

STATEMENT OF  
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COMMANDER  
U.S. MARINE CORPS FORCES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND  
BEFORE THE  
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES  
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## Introduction

Marine Raiders are the Marine Corps' contribution to United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). Through specialized and advanced training, MARSOC builds upon its unique attributes and ethos as Marines to produce agile, scalable, fully-enabled, and responsive special operations forces (SOF) comprised of operators and special operations-specific combat support and combat service support specialists. MARSOC formations task organize for every assigned mission and leverage their robust command and control capability and their ability to fuse operations with intelligence down to the team level. All of these factors enable our Raiders to succeed in distributed environments and enable partners at the tactical and operational levels of war. MARSOC contributes to the SOF enterprise and US combatant commands by providing full spectrum special operations capabilities to combat complex transregional problems.

Established in 2006, our organization continues to address the most immediate threats to our Nation and has become a key participant in the ongoing fight against violent extremist organizations. Accepting this, we are also cognizant that we must work to minimize pressure on our force and our families as we simultaneously prepare for future threats. We ensure preparedness by adapting our training methods using feedback from currently deployed forces to better prepare our Raiders for what they will encounter while deployed. Simultaneously, we minimize pressure on the force by ensuring adequate access to Preservation of the Force and Families (POTFF) resources. We recognize that our operational capability ultimately rests upon a foundation of outstanding individuals and their families. In order to safeguard and sustain MARSOC's human capital, our most valuable resource, we continually strive to balance operational commitments with time Raiders spend at home station. Part of our effort to take care of families involves ensuring that our POTFF program not only delivers responsive and effective support, but that it continues to evolve with changing demands and needs of our force.

## Background

During my tenure as the Commander of MARSOC, I have continually been impressed by the caliber of our individuals, be they Marines, Sailors, or civilians. They are well trained, well equipped, and provide the full spectrum special operations capability that has been crucial to success on the modern battlefield in places as diverse as Mali in West Africa, contested areas of Iraq, and Marawi in the Philippines. Twelve years on, MARSOC is maturing into a full and integral member of the SOF enterprise just as it continues to provide Raiders to counter our Nation's threats. Taking into account where MARSOC is today, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge some of the formative episodes in the history of our Marine Corps that got us here.

The United States Marines Corps' rich history is one that is replete with expeditionary operations against what we know today as irregular threats. These actions serve as the foundation for what is Marine Corps Special Operations today. Although the United States Marine Corps (USMC) did not provide a service component to the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) until 2005, the Marine Corps has demonstrated an ability to conduct and support special operations throughout its history.

In the early years of America's involvement in World War II, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was determined to bring the war to our enemies as rapidly as possible. Because of the Marine Corps' historical successes in small wars and its recent development of amphibious operational concepts, it was considered to be the ideal parent organization for the president's vision for "commando" operations. In January 1942 the United States Marine Corps established two Raider battalions. The mission of the new Raider units was to spearhead amphibious landings, conduct raiding expeditions against Japanese held territory, as well as conduct guerilla-type operations behind enemy lines for extended periods. Marine Raiders were intellectually dynamic, morally disciplined, and physically fit with an irrepressible

sense of duty, loyalty to one another, and imbued with a “Gung Ho” spirit in the face of adversity... much like the Marines and Sailors we select and train as Raiders today.

During the Vietnam War and throughout the Cold War era, the Marine Corps did not formally possess a specialized unit. However, many Marines were members of specialized Joint and certain, tailored conventional units, such as force reconnaissance and Marine Expeditionary Units (Special Operations Capable). These units performed some of the types of missions we associate with Special Operations today. The complex global environment produced by the end of the Cold War as well as the world changing events of September 11, 2001, prompted an almost immediate need for additional special operations capacity capable of achieving operational and strategic effects. In light of these events and the pressing need for more SOF, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld called for the Marines to work more closely with USSOCOM.

After validating an initial proof of concept in 2004 known as the Marine Corps Special Operations Command Detachment (DET One), the Secretary of Defense directed the Marine Corps to provide a permanent contribution to USSOCOM – what would become Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command – in November 2005. On 24 February 2006, MARSOC activated at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina as a service component assigned to USSOCOM. MARSOC today comprises a headquarters, one Marine Raider Regiment, one Marine Raider Support Group, and the Marine Raider Training Center. The Command has forces on both the east coast at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and on the west coast at Camp Pendleton, California. Presiding over a total force of approximately 3,000 Marines, Sailors, and 200 Federal Civilians, the Command is employed across the globe executing special operations missions in support of SOCOM and the geographic combatant commands that span the SOF core activities. With a focus on counterterrorism, direct action, special reconnaissance, foreign internal defense, security force assistance, and counterinsurgency, your modern-day Raiders also have the capability to directly support hostage rescue and recovery, countering of weapons of mass destruction,

unconventional warfare, foreign humanitarian assistance, military information, and civil affairs operations. In order to achieve success and provide full spectrum capability across this wide swathe of core activities, we must prioritize our efforts.

### MARSOC Priorities

Understanding our role as a force provider and capability generator within the SOF enterprise, we have taken the SOCOM Commander's priorities of "Win, Transform, and People," and applied them to how we prepare our forces to accomplish assigned missions. To this end, MARSOC currently focuses on four priority areas: the provision of integrated full spectrum SOF, capabilities integration between SOF and Marine Air Ground Task Forces (MAGTF), future force development, and the preservation of the force and families.

#### **Priority 1: Force Provider**

Our first priority is to provide integrated full spectrum SOF that are task organized, trained and equipped to accomplish assigned special operations tasks. At any given point in the year, MARSOC has approximately 400 Raiders deployed across 18 countries carrying out assigned missions. We maintain three, forward task organized Marine Special Operations Companies; one each in Central Command, Africa Command, and the Pacific Command areas of responsibility. In addition to company-level deployments, we maintain one persistent O-5 (Lieutenant Colonel) level Special Operations Task Force in Central Command and a one-third rotational split with Naval Special Warfare Command for an O-6 (Colonel) level Combined/Joint Special Operations Task Force Headquarters, also in Central Command. At every level, these deployed formations bring integrated capabilities across all functional areas and allow us to operate across the full range of special operations missions. We believe that it is these high-end capabilities that provide our forces with a competitive edge against the adversaries we face.

Providing our force begins with the recruitment process and continues through our assessment, selection, and individual training pipeline. We are focused on recruiting the best individuals from across

the Marine Corps. Based on the results of our deployed forces and feedback from supported commanders, our recruiting and selection methods are working. Our training is progressive. As individuals earn new special operations specialties, they are moved to teams or special skills training environments. This training continues until deployment and covers everything from individual skill sets to high-end, advanced, complex unit collective training.

In order to assess and certify Marine Special Operations Companies for deployment, MARSOC has created the RAVEN exercise. Held six times each year, RAVEN emphasizes realistic decision making for company and team commanders and provides a venue to practice the full planning, decision, execution, and assessment cycle. Alternating between Gulfport, Mississippi and Smyrna, Tennessee, RAVEN is a living exercise that enables MARSOC to incorporate the most current lessons from our deployed units as well as anticipated enemy actions inform and support ongoing joint contingency planning. For example, our most recent RAVEN conducted in Tennessee, featured a more robust foreign intelligence threat that undertook both physical and technical surveillance against our Marine Special Operations Teams. During this RAVEN we also exposed our teams to the degraded communications environment we would expect to encounter when facing a near-peer/emerging competitor.

The training environments we create are dynamic. Not only do they prepare our Raiders for the current operational challenge, but they also evolve based on emerging threats and our expected participation in support of standing operational plans. Another benefit of the RAVEN exercises is its utility as a venue for integrating conventional Marine Corps resources into what is otherwise a SOF-centric exercise.

**Priority 2: Capabilities Integration with MAGTFs (Interoperability, Integration, and Interdependence)**

Second, we provide a bridge for routine capabilities integration with SOF and the deployed Marine Air Ground Task Forces to fully maximize the complimentary capabilities of each formation; especially in light of near-peer/emerging competitors. Given the threats present on contemporary

battlefields and considering those we expect to face in the future, it has become increasingly important for SOF to be able to integrate “seamlessly” with the conventional forces and vice versa. Conventional forces offer capabilities and a capacity that simply do not exist in our small formations. In today’s complex operating environment, the extent to which we, across the Joint Force, are able to leverage one another’s strengths, and thereby offset our vulnerabilities, could determine the difference between success and failure. Cyber and space based capabilities, intelligence exploitation, mobility, fire support, logistics and medical support, are all examples of capabilities that we partially rely on conventional forces to provide— especially in scenarios involving high intensity combat.

Examples of interoperability and capabilities integration occur every day across the globe from Syria and Iraq, Afghanistan, the Philippines and remote locations in Africa. With deliberate efforts to participate in each other’s wargames, exercises, and training, we can institutionalize these efforts to the point that they become routine.

### **Priority 3: Future Force Development**

As the operating environment evolves and more complex threats emerge, MARSOC must adapt its force to meet these new challenges. Constant and deliberate innovation, and evolution is critical to our success. Our concept for development is based on both a bottom-up driven process that incorporates immediate battlefield feedback into our training curricula, equipment research, testing, procurement; and a top-down approach that combines more traditional capability acquisition processes with longer-term future concept and wargaming efforts.

Regarding equipment development and acquisition, we are tightly integrated with SOCOM and the Marine Corps and look forward to benefiting from the ongoing efforts of SOCOM’s Acquisition Technology & Logistics, SOFWERX, and the Marine Corps’ Rapid Capabilities Office. All of these organizations offer us an expedited procurement process for emerging technology. We have already taken steps to bring our vision to fruition with regard to capability development in particular technology

areas. These include freeze dried plasma, semi-autonomous seeing and sensing capability, organic precision fires, counter-UAS rapid self-defense, unmanned cargo UAS and ground systems, rapid fusion of big data analytics and machine assisted learning, broadband tactical edge communications, and specialized insertion capabilities. As we research and improve our warfighting capabilities, we must kept in mind that our near-peer/emerging competitors are also making similar advances and investing in emerging technology. It is critical that we ensure that the technological capabilities we opt for are able to operate, communicate, and self-heal in a signals degraded environment.

Likewise from a training perspective, we recognize the need to simulate operations in a degraded/denied communications environment that reflect what we might face when confronting near-peer/emerging competitors. We also plan to continue to improve our proficiency in the critical combined arms skills that both increase our lethality and allow us to maintain a tactical advantage over our adversaries. Last, we acknowledge that we must be able to operate in any clime and place, therefore we are committed to training in environments that replicate the full range of what we may experience on the battlefield.

Complementing our near and mid-term efforts at capability development is longer term work on the development of a MARSOC-specific futures concept. Although this concept bears a resemblance to similar initiatives undertaken with the Department, it very much reflects MARSOC's unique place within SOF and interpretation of what the future operating environment might look like. We see a world overwhelmingly influenced by a resurgence of regional competition and instability. As these two themes collide, the complexity of the operating environment will dramatically challenge the ability of leaders at all levels to first, understand what is happening and, second, make sound decisions. This is the very situation in which Raider formations of the future must be prepared to operate; an urgent, volatile, complex, high-stakes problem that comprises multiple actors and defies the application of traditional US strengths and solutions.



The results of our futures analysis, conducted over the past 18 months, have provided broad implications for the force as well as options which MARSOC can use to shape future capability to meet the challenges posed by the future operating environment. Throughout our internal wargame series, four discrete concepts or 'themes' consistently emerged. Each theme describes a distinct aspect of a vision for MARSOC, but at the same time each built upon the others such that the four are interconnected and mutually supporting. Together they provide a strong conceptual basis for a future MARSOC force that outpaces changes in the operating environment and remains a reliable force across warfighting and Title X functions. Collectively, these themes have come together to form the four, core pathways of innovation: MARSOF as a Connector, Combined Arms for the Connected Arena, The Cognitive Operator, and Enterprise Level Agility.

Our futures vision document, *MARSOF 2030* explains each of these innovation pathways in depth and also explores how they interconnect with one another. I will briefly introduce them here for the benefit of the committee. 'MARSOF as a Connector' is intended to capture MARSOC's facility in building cohesive, task organized teams. It is the idea that MARSOC can be the ideal integrator and synchronizer of U.S. Governmental capabilities with USSOF and partner nation actions. It also acknowledges the non-military nature of many of the problems we face and the need to look beyond for more durable solutions that involve tools other than the military.

'Combined Arms for the Connected Arena' aims to get at the requirement to 'sense' and 'make sense of' what is happening in diverse and multi-dimensional environments. This second pathway also speaks to the use of cyber and information 'domains' as potential venues for conflict now, but certainly with increasing relevance as we look toward the future. From our standpoint, we must become as comfortable operating in these 'virtual' domains as we are in the physical.

Perhaps the most foundational of all of our innovation pathways is 'the Cognitive Operator'. This pathway touches all others. At its core is the idea that the future requires a SOF operator with an

equal amount of brains to match the brawn; foresight in addition to fortitude. Your future Raiders must preside over expanded capabilities that include the ability to influence allies and partners; understand complex problems; apply a broad set of national, theater, and interagency capabilities to those problems; and fight as adeptly in the virtual space as the physical.

The last innovation pathway, 'Enterprise Level Agility', leverages MARSOC's relatively small size as an advantage. MARSOC possesses the advantage of being a relatively small force with its own component headquarters – this allows the command to rapidly reorient the organization to confront new challenges as they emerge. In other words, MARSOC's organizational dexterity can provide SOCOM with an agile, adaptable force to meet unexpected or rapidly changing requirements. In this context, MARSOC's small size becomes a strength; one that can provide both institutional and operational agility to the SOCOM Commander.

#### **Priority 4: Preservation of the Force and Families**

Calling to mind the SOF Truth that "people are more important than hardware," our fourth priority is the preservation of our force and families program that provide our Raiders and their families with the access to resources promoting personal resiliency increasing longevity in service. Although listed as my fourth priority, preservation of the force and families is equally as important as the previous three priorities because people are at the heart of all we do. Currently, MARSOF special operators average 1 day overseas for every 1.9 days at home. Our capability specialists that enable communications, intelligence, air support, explosive ordnance disposal, and our canine handlers, vary by occupational specialty but average between 1 to 1.7 and 1 to 1.2 days deployed as opposed to days spent at home station. What these numbers do not reflect is the additional time that is spent away from home while training in CONUS. Although difficult to measure, Personnel Tempo or PERSTEMPO receives significant attention at all leadership levels within the Command such that we aim to balance our service members' schedules between training at and training away from home station.

Because of this high operational tempo, POTFF has become an integral tool for maintaining the overall health of our force through programs that are focused on improving human performance, providing resources for behavioral health, developing spiritual fitness, and offering other family-oriented opportunities that are designed to strengthen the family unit. We appreciate the continual support from Congress on providing the funding for programs and specialized capabilities to make these programs effective.

**Culture of accountability:**

Closely tied to these efforts, in concert with both SOCOM and the Marine Corps, is our command-wide push to enhance our culture of accountability as it relates to issues such as sexual misconduct, illicit drug use, personal accountability, and unauthorized media release. As an example, our reported number of sexual assault cases remains in the low single digits and we have not had any victim reported incidents in Fiscal Year 18. We attribute this low number of incidents to our constant command level messaging campaign and our strong Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program. While we believe that even a single incident is one too many, we continue to strive to eradicate sexual and other forms of misconduct from our force. We strive each day to provide you SOF personnel that continue to embody the values of accountability, integrity, and commitment in honorable service to our nation.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, I am committed to providing Marine Raiders that provide the nation with full spectrum special operations capability and whose actions continually demonstrate our motto of *Spiritus Invictus*, or 'unconquerable spirit'. Your Marine Special Operators will remain always faithful, always forward. I thank the committee for your continued support of our military members and their families and also for your commitment to national security.