided in regular appropriations laws, continuing resolutions, or omnibus appropriations. See GAO, *Supplemental Appropriations: Opportunities Exist to Increase Transparency and Provide Additional Controls*, [GAO-08-314](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 31, 2008).

⁴In this report, we adjusted costs for inflation using the deflator for the fiscal year 2014 chain-weighted gross domestic product price index.

of funding provided to support SOF in addition to SOCOM's special operations-specific appropriations. We obtained documentation and interviewed officials from SOCOM to determine the methodology the command used to identify service-provided costs to support SOF. We also reviewed approaches used by DOD for documenting and reporting SOF costs in light of accounting standards and guidance that outlines the need to have information on the full cost of federal programs and a high level of knowledge to guide decision-making efforts.⁵

To evaluate the extent to which DOD has taken steps to manage the pace of SOF deployments, we obtained and reviewed data from SOCOM on average weekly SOF deployments. Using available data maintained by SOCOM, we calculated average weekly SOF deployments and the distribution of SOF deployed in support of operational requirements for fiscal years 2006 through 2014. We further calculated data on the percentage of SOF personnel deployed in support of the geographic combatant commands for fiscal years 2006, 2010, and 2014 to illustrate the global distribution of forces. To present trends in SOF deployments for fiscal years 2001 through 2005, we relied on data presented in our prior work.⁶ To assess the reliability of the data, we reviewed available data for inconsistencies and discussed the inconsistencies with SOCOM officials, analyzed relevant deployment and operational demand policy memoranda, and incorporated data-reliability questions into our data-collection instruments. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes of showing general trends in SOF deployments, though deployments may be somewhat undercounted because some service component commands do not consistently report data for the number of personnel deployed in support of training within the continental United States. In addition, we discussed the effect of past and planned deployments with officials from SOCOM and its service component commands in light of special operations deployment policies and

⁵GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#) (Washington, D.C.: November 1999) and Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget, *Statement of Federal Financial Accounting Standards Number 4* (July 31, 1995).

⁶GAO, *Special Operations Forces: Several Human Capital Challenges Must Be Addressed to Meet Expanded Role*, [GAO-06-812](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 31, 2006).

documentation that describe goals for SOF deployments.⁷ We obtained and reviewed guidance on DOD's process for filling geographic combatant commander force needs, such as related Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff manuals and joint doctrine.⁸ We also reviewed DOD's SOF mission analysis conducted in 2003 to determine the extent to which the department had considered options for sharing the burden of SOF deployments with conventional forces. We interviewed military service and SOCOM officials to identify opportunities for potentially alleviating some of the demand on SOF with conventional forces, such as the establishment of the Army's regionally aligned force concept. We then examined the Joint Staff's role in considering these alternatives in the process of sourcing department-wide force needs.

We contacted officials, and when appropriate obtained documentation, from the organizations listed below:

Department of Defense:

- Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation
- Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)
- Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict)
- Joint Staff

Special Operations:

- U.S. Special Operations Command
- U.S. Army Special Operations Command
- U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command
- U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command
- U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command

⁷U.S. Special Operations Command, *Policy Memorandum 14-07: Policy on Personnel Tempo Tracking and Thresholds* (May 28, 2014) and U.S. Special Operations Command, *Policy Memorandum 14-08: Force Rotation Duration and Deployment-to-Dwell/Mobilization-to-Dwell Ratio Thresholds* (May 28, 2014).

⁸Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3130.06A, *Global Force Management Allocation Policies and Procedures* (Mar. 28, 2014) and Joint Publication 3-05, *Special Operations* (July 16, 2014).

Geographic Combatant Commands:

- U.S. Africa Command
- U.S. Central Command
- U.S. European Command
- U.S. Northern Command
- U.S. Pacific Command
- U.S. Southern Command

Theater Special Operations Commands:

- Special Operations Command Africa
- Special Operations Command Central
- Special Operations Command Europe
- Special Operations Command North
- Special Operations Command Pacific
- Special Operations Command South

Military Services:

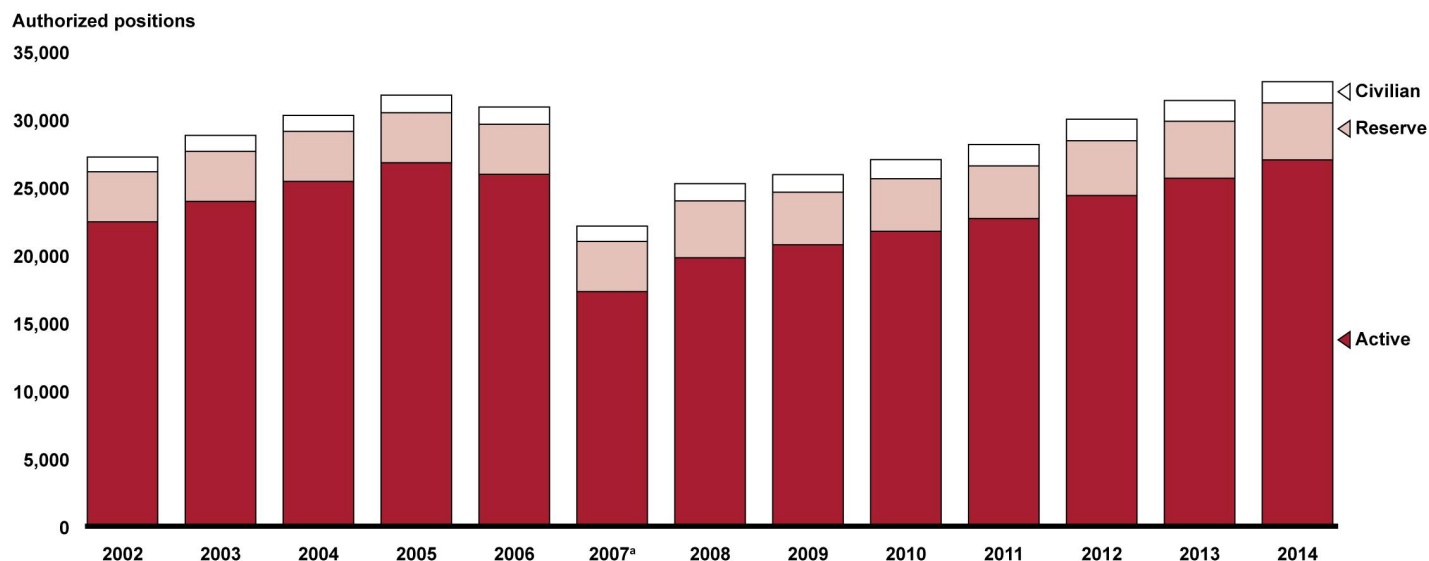
- Headquarters, Department of the Army
- Office of the Chief of Naval Operations
- Headquarters, Marine Corps
- Headquarters Air Force

We conducted this performance audit from March 2014 to July 2015 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix II: Resources at U.S. Army Special Operations Command

Figure 8: U.S. Army Special Operations Command's Organizational Structure (Interactive graphic. Refer to Appendix VIII for accessible data.)

Figure 9: Authorized U.S. Army Special Operations Command Active, Reserve, and Civilian Positions, Fiscal Years 2002 through 2014



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Army Special Operations Command data. | GAO-15-571

Note: We limited our analysis of authorized military and civilian positions to fiscal years 2002 through 2014 because data were not available prior to fiscal year 2002.

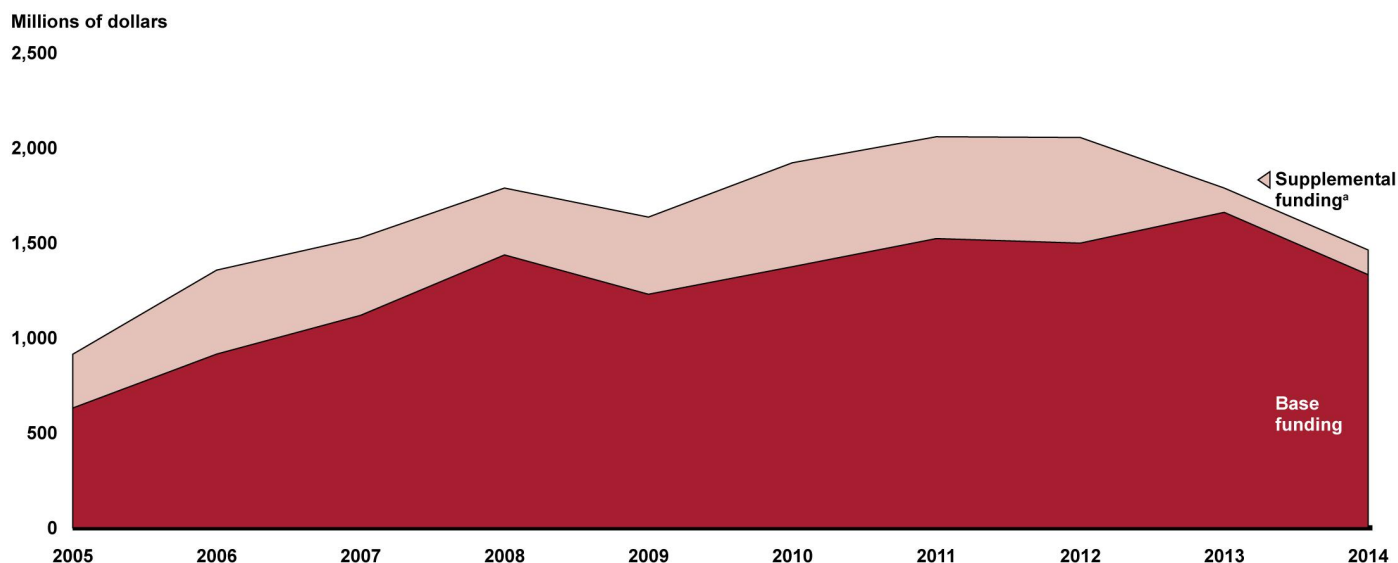
Note A: In 2007, the U.S. Army Civil Affairs/ Psychological Operations Unit was transferred from U.S. Army Special Operations Command to the U.S. Army Reserve Command. This resulted in a decrease of approximately 8,700 total positions at U.S. Army Special Operations Command.

Figure 10: Fiscal Year 2014 Authorized Military and Civilian Positions by U.S. Army Special Operations Command Organization

Organization	Military	Civilian	Total
U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Headquarters	777	476	1,253
1st Special Forces Command	22,845	126	22,971
U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School	1,891	534	2,425
75th Ranger Regiment	3,566	57	3,623
U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command	3,473	60	3,533
Total	32,552	1,253	33,805

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Army Special Operations Command data. | GAO-15-571

Figure 11: Special Operations–Specific Funding for U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Fiscal Years 2005 through 2014



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

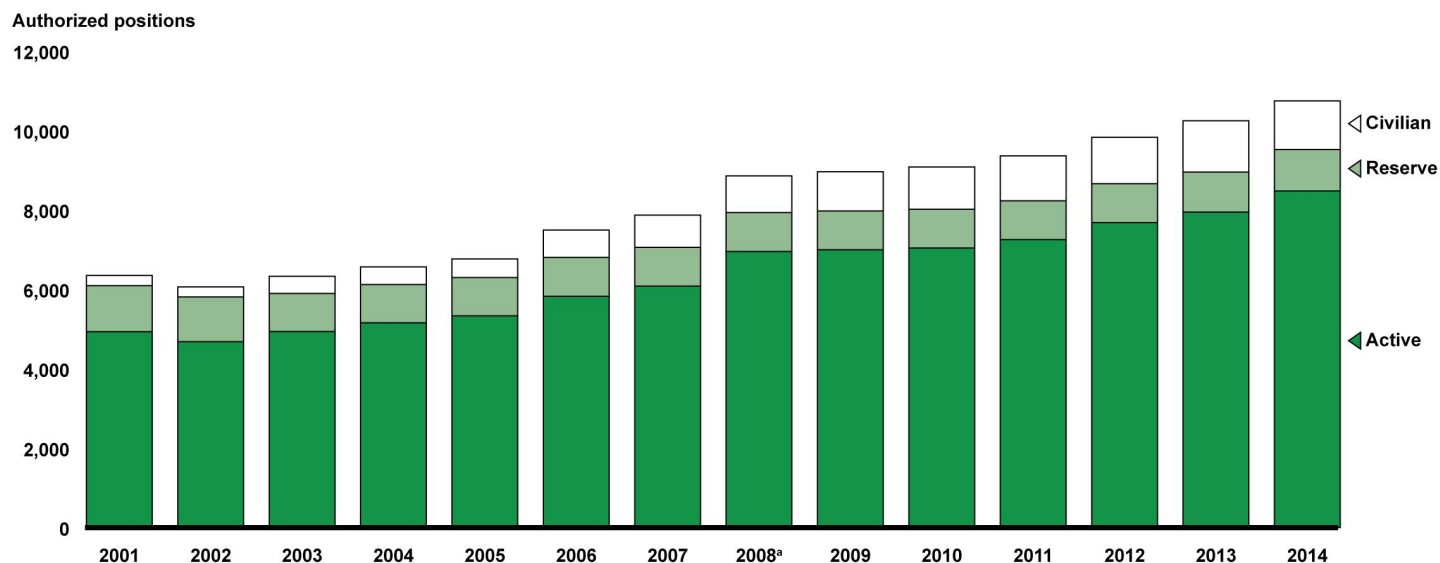
Note: Funding is in constant fiscal year 2014 dollars. We adjusted costs for inflation using the deflator for the fiscal year 2014 chain-weighted gross domestic product price index. We limited our analysis of special operations–specific funding to fiscal years 2005 through 2014 because service component data for supplemental funding were not available prior to fiscal year 2005.

Note A: Funding for overseas contingency operations, including those conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan, and for certain other expenses has been provided through supplemental appropriations. Beginning in fiscal year 2009, the administration has referred to funds for ongoing contingency operations as overseas contingency operations funds instead of Global War on Terrorism funds.

Appendix III: Resources at U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command

Figure 12: U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command's Organizational Structure (Interactive graphic. Refer to Appendix VIII for accessible data.)

Figure 13: Authorized U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command Active, Reserve, and Civilian Positions, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

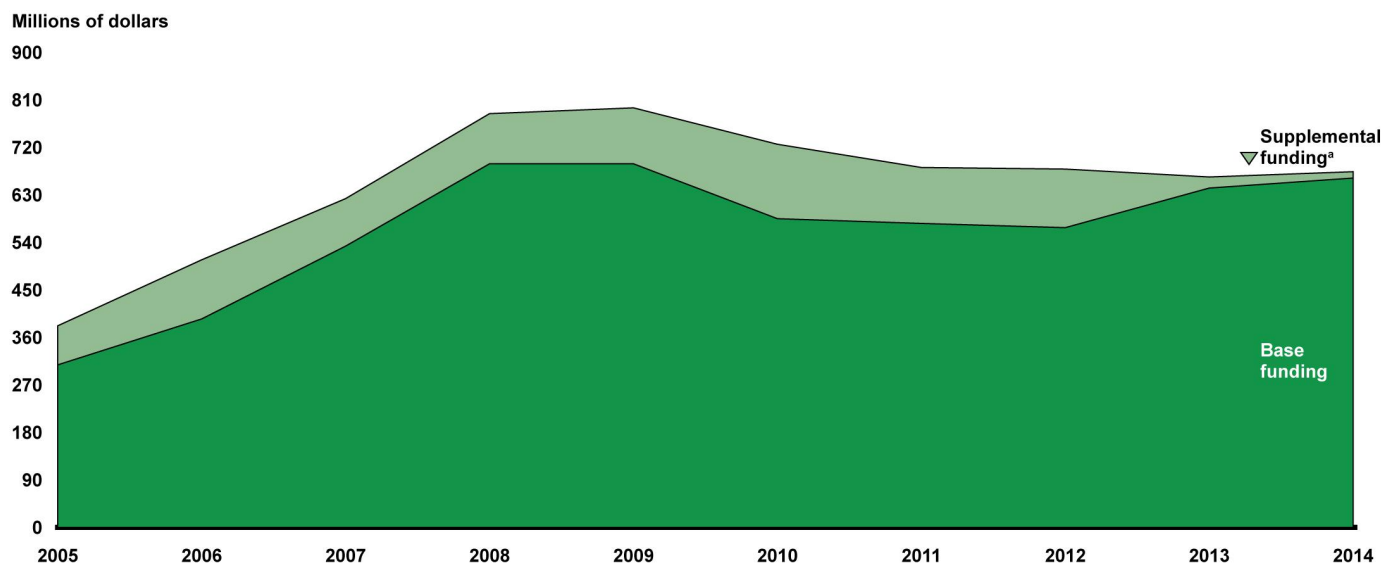
Note A: During the fiscal year 2008 budget deliberations, U. S. Naval Special Warfare Command received approximately 1,100 additional authorized positions, which allowed for certain increases in the Naval Special Warfare Development Group, as well as increases in unmanned aerial vehicle operators and headquarters positions, among others.

Figure 14: Fiscal Year 2014 Authorized Military and Civilian Positions by U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command Organization

Organization	Military	Civilian	Total
U. S. Naval Special Warfare Command, Headquarters	212	221	433
Group One	1,746	106	1,852
Group Two	1,719	96	1,815
Group Three	620	47	667
Group Four	1,084	98	1,182
Group Ten	728	43	771
Group Eleven	956	3	959
Development Group	1,342	445	1,787
U. S. Naval Special Warfare Center	578	122	700
Total	8,985	1,181	10,166

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

Figure 15: Special Operations–Specific Funding for U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command, Fiscal Years 2005 through 2014



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

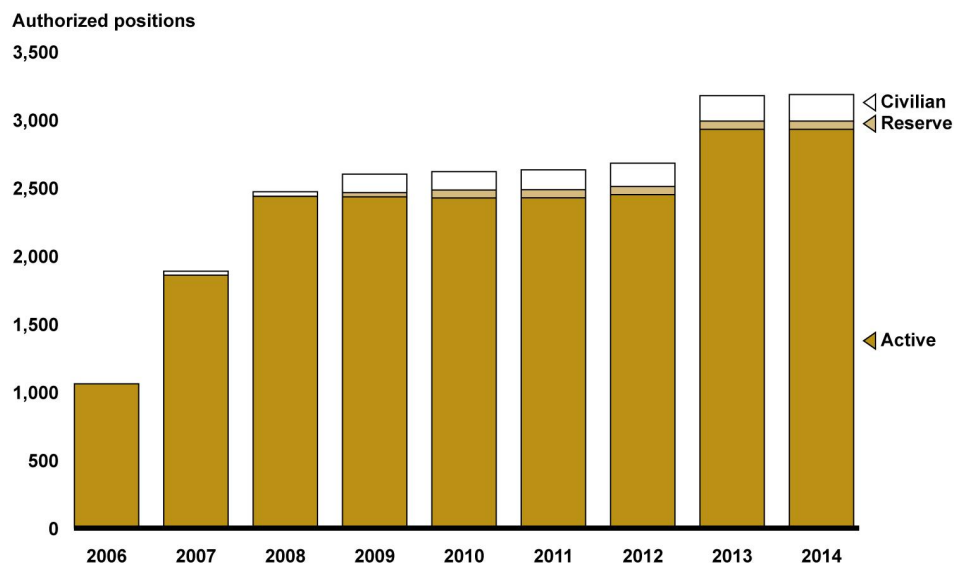
Note: Funding is in constant fiscal year 2014 dollars. We adjusted costs for inflation using the deflator for the fiscal year 2014 chain-weighted gross domestic product price index. We limited our analysis of special operations–specific funding to fiscal years 2005 through 2014 because service component data for supplemental funding were not available prior to fiscal year 2005.

Note A: Funding for overseas contingency operations, including those conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan, and for certain other expenses has been provided through supplemental appropriations. Beginning in fiscal year 2009, the administration has referred to funds for ongoing contingency operations as overseas contingency operations funds instead of Global War on Terrorism funds.

Appendix IV: Resources at U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command

Figure 16: U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command's Organizational Structure (Interactive graphic. Refer to Appendix VIII for accessible data.)

Figure 17: Authorized U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command Active, Reserve, and Civilian Positions, Fiscal Years 2006 through 2014



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

Note: We limited our analysis to fiscal years 2006 through 2014 because the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command was established in 2006. These numbers include Army and Navy personnel temporarily assigned to the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command. The command's total force structure growth in fiscal year 2013 was due to the elimination of a service directed force cap for the active duty Marine Corps.

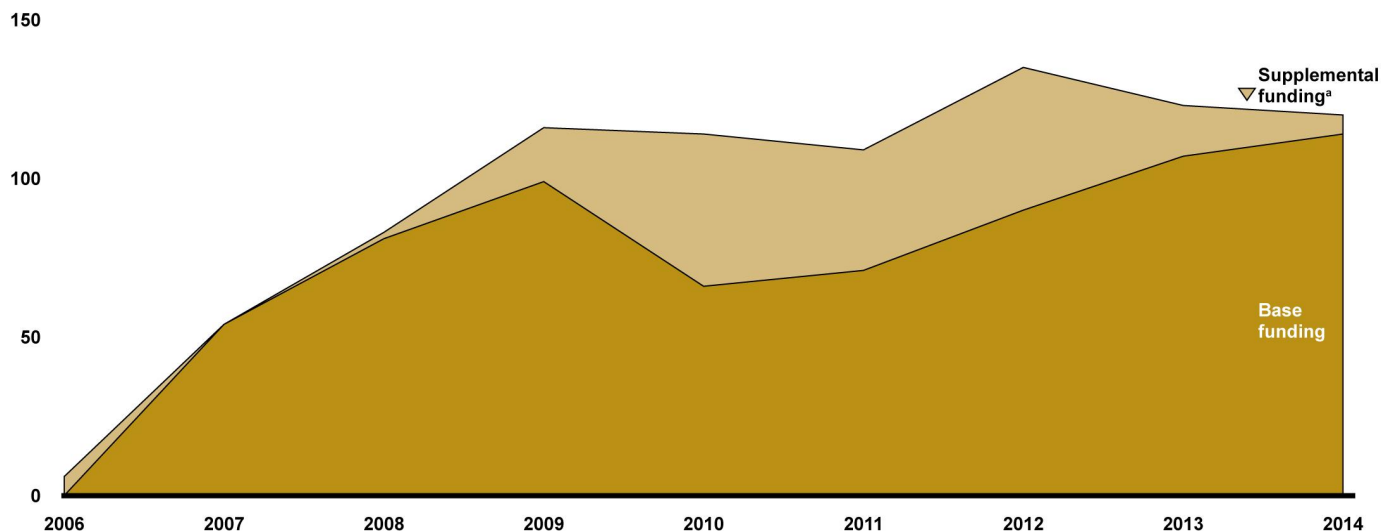
Figure 18: Fiscal Year 2014 Authorized Military and Civilian Positions by U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command Organization

Organization	Military	Civilian	Total
U. S. Marine Corps Special Operations Command, Headquarters	256	106	362
U. S. Marine Special Operations School	305	53	358
U. S. Marine Special Operations Regiment	1,475	37	1,512
U. S. Marine Special Operations Support Group	958	5	963
Total	2,994	201	3,195

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

Figure 19: Special Operations–Specific Funding for U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, Fiscal Years 2006 through 2014

Millions of dollars



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

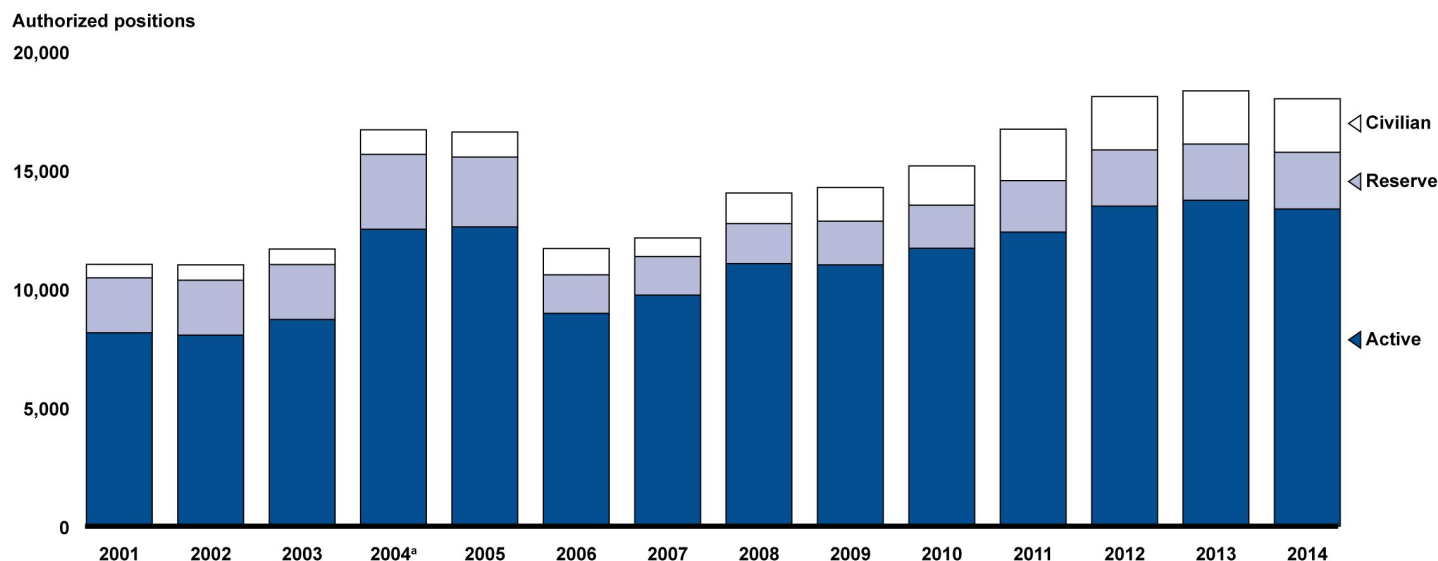
Note: Funding is in constant fiscal year 2014 dollars. We adjusted costs for inflation using the deflator for the fiscal year 2014 chain-weighted gross domestic product price index. U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command was established in 2006. We limited our analysis of special operations–specific funding to fiscal years 2006 through 2014 because data were not available prior to the command's establishment in fiscal year 2006. These numbers include Army and Navy personnel temporarily assigned to the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command.

Note A: Funding for overseas contingency operations, including those conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan, and for certain other expenses has been provided through supplemental appropriations. Beginning in fiscal year 2009, the administration has referred to funds for ongoing contingency operations as overseas contingency operations funds instead of Global War on Terrorism funds.

Appendix V: Resources at U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command

Figure 20: U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command's Organizational Structure (Interactive graphic. Refer to Appendix VIII for accessible data.)

Figure 21: Authorized U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command Active, Reserve, and Civilian Positions, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

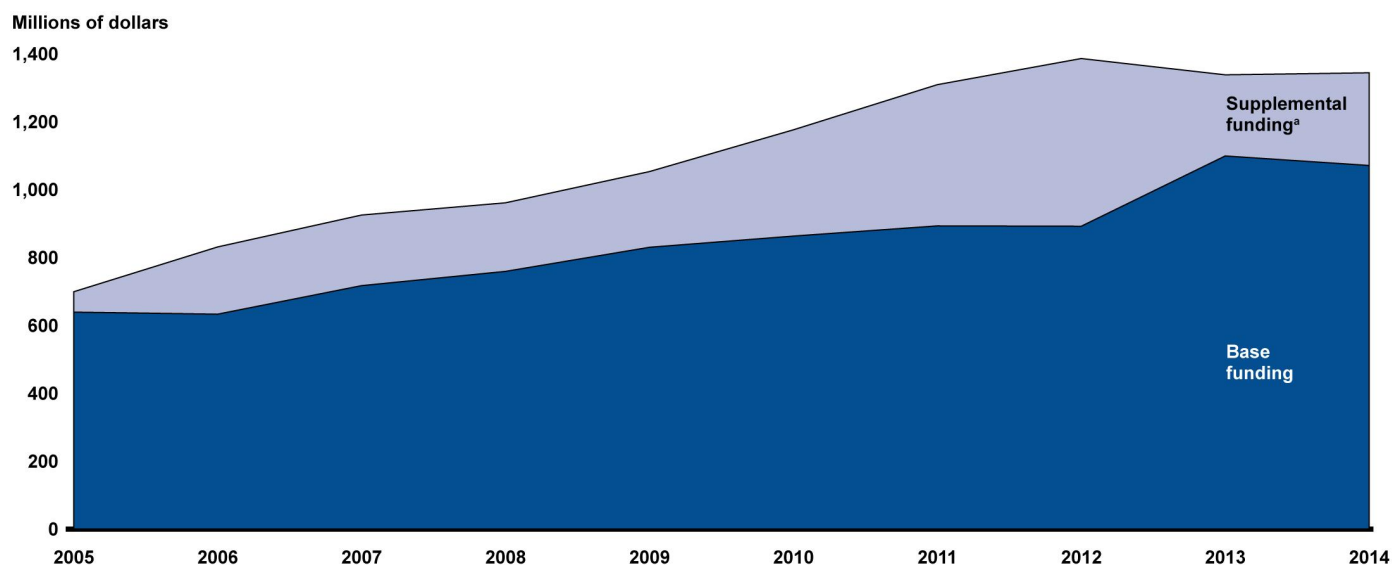
Note A: The increase in 2004 can largely be attributed to the transfer of Moody Air Force Base and the Air Force Search and Rescue mission from Headquarters, Air Combat Command, to Air Force Special Operations Command in October 2003. The transfer resulted in approximately 3,500 new authorized military and civilian positions. In fiscal year 2006, Moody Air Force Base and the Air Force Search and Rescue mission transferred back to the Air Combat Command, resulting in a reduction at Air Force Special Operations Command.

Figure 22: Fiscal Year 2014 Authorized Military and Civilian Positions by U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command Organization

Organization	Military	Civilian	Total
U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command, Headquarters	500	401	901
1st Special Operations Wing	4,674	520	5,194
24th Special Operations Wing	1,451	129	1,580
27th Special Operations Wing	4,430	423	4,853
352nd Special Operations Group	959	13	972
353rd Special Operations Group	709	12	721
U.S. Air Force Special Operations Air Warfare Center	610	161	771
919th Special Operations Wing	1,314	343	1,657
193rd Special Operations Wing	1,077	241	1,318
Total	15,724	2,243	17,967

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

Figure 23: Special Operations–Specific Funding for U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command, Fiscal Years 2005 through 2014



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

Note: Funding is in constant fiscal year 2014 dollars. We adjusted costs for inflation using the deflator for the fiscal year 2014 chain-weighted gross domestic product price index. We limited our analysis of special operations–specific funding to fiscal years 2005 through 2014 because service component data for supplemental funding were not available prior to fiscal year 2005.

Note A: Funding for overseas contingency operations, including those conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan, and for certain other expenses has been provided through supplemental appropriations. Beginning in fiscal year 2009, the administration has referred to funds for ongoing contingency operations as overseas contingency operations funds instead of Global War on Terrorism funds.

Appendix VI: Special Operations—Specific Funding in Nominal Dollars

Table 2: Special Operations—Specific Funding for U.S. Special Operations Command’s Service Component Commands, Fiscal Years 2005 through 2014

Service component command	Fiscal year 2005	Fiscal year 2006	Fiscal year 2007	Fiscal year 2008	Fiscal year 2009	Fiscal year 2010	Fiscal year 2011	Fiscal year 2012	Fiscal year 2013	Fiscal year 2014
U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command—Base Budget	\$539,684,000	\$551,690,000	\$642,320,630	\$693,469,000	\$767,719,000	\$804,934,200	\$849,603,860	\$863,988,500	\$1,081,343,400	\$1,071,216,800
U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command—Supplemental Funding	50,890,000	172,392,000	186,464,000	184,719,000	206,182,600	292,123,000	395,964,840	478,461,000	235,647,000	273,289,000
U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command—Total Funding	\$590,574,000	\$724,082,000	\$828,784,630	\$878,188,000	\$973,901,600	\$1,097,057,200	\$1,245,568,700	\$1,342,449,500	\$1,316,990,400	\$1,344,505,800
U.S. Army Special Operations Command—Base Budget	531,747,307	796,785,118	1,000,795,450	1,312,410,256	1,135,992,617	1,281,778,540	1,448,678,578	1,451,686,532	1,634,444,326	1,331,804,118
U.S. Army Special Operations Command—Supplemental Funding	238,785,000	385,213,000	365,237,000	321,490,000	375,523,600	510,615,500	509,973,260	538,999,518	126,352,800	130,381,100

Appendix VI: Special Operations—Specific Funding in Nominal Dollars

Service component command	Fiscal year 2005	Fiscal year 2006	Fiscal year 2007	Fiscal year 2008	Fiscal year 2009	Fiscal year 2010	Fiscal year 2011	Fiscal year 2012	Fiscal year 2013	Fiscal year 2014
U.S. Army Special Operations Command— Total Funding	\$770,532,307	\$1,181,998,118	\$1,366,032,450	\$1,633,900,256	\$1,511,516,217	\$1,792,394,040	\$1,958,651,838	\$1,990,686,050	\$1,760,797,126	\$1,462,185,218
U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command— Base Budget	260,353,149	344,148,791	477,515,012	630,117,628	541,164,908	537,321,764	540,878,258	622,969,587	651,991,529	575,755,811
U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command— Supplemental Funding	62,785,000	97,570,000	80,984,000	87,028,000	98,298,134	131,137,000	101,053,400	107,966,000	20,233,000	12,388,000
U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command— Total Funding	\$323,138,149	\$441,718,791	\$558,499,012	\$717,145,628	\$639,463,042	\$668,458,764	\$641,931,658	\$730,935,587	\$672,224,529	\$588,143,811
U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations— Base Budget	-	224,000	48,168,403	73,769,684	91,092,800	61,560,185	67,787,300	87,633,596	105,438,000	114,399,800

Appendix VI: Special Operations—Specific Funding in Nominal Dollars

Service component command	Fiscal year 2005	Fiscal year 2006	Fiscal year 2007	Fiscal year 2008	Fiscal year 2009	Fiscal year 2010	Fiscal year 2011	Fiscal year 2012	Fiscal year 2013	Fiscal year 2014
U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations— Supplemental Funding	-	5,380,000	-	1,620,000	15,520,000	44,416,000	36,632,000	43,775,500	15,770,000	6,183,000
U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations— Total Funding	\$ -	\$5,604,000	\$ 48,168,403	\$ 75,389,684	\$ 106,612,800	\$ 105,976,185	\$ 104,419,300	\$ 131,409,096	\$ 121,208,000	\$ 120,582,800
U.S. Special Operations Command's service component commands' totals	\$1,684,244,455	\$2,353,402,910	\$2,801,484,495	\$3,304,623,568	\$3,231,493,659	\$3,663,886,189	\$3,950,571,496	\$4,195,480,233	\$3,871,220,055	\$3,515,417,629

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) data. | GAO-15-571

Note: Data are in nominal dollars.

Table 3: Special Operations Command Funding, Fiscal Years (FY) 2001 through 2014 (Dollars in millions)

	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
Base budget	\$2,269	\$2,384	\$3,157	\$4,611	\$4,204	\$4,341	\$6,219	\$6,069	\$5,994	\$5,994	\$5,765	\$6,871	\$8,003	\$7,487
Supplemental funding	90	142	1,068	136	1,012	1,631	2,452	2,438	2,600	3,108	3,607	3,608	2,538	2,277
Total	\$2,359	\$2,526	\$4,225	\$4,747	\$5,216	\$5,972	\$8,671	\$8,508	\$8,594	\$9,102	\$9,372	\$10,479	\$10,541	\$9,764

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) data. | GAO-15-571

Note: Data are in nominal dollars.

Appendix VII: U.S. Special Operations Command's Service Component Commands' Organizational Structure Descriptions

This appendix contains information in noninteractive format presented in the organizational charts in appendixes II, III, IV, and V.

Table 4: Organizational Descriptions of U.S. Special Operations Command's Service Component Commands

	Service component command	Organizational descriptions
U.S. Army Special Operations Command	U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Headquarters	Provides fully prepared U.S. Army special operations forces to conduct worldwide special operations in support of geographic combatant commanders, American ambassadors, and other agencies as directed.
	1st Special Forces Command	Consolidates all special warfare-focused units under one unified command, including: the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade, which provides long-term stability operations; the Military Information Support Operations Command, which synchronizes plans and conveys information to foreign audiences; the 528th Sustainment Brigade, which provides logistical, medical, and signal support; and the U.S. Army Special Forces Command (Airborne), which contains the Special Forces Green Berets and Operational Detachment-Alpha..
	U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command	Organizes, trains, resources, and equips units to provide responsive, special operations aviation support to special operations forces.
	75th Ranger Regiment	Plans and conducts joint special operations in support of U.S. policy and objectives and contains light infantry units specializing in a range of missions, including direct action and personnel recovery.
	U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School	Assesses, selects, and trains U.S. Army civil affairs, military information support operations, and special forces, and is responsible for all matters pertaining to doctrine, force development, and individual and collective training.
U. S. Naval Special Warfare Command	U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command, Headquarters	Provides fully prepared U.S. Naval Special Warfare forces for operations and activities abroad in support of combatant commander and U.S. national interests.
	Group One	Contains active duty Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) Teams 1, 3, 5, and 7. Personnel are assigned one or more specialties including, but not limited to, intelligence, diving, and communications. Additionally, each team contains specialists trained as snipers, advanced special operations technicians, and unmanned aerial systems operators.
	Group Two	Contains active duty SEAL Teams 4, 8, and 10. Personnel are assigned one or more specialties including, but not limited to, intelligence, diving, and communications. Additionally, each team contains specialists trained as snipers, advanced special operations technicians, and unmanned aerial systems operators.
	Group Three	Contains the undersea capability, which includes the SEAL delivery vehicles and dry deck shelters. Teams in this group conduct clandestine reconnaissance, direct action, and passenger delivery missions in maritime environments.
	Group Four	Contains Special Boat Teams 12, 20, and 22 and the U.S. Naval Small Craft Instructional Technical and Training School. Teams conduct maritime special operations, such as over-the-beach and other insertion or extraction of special operations forces.
	Group Ten	Contains three subordinate units, two support activities, and a mission support center and coordinates the unmanned aerial systems and intelligence activities in support of operational units.
	Group Eleven	Contains Reserve SEAL Teams 17 and 18 and deploys SEAL platoons, special boat detachments, and expeditionary support elements.

**Appendix VII: U.S. Special Operations
Command's Service Component Commands'
Organizational Structure Descriptions**

	Development Group	Contains the subordinate tactical development and evaluation teams. The group develops special operations requirements and techniques and ensures the interoperability and equipment standardization within U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command.
	U.S. Naval Special Warfare Center	Responsible for numerous training courses, the largest being the SEAL and special warfare combatant-craft crewman qualification training courses.
U. S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command	U. S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, Headquarters	Provides task-organized U.S. Marine Corps special operations forces worldwide to accomplish missions assigned by the U.S. Special Operations Command commander or geographic combatant commanders.
	U. S. Marine Special Operations School	Assesses, selects, and trains personnel for assignment as special operations forces; provides basic and advanced special operations skills training for special operations forces; and validates tactics, techniques, and procedures to train basic knowledge and develop advanced special operations skills.
	U. S. Marine Special Operations Regiment	Trains, sustains, and maintains combat readiness for its three subordinate Marine Special Operations Battalions and deploys Marine Corps special operations forces to accomplish special operations missions.
	U. S. Marine Special Operations Support Group	Trains, equips, and deploys specially qualified combat support and combat service support forces to support Marine Corps special operations forces deployed globally.
U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command	U. S. Air Force Special Operations Command, Headquarters	Provides combat-ready U.S. Air Force special operations forces to conduct and support global special operations missions.
	1st Special Operations Wing	Includes the personnel and equipment necessary to operate platforms such as the AC-130U; CV-22; MC-130H; MC-130P; PC-12; and U-28.
	24th Special Operations Wing	Includes the personnel and equipment necessary to operate platforms such as the 720th and 724th Special Tactics Group and serves as U.S. Special Operations Command's tactical air/ground integration force and the U.S. Air Force's special operations ground force.
	27th Special Operations Wing	Includes the personnel and equipment necessary to operate platforms such as the AC-130H; AC-130W; CV-22; MC-130H; MC-130J; C-146; U-28; MQ-1; and MQ-9.
	352nd Special Operations Group	Contains a forward-deployed unit and includes the personnel and equipment necessary to operate platforms such as the CV-22, MC-130J, MC-130H, and MC-130P, as well as special tactics squadrons.
	353rd Special Operations Group	Includes the personnel and equipment necessary to operate platforms such as the MC-130H and the MC-130P, as well as special tactics squadrons.
	U. S. Air Force Special Operations Air Warfare Center	Organizes, trains, educates, and equips forces to conduct special operations missions; executes special operations test and evaluation and lessons learned programs; and develops doctrine, tactics, techniques and procedures for U.S. Air Force special operations forces. The center also contains the 6th Special Operations Squadron, the only dedicated foreign internal defense unit in U.S. Air Force special operations.
	919th Special Operations Wing	Includes the personnel and equipment necessary to operate platforms such as the MQ-1/9 and C-145 aircraft and specializes in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; specialized air mobility; aviation foreign internal defense; and combat aviation advisor duties.
	193rd Special Operations Wing	Includes the personnel and equipment necessary to operate platforms such as the EC-130J Commando Solo and the EC-130J. Primary tasks include information operations/military information support operations and specialized air mobility to support requirements.

Source: GAO summary of Department of Defense (DOD) information. | GAO-15-571

Appendix VIII: Comments from the Department of Defense



SPECIAL OPERATIONS /
LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
2500 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2500

JUL 02 2015

Mr. John H. Pendleton
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Mr. Pendleton,

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report, GAO-15-571, "SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: Opportunities Exist to Improve Transparency of Funding and Assess Potential to Lessen Some Deployments," dated May 22, 2015 (GAO Code 351915).

The Department generally finds the information contained in the draft GAO Report 15-571 to be accurate and partially concurs with the recommendations contained in the report. The Department and the Joint Staff constantly seek to improve management processes that inform and guide decision making on budgets, operational deployments, and allocations of missions and requirements for Special Operations Forces (SOF). The current review of the Global Force Management process is one example of DoD's efforts that will have a positive effect on SOF.

The complete Department of Defense response to the recommendations accompanies this letter.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on this draft report. Please direct any questions or comments you may have to Mr. Jim Coffman, at (703) 697-0331 and james.h.coffman.civ@mail.mil.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of Michael D. Lumpkin, consisting of a stylized 'M' and 'L' followed by a horizontal line.

Michael D. Lumpkin



**GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED MAY 22, 2015
GAO-15-571 (GAO CODE 351915)**

**“SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: OPPORTUNITIES EXIST TO IMPROVE
TRANSPARENCY OF FUNDING AND ASSESS POTENTIAL TO LESSEN SOME
DEPLOYMENTS”**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATION**

RECOMMENDATION 1: In order to improve the budget visibility over the funding for SOF needed to guide departmental and congressional decision making and to better balance operational deployments across the joint force, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), in consultation with the military service secretaries and SOCOM, to develop a mutually acceptable methodology to track and report funding to support SOF, possibly as part of annual budget justification materials.

DoD RESPONSE: DoD partially concurs. The Department budget decisions on Special Operations Forces (SOF) are guided by Defense strategic objectives and informed by fiscal constraints. DoD maintains full visibility of Service funding to support SOF through manpower and acquisition accounts as well as the Major Force Program – 11 account for SOF-unique requirements. Although there are indirect Service costs to support SOF such as base operations support and incentive pays, these costs are Service responsibilities regardless of assignment of personnel to SOF or General Purpose Forces and do not generally influence the Department’s decisions on SOF capabilities or end strength. The Department will review the current methodology to track and report funding to support SOF and consider any changes based on incremental costs incurred by enhanced audit and reporting procedures balanced against potential benefits for decision making on SOF resourcing.

RECOMMENDATION 2: In order to improve the budget visibility over the funding for SOF needed to guide departmental and congressional decision making and to better balance operational deployments across the joint force, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in consultation with SOCOM and the military services, to evaluate whether opportunities exist for certain types of activities traditionally conducted by SOF to be transferred to or shared with conventional forces.

DoD RESPONSE: DoD partially concurs. The Department believes that the current Global Force Management process appropriately balances assignments of missions and requirements between SOF and conventional forces. However, during the current review of the Global Force Management process, the Department and the Joint Staff will consider any changes to the current decision process that could improve allocation of missions and requirements between SOF and conventional forces.

RECOMMENDATION 3: In order to improve the budget visibility over the funding for SOF needed to guide departmental and congressional decision making and to better balance

operational deployments across the joint force, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in consultation with SOCOM and the military services, to revise the validation criteria outlined in Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3130.06A to include a requirement that the Joint Staff consider whether conventional forces could serve as an appropriate alternative to meet requests for SOF before validating combatant commander requests.

DoD RESPONSE: DoD partially concurs. The Department believes that the current Global Force Management validation process considers the appropriate allocation of missions and requirements between SOF and conventional forces. The Joint Staff is currently reviewing the Global Force Management process for improvements and will consider revising validation procedures outlined in Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3130.06A, as necessary, to ensure that missions and requirements are appropriately assigned to SOF and conventional forces.

Appendix IX: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

John Pendleton, (202) 512-3489 or pendletonj@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, key contributors to this report include Matthew Ullengren (Assistant Director), Tracy Barnes, Timothy Carr, Cynthia Grant, Tamiya Lunsford, Geoff Peck, Carol D. Petersen, Christine San, Michael Silver, Amie Lesser, Cheryl Weissman, and Kristy Williams.

Appendix X: Accessible Data

Accessible Text and Data Tables

Data Table for Highlights Figure: Increases in Special Operations Military Positions, Funding, and Personnel Deployed, Fiscal Years 2001 and 2014

	2001	2014	Increase from 2012-2014
Authorized military positions	42,800	62,800	47%
Special operations-specific funding in constant fiscal year 2014 dollars	\$3.1 billion	\$9.8 billion	213%
Average personnel deployed	2,900	7,200	148%

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) and U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) data. | GAO-15-571

Accessible Text for Figure 1: Special Operations Command Organization Structure

United States Special Operations Command:

- Service Component Commands:
 - U.S. Army Special Operations Command;
 - U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command;
 - U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command;
 - U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command.
- Subunified Commands:
 - Joint Special Operations Command;
 - Theater Special Operations Commands:
 - Special Operations Command Africa;
 - Special Operations Command Europe;
 - Special Operations Command North;
 - Special Operations Command South;
 - Special Operations Command Central;
 - Special Operations Command Korea;
 - Special Operations Command Pacific.

Source: Department of Defense (DOD). | GAO-15-571

Data Table for Figure 2: Number of Authorized Special Operations Military Positions and Key Events Driving Changes, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014

Fiscal Year	Authorized special operations military
2001	42,865
2002	43,725
2003	44,232
2004	46,411

Fiscal Year	Authorized special operations military
2005	47,921
2006 [Note A] [Note B]	49,091
2007 [Note B]	53,057
2008	49,247
2009	50,616
2010 [Note C]	52,482
2011	54,571
2012	57,090
2013	60,131
2014 [Note D]	62,818

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) and U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) data. | GAO-15-571

Note: Our analysis is focused on authorized special operations military positions. Some of the key events outlined above also include adjustments to authorized civilian positions, but these are not captured in this figure.

Note A: **2006:** The Quadrennial Defense Review Report announced the Department of Defense's (DOD) plan to increase active-duty Army Special Forces Battalions by one-third and expanded Civil Affairs / Psychological Operations units by 3,700 personnel.

2006: DOD established the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command and added about 2,600 Marines and Navy positions.

Note B: **2006/2007:** DOD transferred the Civil Affairs / Psychological Operations Command from U.S. Army Special Operations Command to the U.S. Army Reserve Command.

Note C: **2010:** The Quadrennial Defense Review Report announced DOD's plan to increase both key enabling assets for special operations forces and the number of organic combat support and combat service support assets available to Army and Navy special operations units.

Note D: **2014:** The department determined that authorized special operations positions would level off generally at fiscal year 2014 levels.

Data Table for Figure 3: Percentage of Total Authorized Special Operations Military Positions by Military Service, Fiscal Year 2014

Military Service	Percentage
U.S. Army Special Operations Command (34,100)	54%
U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command (15,681)	25%
U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command (9,856)	16%
U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (3,181)	5%

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) and U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) data. | GAO-15-571

Data Table for Figure 4: Authorized Special Operations Military Positions as a Percentage of Total Military Positions, by Service, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014 (Percentage end strength)

Fiscal year	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force
2001	2.5	1.4	N/A	2

Fiscal year	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force
2002	2.6	1.4	N/A	1.9
2003	2.6	1.3	N/A	2
2004	2.8	1.4	N/A	2
2005	2.8	1.4	N/A	2.1
2006	2.9	1.6	N/A	2.2
2007	3	1.8	0.7	2.4
2008	2.4	2.2	0.9	2.5
2009	2.5	2.2	1	2.5
2010	2.5	2.2	1	2.6
2011	2.6	2.2	1	2.7
2012	2.7	2.3	1	2.9
2013	2.9	2.5	1.3	3
2014	3.2	2.6	1.4	3.1

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) and U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) data. | GAO-15-571

Note: U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command was not established until 2006.

Data Table for Figure 5: Special Operations–Specific Funding for Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014, in Constant Fiscal Year 2014 Dollars (Millions of dollars)

Fiscal year	Base budget	Supplemental funding
2001	2,942	117
2002	3,042	181
2003	3,952	1,338
2004	5,632	166
2005	4,978	1,199
2006	4,979	1,871
2007	6,944	2,738
2008	6,641	2,668
2009	6,483	2,812
2010	6,426	3,331
2011	6,058	3,790
2012	7,091	3,724
2013	8,131	2,578
2014	7,487	2,277

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) and Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) data. | GAO-15-571

Note: See Appendix VI for special operations–specific funding in nominal dollars.

Data Table for Figure 6: Average Weekly Number of Special Operations Forces Deployed, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014

Fiscal year	Personnel
2001	2,874
2002	5,062
2003	7,806
2004	6,565
2005	6,591
2006	7,184
2007	6,436
2008	7,428
2009	8,307
2010	8,710
2011	8,604
2012	7,983
2013	8,161
2014	7,201

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) data. | GAO-15-571

Data Table for Figure 7: Average Number of Special Operations Forces Personnel Deployed in Support of the Geographic Combatant Commands, Fiscal Years 2006, 2010, and 2014

Special Operations Forces	2006	2010	2014
U.S. Africa Command	1%	3%	10%
U.S. Central Command	85%	81%	69%
U.S. European Command	3%	3%	6%
U.S. Northern Command	1%	0%	1%
U.S. Pacific Command	7%	9%	10%
U.S. Southern Command	3%	3%	4%

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) data. | GAO-15-571

Data Table for Figure 9: Authorized U.S. Army Special Operations Command Active, Reserve, and Civilian Positions, Fiscal Years 2002 through 2014

Fiscal year	Active	Reserve	Civilian
2002	22,425	3,686	1,078
2003	23,930	3,686	1,174
2004	25,393	3,686	1,188
2005	26,779	3,686	1,292

Fiscal year	Active	Reserve	Civilian
2006	25,920	3,686	1,276
2007 [Note A]	17,281	3,698	1,123
2008	19,776	4,182	1,270
2009	20,736	3,869	1,289
2010	21,721	3,869	1,411
2011	22,666	3,869	1,577
2012	24,360	4,034	1,587
2013	25,630	4,196	1,533
2014	26,986	4,196	1,567

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Army Special Operations Command data. | GAO-15-571

Note: We limited our analysis of authorized military and civilian positions to fiscal years 2002 through 2014 because data were not available prior to fiscal year 2002.

Note A: In 2007, the U.S. Army Civil Affairs/ Psychological Operations Unit was transferred from U.S. Army Special Operations Command to the U.S. Army Reserve Command. This resulted in a decrease of approximately 8,700 total positions at U.S. Army Special Operations Command.

Data Table for Figure 10: Fiscal Year 2014 Authorized Military and Civilian Positions by U.S. Army Special Operations Command Organization

Organization	Military	Civilian	Total
U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Headquarters	777	476	1,253
1 st Special Forces Command	22,845	126	22,971
U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School	1,891	534	2,425
75 th Ranger Regiment	3,566	57	3,623
U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command	3,473	60	3,533
Total	32,552	1,253	33,805

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Army Special Operations Command data. | GAO-15-571

Data Table for Figure 11: Special Operations–Specific Funding for U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Fiscal Years 2005 through 2014 (Millions of dollars)

Fiscal year	Base funding	Supplemental funding [Note A]
2005	630	283
2006	914	442
2007	1,118	408
2008	1,436	352
2009	1,229	406
2010	1,374	547
2011	1,522	536
2012	1,498	556

Fiscal year	Base funding	Supplemental funding [Note A]
2013	1,660	128
2014	1,332	130

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

Note: Funding is in constant fiscal year 2014 dollars. We adjusted costs for inflation using the deflator for the fiscal year 2014 chain-weighted gross domestic product price index. We limited our analysis of special operations-specific funding to fiscal years 2005 through 2014 because service component data for supplemental funding were not available prior to fiscal year 2005.

Note A: Funding for overseas contingency operations, including those conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan, and for certain other expenses has been provided through supplemental appropriations. Beginning in fiscal year 2009, the administration has referred to funds for ongoing contingency operations as overseas contingency operations funds instead of Global War on Terrorism funds.

Data Table for Figure 13: Authorized U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command Active, Reserve, and Civilian Positions, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014

Fiscal year	Active	Reserve	Civilian
2001	4,932	1,161	253
2002	4,681	1,125	253
2003	4,936	961	431
2004	5,157	961	447
2005	5,333	961	471
2006	5,825	978	689
2007	6,079	978	809
2008 [Note A]	6,952	978	927
2009	6,995	978	987
2010	7,038	978	1,065
2011	7,251	978	1,129
2012	7,680	978	1,170
2013	7,944	1,009	1,292
2014	8,474	1,045	1,225

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

Note A: During the fiscal year 2008 budget deliberations, U. S. Naval Special Warfare Command received approximately 1,100 additional authorized positions, which allowed for certain increases in the Naval Special Warfare Development Group, as well as increases in unmanned aerial vehicle operators and headquarters positions, among others.

Data Table for Figure 14: Fiscal Year 2014 Authorized Military and Civilian Positions by U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command Organization

Organization	Military	Civilian	Total
U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command, Headquarters	212	221	433
Group One	1,746	106	1,852
Group Two	1,719	96	1,815
Group Three	620	47	667
Group Four	1,084	98	1,182
Group Ten	728	43	771
Group Eleven	956	3	959
Development Group	1,342	445	1,787
U.S. Naval Special Warfare Center	578	122	700
Total	8,985	1,181	10,166

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

Data Table for Figure 15: Special Operations–Specific Funding for U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command, Fiscal Years 2005 through 2014

Fiscal year	Base funding	Supplemental funding [Note A]
2005	308	74
2006	395	112
2007	533	90
2008	689	95
2009	689	106
2010	585	141
2011	576	106
2012	568	111
2013	643	21
2014	662	12

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

Note: Funding is in constant fiscal year 2014 dollars. We adjusted costs for inflation using the deflator for the fiscal year 2014 chain-weighted gross domestic product price index. We limited our analysis of special operations–specific funding to fiscal years 2005 through 2014 because service component data for supplemental funding were not available prior to fiscal year 2005.

Note A: Funding for overseas contingency operations, including those conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan, and for certain other expenses has been provided through supplemental appropriations. Beginning in fiscal year 2009, the administration has referred to funds for ongoing contingency operations as overseas contingency operations funds instead of Global War on Terrorism funds.

Data Table for Figure 17: Authorized U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command Active, Reserve, and Civilian Positions, Fiscal Years 2006 through 2014

Fiscal year	Active	Reserve	Civilian
2006	1,059	0	1
2007	1,858	0	29
2008	2,436	1	33
2009	2,433	31	135
2010	2,424	59	135
2011	2,426	59	146
2012	2,449	60	171
2013	2,929	60	187
2014	2,929	60	195

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

Note: We limited our analysis to fiscal years 2006 through 2014 because the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command was established in 2006. These numbers include Army and Navy personnel temporarily assigned to the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command. The command's total force structure growth in fiscal year 2013 was due to the elimination of a service directed force cap for the active duty Marine Corps.

Data Table for Figure 18: Fiscal Year 2014 Authorized Military and Civilian Positions by U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command Organization

Organization	Military	Civilian	Total
U.S. Marines Corps Special Operations Command, Headquarters	256	106	362
U.S. Marine Special Operations School	305	53	358
U.S. Marine Special Operations Regiment	1,475	37	1,512
U.S. Marine Special Operations Support Group	958	201	963
Total	2,994	201	3,195

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

Data Table for Figure 19: Special Operations–Specific Funding for U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, Fiscal Years 2006 through 2014 (Millions of dollars)

Fiscal year	Base funding	Supplemental funding [Note A]
2006	0	6
2007	54	0
2008	81	2
2009	99	17
2010	66	48

Fiscal year	Base funding	Supplemental funding [Note A]
2011	71	38
2012	90	45
2013	107	16
2014	114	6

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

Note: Funding is in constant fiscal year 2014 dollars. We adjusted costs for inflation using the deflator for the fiscal year 2014 chain-weighted gross domestic product price index. U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command was established in 2006. We limited our analysis of special operations-specific funding to fiscal years 2006 through 2014 because data were not available prior to the command's establishment in fiscal year 2006. These numbers include Army and Navy personnel temporarily assigned to the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command.

Note A: Funding for overseas contingency operations, including those conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan, and for certain other expenses has been provided through supplemental appropriations. Beginning in fiscal year 2009, the administration has referred to funds for ongoing contingency operations as overseas contingency operations funds instead of Global War on Terrorism funds.

Data Table for Figure 21: Authorized U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command Active, Reserve, and Civilian Positions, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2014

Fiscal year	Active	Reserve	Civilian
2001	8,137	2,317	565
2002	8,039	2,316	647
2003	8,697	2,313	659
2004 [Note A]	12,499	3,154	1,031
2005	12,600	2,942	1,053
2006	8,957	1,622	1,104
2007	9,729	1,624	780
2008	11,051	1,686	1,291
2009	11,002	1,834	1,420
2010	11,701	1,813	1,653
2011	12,378	2,170	2,166
2012	13,474	2,365	2,250
2013	13,718	2,371	2,236
2014	13,351	2,391	2,249

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

Note A: The increase in 2004 can largely be attributed to the transfer of Moody Air Force Base and the Air Force Search and Rescue mission from Headquarters, Air Combat Command, to Air Force Special Operations Command in October 2003. The transfer resulted in approximately 3,500 new authorized military and civilian positions. In fiscal year 2006, Moody Air Force Base and the Air Force Search and Rescue mission transferred back to the Air Combat Command, resulting in a reduction at Air Force Special Operations Command.

Data Table for Figure 22: Fiscal Year 2014 Authorized Military and Civilian Positions by U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command Organization

Organization	Military	Civilian	Total
U.S. Air Force Special Warfare Command, Headquarters	500	401	901
1 st Special Operations Wing	4,674	520	5,194
24 th Special Operations Wing	1,451	129	1,580
27 th Special Operations Wing	4,430	423	4,853
352 nd Special Operations Group	959	13	972
353 rd Special Operations Group	709	12	721
U.S. Air Force Special Operations Air Warfare Center	610	161	771
919 th Special Operations Wing	1,314	343	4,657
193 rd Special Operations Wing	1,077	241	1,318
Total	15,724	2,243	17,967

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

Data Table for Figure 23: Special Operations–Specific Funding for U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command, Fiscal Years 2005 through 2014 (Millions of dollars)

Fiscal year	Base funding	Supplemental funding [Note A]
2005	639	60
2006	633	198
2007	717	208
2008	759	202
2009	830	223
2010	863	313
2011	893	416
2012	892	494
2013	1,099	239
2014	1,071	273

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and component data. | GAO-15-571

Note: Funding is in constant fiscal year 2014 dollars. We adjusted costs for inflation using the deflator for the fiscal year 2014 chain-weighted gross domestic product price index. We limited our analysis of special operations–specific funding to fiscal years 2005 through 2014 because service component data for supplemental funding were not available prior to fiscal year 2005.

Note A: Funding for overseas contingency operations, including those conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan, and for certain other expenses has been provided through supplemental appropriations. Beginning in fiscal year 2009, the administration has referred to funds for ongoing contingency operations as overseas contingency operations funds instead of Global War on Terrorism funds.

Agency Comments

Department of Defense

Page 1

Accessible Text for Appendix VIII: Comments from the Department of Defense

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
2500 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2500**

SPECIAL OPERATIONS / LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT

July 2, 2015

Mr. John H. Pendleton
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Mr. Pendleton,

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report, GAO-15-571, "SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: Opportunities Exist to Improve Transparency of Funding and Assess Potential to Lessen Some Deployments," dated May 22, 2015 (GAO Code 351915).

The Department generally finds the information contained in the draft GAO Report 15- 571 to be accurate and partially concurs with the recommendations contained in the report. The Department and the Joint Staff constantly seek to improve management processes that inform and guide decision making on budgets, operational deployments, and allocations of missions and requirements for Special Operations Forces (SOF). The current review of the Global Force Management process is one example of DoD's efforts that will have a positive effect on SOF.

The complete Department of Defense response to the recommendations accompanies this letter.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on this draft report. Please direct any questions or comments you may have to Mr. Jim Coffman, at (703) 697-0331 and james.h.coffman.civ@mail.mil.

Sincerely,

Signed by
Michael D. Lumpkin

Page 2

GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED MAY 22, 2015 GA0-15-571 (GAO CODE 351915)
"SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: OPPORTUNITIES EXIST TO IMPROVE
TRANSPARENCY OF FUNDING AND ASSESS POTENTIAL TO LESSEN SOME
DEPLOYMENTS"
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION 1: In order to improve the budget visibility over the funding for SOF needed to guide departmental and congressional decision making and to better balance operational deployments across the joint force, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), in consultation with the military service secretaries and SOCOM, to develop a mutually acceptable methodology to track and report funding to support SOF, possibly as part of annual budget justification materials.

DoD RESPONSE: DoD partially concurs. The Department budget decisions on Special Operations Forces (SOF) are guided by Defense strategic objectives and informed by fiscal constraints. DoD maintains full visibility of Service funding to support SOF through manpower and acquisition accounts as well as the Major Force Program - 11 account for SOF-unique requirements. Although there are indirect Service costs to support SOF such as base operations support and incentive pays, these costs are Service responsibilities regardless of assignment of personnel to SOF or General Purpose Forces and do not generally influence the Department's decisions on SOF capabilities or end strength. The Department will review the current methodology to track and report funding to support SOF and consider any changes based on incremental costs incurred by enhanced audit and reporting procedures balanced against potential benefits for decision making on SOF resourcing.

RECOMMENDATION 2: In order to improve the budget visibility over the funding for SOF needed to guide departmental and congressional decision making and to better balance operational deployments across the joint force, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in consultation with SOCOM and the military services, to evaluate whether opportunities exist for certain types of activities traditionally conducted by SOF to be transferred to or shared with conventional forces.

DoD RESPONSE: DoD partially concurs. The Department believes that the current Global Force Management process appropriately balances assignments of missions and requirements between SOF and conventional forces. However, during the current review of the Global Force Management process, the Department and the Joint Staff will consider any changes to the current decision process that could improve allocation of missions and requirements between SOF and conventional forces.

RECOMMENDATION 3: In order to improve the budget visibility over the funding for SOF needed to guide departmental and congressional decision making and to better balance

operational deployments across the joint force, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in consultation with SOCOM and the military services, to revise the validation criteria outlined in Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3130.06A to include a requirement that the Joint Staff consider whether conventional forces could serve as an appropriate alternative to meet requests for SOF before validating combatant commander requests.

DoD RESPONSE: DoD partially concurs. The Department believes that the current Global Force Management validation process considers the appropriate allocation of missions and requirements between SOF and conventional forces. The Joint Staff is currently reviewing the Global Force Management process for improvements and will consider revising validation procedures outlined in Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3130.06A, as necessary, to ensure that missions and requirements are appropriately assigned to SOF and conventional forces.

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