



September 8, 2014

Congressional Committees

Special Operations Forces: DOD’s Report to Congress Generally Addressed the Statutory Requirements but Lacks Detail

U.S. special operations forces (SOF) are specially organized, trained, and equipped to conduct operations in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments. Since 2001, the Department of Defense (DOD) has deployed SOF to conduct a range of military operations, particularly in Afghanistan and Iraq. To meet an increase in operational demands for SOF, DOD has increased funding for U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) as well as SOF force levels from about 45,700 in fiscal year 2001 (including about 43,000 military personnel and about 2,700 civilians) to about 69,500 in fiscal year 2014 (including about 63,000 military personnel and about 6,500 civilians).¹ DOD’s strategic guidance indicates 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 partners, among other things.² DOD has taken steps to adjust some organizational structures and relationships for SOF. For example, DOD has assigned all SOF, including forward-based headquarters and forces, to SOCOM.³ With this new organizational relationship, SOCOM has direct responsibility for manning, training, and equipping all SOF.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, section 1086,⁴ directed the Secretary of Defense to submit to the congressional defense committees a review of the SOF organization, capabilities, structure, and oversight. Specifically, the mandate—enacted on December 26, 2013—mandated the Secretary of Defense to provide an analysis and, where

¹SOCOM has its own budget authority and responsibilities within DOD’s budget. This budget authority, commonly referred to as “Major Force Program-11,” is used to organize, train, and equip forces to conduct special operations missions and to acquire or to modify service common systems to meet “special operations-peculiar” requirements for which there is no broad conventional force need.

²Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014* (Mar. 4, 2014).

³Forward-based SOF headquarters includes the Theater Special Operations Commands, which are commands that support the geographic combatant commands with logistics, planning, and operational command and control of SOF in their assigned regions. Prior to February 2013, the geographic combatant commands were responsible for the manpower and readiness of the Theater Special Operations Commands.

⁴Pub. L. No. 113-66, section 1086 (2013).

appropriate, an assessment of the adequacy of eight reporting elements not later than 90 days after enactment of the law. DOD submitted its report on May 8, 2014.⁵ The mandated reporting elements were to include the following areas:

1. Organizational structure of SOCOM and each subordinate component.
2. Policy and civilian oversight structures for SOF within DOD.
3. Roles and responsibilities of SOCOM and SOF under Title 10 of the United States Code.
4. Current and future special operations-peculiar requirements of the geographic combatant commands and the Theater Special Operations Commands.⁶
5. Command relationships between SOCOM, its subordinate component commands, and the geographic combatant commands.
6. Funding authorities, uses, acquisition processes, and civilian oversight mechanisms of Major Force Program-11.
7. Changes to areas such as structure, authorities, and oversight mechanisms assumed in the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review.
8. Any other matters that the Secretary of Defense determined appropriate to ensure a comprehensive review and assessment.

Section 1086 also mandated that GAO submit to the congressional defense committees an evaluation of DOD's report. We assessed the extent to which DOD's report addressed the mandated reporting elements. We provided a briefing on our results to the congressional defense committees' staffs in July 2014. This report formally transmits the results of our work in response to this mandate (see enclosure I). We plan to report separately at a later date on other issues related to the mandate, including DOD's force sizing plans for SOF and the trends in costs associated with the growth in SOF.

To conduct our work, we analyzed the legislation to identify each of the eight mandated reporting elements and used a scorecard methodology in which two analysts independently assessed the extent to which DOD's report addressed the mandated reporting elements. We assessed the report's content and assigned one of three ratings for each reporting element: "addressed" when DOD's report explicitly addressed all parts set forth in the reporting element, "partially addressed" when DOD's report addressed at least one or more parts of the reporting element but not all parts of the element, or "not addressed" if DOD's report did not explicitly address any part of the reporting element. In cases where the two independent analysts disagreed on an assessment of a reporting element, we compared the two sets of observations,

⁵Department of Defense, *Review and Assessment of United States Special Operations Forces and United States Special Operations Command* (May 2014). On April 3, 2014, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict requested an extension to the reporting date so that the department could incorporate additional information in its report in response to congressional direction received on March 27, 2014.

⁶Special operations-peculiar requirements can include equipment, materials, supplies, and services required for special operations missions for which there is no broad conventional force requirement.

discussed reasons for coding decisions, and reconciled any differences. We met with officials from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict and SOCOM to discuss the process used to develop the report. We obtained additional documentation, such as department-issued strategic guidance for SOF, to enhance our understanding of the report's content. We also discussed our assessment of the reporting elements with the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict. We conducted this performance audit from April 2014 to September 2014, 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.

In summary, we found that DOD's report addressed or partially addressed each of the eight mandated reporting elements, but the report did not include additional details on the analysis that underpins the department's conclusions on several reporting elements. DOD's report concluded that current and planned SOF organizations, capabilities, and oversight are adequate to meet special operations roles and responsibilities. DOD officials told us that the department believes the report was consistent with the mandated reporting elements, and focused on key themes and developments in certain areas that warranted more detailed explanation. For example, the report described civilian oversight provided by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict and other departmental offices and discussed the development of a new oversight council that is intended to improve policies and procedures for special operations. We found that DOD's report addressed three reporting elements by (1) detailing the roles and responsibilities of SOCOM and SOF under section 167 of Title 10 of the United States Code; (2) identifying funding authorities, uses, acquisition processes, and civilian oversight mechanisms of Major Force Program-11; and (3) reporting on other matters that the Secretary of Defense considered appropriate. Specifically, for this third element, DOD's report provided information on suicide prevention, health, and family readiness programs and initiatives to enhance the professionalization of SOF. However, we found that DOD's report partially addressed the other five mandated reporting elements. For example, although DOD's report provided limited discussion about current and future requirements of the geographic combatant commands and Theater Special Operations Commands, it does not specify the requirements needed to meet mission needs.

Table 1 summarizes the results of our analysis of the eight mandated reporting elements.

Table 1: GAO’s Assessment of the Extent that DOD’s Special Operations Forces (SOF) Report Addressed Statutory Requirements

Element	GAO Assessment	Assessment Summary
1	Partially Addressed	DOD’s report concluded that the organizational structure of the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) is adequate to meet current assigned roles and responsibilities. The report does not provide an analysis to justify how the department reached that conclusion.
2	Partially Addressed	DOD’s report concluded that the oversight and statutory structures and responsibilities provided by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict and other civilian offices meets statutory and assigned oversight responsibilities. The report does not discuss the alignment of resources, including human capital, as it pertains to these offices.
3	Addressed	DOD’s report concluded that SOCOM and SOF have sufficient statutory authorities to accomplish their roles and responsibilities under section 167 of Title 10 of the United States Code to develop strategy; train forces; ensure combat readiness; and organize, employ, and direct forces to execute assigned missions.
4	Partially Addressed	DOD’s report concluded that current and future special operations-peculiar requirements can be met with current and planned resources. The report provides limited discussion about the planned shift in special operations missions with a greater emphasis on activities, including building partner capacity and foreign internal defense. The report does not specify the special operations-peculiar requirements of the geographic combatant commands and the Theater Special Operations Commands that will be needed to meet these missions.
5	Partially Addressed	DOD’s report concluded that command relationships are adequate between SOCOM, its subordinate component commands, and the geographic combatant commands. The report includes information on the relationships between SOCOM, the geographic combatant commands, and the Theater Special Operations Commands, but does not discuss command relationships between SOCOM and its service component commands.
6	Addressed	DOD’s report concluded that the following are adequate: funding authorities, uses, acquisition processes, and civilian oversight mechanisms of Major Force Program-11 funding. The report includes information on the budget development process and uses of Major Force Program-11 funding; resolution of resourcing disputes between SOCOM and the services; DOD’s assessment of funding authorities and overseas contingency operations requirements; and civilian oversight mechanisms for Major Force Program-11 funding.
7	Partially Addressed	DOD’s report concluded that the following are adequate: the structure, authorities, Major Force Program-11 funding, roles, and responsibilities assumed in the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review. The report does not provide a detailed justification of how the department reached its conclusion that Major Force Program-11 funding is adequate.
8	Addressed	DOD’s report included additional information on suicide prevention, health, and family readiness programs, and on initiatives to enhance the professionalization of SOF.

Source: GAO analysis. | GAO-14-820R

Note: We determined that a statutory reporting requirement was “addressed” when DOD’s report explicitly addressed all parts set forth in the reporting element and determined that a requirement was “partially addressed” when DOD’s report addressed at least one or more parts of the reporting element but not all parts of the element.

For additional information on the results of our assessment, please see the briefing pages provided in enclosure I.

We are not making recommendations in this product.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

In written comments on a draft of this report, DOD generally agreed with the facts contained in the report. However, in its comments, DOD stated that our report should have placed additional emphasis on DOD's justification for the lack of detailed analysis contained in its report to Congress. According to DOD, a more detailed analysis of the reporting elements would not have changed the department's assessments. As we reported, DOD told us that it did not provide detailed analysis of all reporting elements in order to maintain brevity and limit the length of the report. DOD also told us that its report focused on specific changes to SOF and SOCOM that the department believed warranted an explanation. We do not believe additional emphasis on DOD's rationale is warranted. In its comments, DOD also noted that for those reporting elements related to budget and financial decisions, providing a more detailed analysis in the report to Congress would have been inconsistent with a DOD directive limiting the release of future program and budget information outside the department. However, DOD did not indicate which reporting elements were affected by the DOD directive. Only one of eight reporting elements specifically directed the department to assess funding. This element focused on authorities, uses, acquisition processes, and oversight mechanisms related to the administration of Major Force Program-11 funding, and it did not require future program or budget information. As a result, it is difficult to assess the impact of this constraint on the specificity of DOD's final report.

DOD's comments are reprinted in enclosure II.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Defense, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, and the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command. The report is also 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 Office of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this product. GAO staff who made key contributions to this product include Matthew Ullengren, Assistant Director; Tracy Barnes, Tamiya Lunsford, Michael Silver, Cheryl Weissman, and Kristy Williams.



John H. Pendleton
Director
Defense Capabilities and Management

Enclosure - 2

List of Committees

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman
The Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

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

The Honorable Howard P. "Buck" McKeon
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



Assessment of DOD's Report on Special Operations Forces and U.S. Special Operations Command

**Briefing for Congressional Staff
July 2014**

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Introduction

- Section 1086 of the National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 (Public Law (P.L.) 113-66) required that the Secretary of Defense conduct a review of the U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) organization, capabilities, structure, and oversight.
- Specifically, the mandate directed the Secretary of Defense to provide an analysis, and where appropriate, an assessment of the adequacy of SOF organization, capabilities, structure, and oversight not later than 90 days after enactment of the law (enacted December 26, 2013).
- In April 2014, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict requested an extension to the reporting date so that the department could incorporate additional information in its report in response to congressional direction received on March 27, 2014.
- DOD submitted its report to Congress on May 8, 2014.



Objective

- P.L. 113-66, Section 1086 also mandated GAO to review and provide an assessment of DOD's report not later than 60 days after submission of the report to Congress.
- Our objective is to determine the extent to which DOD's report to Congress addressed the reporting elements identified in P.L. 113-66, Section 1086.



Scope and Methodology

To determine the extent to which DOD's report addressed the reporting elements, we:

- analyzed P.L. 113-66 to identify each of the eight required reporting elements.
- conducted content analysis and two analysts independently assessed the extent to which DOD's report addressed the mandated reporting elements.
- assigned a rating of "addressed" when DOD's report explicitly addressed all parts set forth in the reporting element; "partially addressed" when DOD's report addressed at least one or more parts of the reporting element, but not all parts of the element, and "not addressed" when DOD's report did not explicitly address any part of the reporting element.
- compared the two sets of observations, discussed reasons for coding decisions, and reconciled any differences after the independent analysis was completed.
- interviewed DOD officials from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict and U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) to discuss issues and obtained additional documentation related to the report in support of our analysis.
- obtained and incorporated agency views and technical comments where appropriate.



Background

- SOCOM is a functional combatant command that has the statutory requirement for organizing, training, doctrine development, and equipping of all SOF units and is responsible for synchronizing the planning of global special operations against global terrorist networks.
 - SOCOM is comprised of four service component commands and eight sub-unified commands (Joint Special Operations Command and the seven Theater Special Operations Commands).
 - SOCOM is responsible for training SOF to conduct missions, including counter-terrorism, unconventional warfare, direct action, strategic reconnaissance, foreign internal defense, civil affairs, military information support operations, security force assistance, counterinsurgency, information operations, and counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
 - To meet an increase in operational demands for SOF, DOD has increased SOF force levels of military personnel from about 43,000 in FY2001 to about 63,000 in FY2014.
 - Total SOF force levels include an additional 6,500 civilians across SOCOM and its components.
 - DOD's FY2015 budget documents indicate that total SOF force levels will level off at the FY2014 authorization levels and there are no further changes planned through FY2019.
-



Background (continued)

- SOCOM is unique from other combatant commands in that it has its own budgetary authority and responsibilities through a Major Force Program-11 in DOD's budget.
 - Major Force Program-11 funds are used to organize, train, and equip forces to conduct special operations activities.
 - These funds are also used to acquire equipment or modify service common systems to meet "special operations-peculiar" requirements for which there is no broad conventional force need.
- The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict provides principal civilian oversight over SOCOM and special operations activities. According to DOD guidance, this office is responsible for a range of functions, including:
 - developing, coordinating, and overseeing the implementation of special operations policy, and
 - reviewing, evaluating, coordinating, and overseeing special operations programs and resources to ensure adherence to approved policy and planning guidance, including reviewing SOCOM's budget proposals.



Background (continued): Requirements for DOD's Report

P.L. 113-66, Section 1086 identified eight elements for DOD's report to include. Specifically:

1. Organizational structure of SOCOM and each subordinate component.
 2. Policy and civilian oversight structures for SOF within DOD.
 3. Roles and responsibilities of SOCOM and SOF under Title 10 of the United States Code.
 4. Current and future special operations peculiar requirements of the geographic combatant commands and the Theater Special Operations Commands.
 5. Command relationships between SOCOM, its subordinate component commands, and the geographic combatant commands.
 6. Funding authorities, uses, acquisition processes, and civilian oversight mechanisms of Major Force Program-11.
 7. Changes to areas such as structure, authorities, and oversight mechanisms assumed in the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review.
 8. Any other matters the Secretary of Defense determined appropriate to ensure a comprehensive review and assessment.
-



Summary

- Overall, we found that DOD's report addressed all eight of the reporting elements at least partially. Our analysis shows that the report fully addressed three elements and partially addressed five elements.
- DOD's report concluded that current and planned SOF organizations, capabilities, and oversight are adequate to meet special operations roles and responsibilities. The report focused on several key themes, including:
 - Civilian oversight provided by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict and other departmental offices. The report also discusses the development of a "Special Operations Oversight Council" as an example of an initiative intended to improve special operations policies and procedures.
 - Recent initiatives to assign forward-based SOF commands and forces to SOCOM, which provides SOCOM with a more direct responsibility for resourcing special operations requirements for these commands.
 - Development of a new planning process within the Global Campaign Plan for Special Operations, which is intended, among other things, to strengthen the process to identify and resource the geographic combatant commands' SOF requirements.
 - Initiatives to address potential gaps in personnel areas, such as suicide prevention, health and family readiness, as well as education programs to prepare SOF to operate in politically sensitive and complex environments.



Summary (continued)

- We found that DOD's report fully addressed the following three reporting elements: roles and responsibilities of SOCOM and SOF under Title 10 of the United States Code; funding authorities, uses, acquisition processes, and civilian oversight mechanisms of Major Force Program-11; and other matters needed to ensure a comprehensive review.
- We also found that DOD's report partially addressed the following five reporting elements:
 - the organizational structure of SOCOM's headquarters and its service component commands.
 - the policy and civilian oversight structures for SOF.
 - current and future special operations-peculiar requirements of the geographic combatant commands and Theater Special Operations Commands.
 - relationships between SOCOM, its subordinate component commands, and the geographic combatant commands.
 - changes to the structure, authorities, acquisition processes, and civilian oversight mechanisms for SOF assumed in the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review.
- The following slides provide our assessment for each of the eight reporting elements.



Report Element 1: Organizational Structure of Special Operations Command

Mandated Reporting Requirement		Assessment
1	The organizational structure of the United States Special Operations Command and each subordinate component, as in effect as of the date of the enactment of this Act.	Partially Addressed

- DOD’s report notes that the organizational structure of SOCOM is adequate to meet current assigned roles and responsibilities, but it does not provide an analysis to justify how the department reached that conclusion.
- DOD’s report also notes that the organizational structure of SOCOM’s subordinate component commands is adequate and discusses selected force structure modifications that have resulted in added capabilities or capacity. For example, the Naval Special Warfare Command invested in improved maritime surface platforms and the U.S. Army Special Operations Command is establishing a provisional Office of Special Warfare to address the full range of special operations missions.



Report Element 2: Policy and Civilian Oversight Structure

	Mandated Reporting Requirement	Assessment
2	The policy and civilian oversight structures for Special Operations Forces within the Department of Defense, as in effect as of the date of the enactment of this Act, including the statutory structures and responsibilities of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict within the Department and the alignment of resources, including human capital, with regard to such responsibilities within the Department.	Partially Addressed

- DOD’s report discusses oversight and statutory structures and responsibilities provided by Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict and other civilian offices, including the Under Secretaries of Defense (Comptroller) and Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, as well as the Military Departments. However, the report does not discuss the alignment of resources, including human capital, as it pertains to these offices.
- The report notes the development of a senior level “Special Operations Oversight Council” and discusses broad goals and objectives for the council. According to DOD officials, the council is intended to synchronize special operations-related guidance and oversight from across the department, but DOD has not finalized the council’s charter. Officials stated that the council’s first meeting is scheduled for September 2014.



Report Element 3: Roles and Responsibilities of SOCOM and SOF

Mandated Reporting Requirement		Assessment
3	The roles and responsibilities of United States Special Operations Command and Special Operations Forces under section 167 of title 10, United States Code	Addressed

- DOD’s report states SOCOM and SOF have sufficient statutory authorities to accomplish their roles and responsibilities to develop strategy; train forces; ensure combat readiness; and organize, employ, and direct forces to execute assigned missions.
- In addition to existing statutory authority, the report highlights two areas regarding special operations roles and responsibilities.
 - the Unified Command Plan directs SOCOM to synchronize planning of global special operations against violent extremists and other threat networks.
 - the February 2013 Forces for Unified Commands Memorandum assigned SOCOM with the combatant command of all SOF. This change is intended to enable SOCOM to standardize, to the extent possible, Theater Special Operations Command capabilities and manpower requirements.
- The report states that DOD continues to invest in capabilities to meet the full range of special operations missions prescribed in Title 10 and provides information on investments being made for selected force structure modifications.



Report Element 4: Current and Future Special Operations Peculiar Requirements

Mandated Reporting Requirement		Assessment
4	Current and future special operations peculiar requirements of the commanders of the geographic combatant commands and Theater Special Operations Commands.	Partially Addressed

- DOD's report provides limited discussion about current or future requirements of the geographic combatant commands and Theater Special Operations Commands, such as the shift in missions with a greater emphasis on activities including building partner capacity and foreign internal defense. However, the report does not specify the special operations-peculiar requirements that will be needed to meet these special operations missions.
- The report discusses the process by which requirements are identified and notes the development of a "Global Campaign Plan for Special Operations" that will be the process to identify and resource geographic combatant command SOF requirements. According to DOD officials, the plan is currently under departmental review, and there is no projected completion date.
- DOD's report states that service reductions in force in some areas and increased fiscal constraints may present challenges in meeting SOF requirements. For example, SOF relies heavily on service-provided capabilities for pre-deployment training and to sustain global operations. Furthermore, according to DOD officials, as the services draw down their force levels, the pool of qualified applicants for SOF programs may decrease. Officials noted that specific impacts of the draw downs were underdetermined, but that the department would continue to evaluate them.



Report Element 5: Command Relationships

Mandated Reporting Requirement		Assessment
5	Command relationships between United States Special Operations Command, its subordinate component commands, and the geographic combatant commands.	Partially Addressed

- DOD’s report notes that command relationships between SOCOM, its subordinate component commands, and the geographic combatant commands are adequate, and discusses in detail the relationships between SOCOM, the geographic combatant commands and the Theater Special Operations Commands. However, the report does not discuss command relationships between SOCOM and its service component commands.
- DOD’s report notes that the new command relationship between SOCOM and the Theater Special Operations Commands would better support SOCOM’s responsibilities for all SOF. According to DOD officials, this new command relationship gives SOCOM a more direct responsibility for resourcing special operations requirements for these commands.
 - Prior to February 2013, the geographic combatant commands were responsible for the manpower and readiness of the Theater Special Operations Commands.
 - In February 2013, the Secretary of Defense assigned SOCOM with combatant command authority for all forward-based Theater Special Operations Commands and forces while the geographic combatant commands retained operational control of SOF.



Report Element 6: Major Force Program-11

Mandated Reporting Requirement		Assessment
6	The funding authorities, uses, acquisition processes, and civilian oversight mechanisms of Major Force Program-11	Addressed

- DOD’s report includes information on:
 - the budget development process and uses of Major Force Program-11 funding;
 - resolution of resourcing disputes between SOCOM and the services;
 - DOD’s assessment of funding authorities and overseas contingency operations requirements; and
 - civilian oversight mechanisms for Major Force Program-11 funding, to include SOCOM’s coordination of all OSD-level acquisition activities with the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict.
- DOD’s report notes that the special operations acquisition process adheres to DOD policies and regulations that govern acquisition activities.



Report Element 7: Changes Assumed in the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review

Mandated Reporting Requirement		Assessment
7	Changes to structure, authorities, acquisition processes, oversight mechanisms, Major Force Program–11 funding, roles, and responsibilities assumed in the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review.	Partially Addressed

- DOD’s report notes that the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review did not change SOCOM’s roles and responsibilities, but provided strategic guidance to SOCOM for conducting special operations and emphasized certain areas, including:
 - *Missions:* Building partner capacity and counterterrorism
 - *Threats:* al Qa’ida and other terrorist networks
 - *Regional Priorities:* Middle East and Africa
- DOD’s report notes that the current structure, authorities and Major Force Program-11 funding are adequate, but does not provide a detailed analysis to justify how the department reached that conclusion.
- The report also does not address changes to the acquisition process for SOF because, according to a DOD official, the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review did not direct any changes to the SOF acquisition process.
- DOD’s report discusses a change to oversight for SOF in a newly established Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict led Special Operations Oversight Council.



Report Element 8: Any Other Matters

Mandated Reporting Requirement		Assessment
8	Any other matters the Secretary of Defense determines are appropriate to ensure a comprehensive review and assessment	Addressed

- DOD’s report includes information on
 - suicide prevention, health, and family readiness programs, to include the development of initiatives intended to focus on physical and mental conditioning and ensure the readiness of SOF and their families, and
 - initiatives to enhance the professionalization of SOF, to include efforts intended to ensure personnel are prepared to work in increasingly complex environments with specialized education, ethics, and leadership programs.
- According to a DOD official, the department requested a 45-day extension for this report to address additional congressional direction received on March 27, 2014. During that time, the official noted that DOD refined its draft of the report and added information on suicide prevention and professionalization to this section.



Agency Views

- We shared the information in this briefing with DOD officials to obtain the agency's views on our analysis. An official with the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict made the following points:
 - The responses in DOD's report are based on the department's interpretation of the reporting elements outlined in P.L. 113-66, Section 1086. Therefore, there are areas where DOD and GAO reached differing interpretations for some of the mandated reporting elements. However, in its view, the department believes its response is consistent with the mandated reporting elements.
 - DOD provided an overall assessment for each reporting element and did not go into detailed responses on reasons for the assessment of adequacy in an attempt to limit the overall length of the report. The DOD report focused on changes to SOF and SOCOM that warranted an explanation.
- We incorporated technical comments we received from DOD officials as appropriate.

Enclosure II: Comments from the Department of Defense



SPECIAL OPERATIONS/
LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2500

AUG 22 2014

Mr. John H. Pendleton
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U.S. Government Accountability Office
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Washington, DC 20548

Mr. Pendleton,

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO draft report, GAO-14-820R, "SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: DoD's Report to Congress Generally Addresses the Statutory Requirements But Lacks Details," dated August 5, 2014 (GAO Code 351969).

The Department generally agrees with statements of fact contained in the draft GAO Report 14-820R. However, the Department believes that additional emphasis should be placed on the justification for the lack of detailed analysis contained in the Secretary of Defense's review of the United States Special Operation Forces organization, capabilities, structure, and oversight, pursuant to Section 1086 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, Public Law 113-66. First, as indicated in the draft GAO Report, the Department did not provide detailed analysis of all reporting elements in order to maintain brevity and limit the length of the Report to Congress. Including additional analytical details for each of the reporting elements would not have changed the Department's assessments. Second, for those reporting elements related to budget and financial decisions, providing a more detailed analysis in the Report to Congress would have been inconsistent with Department of Defense Directive 7045.14, "The Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution (PPBE) Process," under which internal PPBE information not contained in the President's Budget may not be released.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on this draft report and looks forward to continued cooperation on the follow on efforts. Please direct any questions or comments you may have to Mr. Jim Coffman, at (703) 697-0738 and james.h.coffman.civ@mail.mil.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Wechsler".

William F. Wechsler
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
Special Operations and Combating Terrorism

(351969)

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E-mail: fraudnet@gao.gov

Automated answering system: (800) 424-5454 or (202) 512-7470

Congressional Relations

Katherine Siggerud, Managing Director, siggerudk@gao.gov, (202) 512-4400, U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7125, Washington, DC 20548

Public Affairs

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