

# U.S. Military Forces in FY 2022

## *Space, SOF, Civilians, and Contractors*

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This paper is part of *U.S. Military Forces in FY 2022*. Military forces include the Space Force (fully established but still defining itself), Special Operations Forces (shifting their strategic focus), Department of Defense (DOD) civilians (still growing because of linkage to readiness), and contractors (a permanent element of force structure despite some criticism).

### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

#### **U.S. Space Force**

- Major elements of the U.S. Space Force (USSF), such as a service headquarters, appropriations accounts, training and educational commands, operational headquarters, and systems command, have been established. The shape of the acquisition organization and related acquisition processes are major unresolved questions.
- Personnel and organizations continue to transfer to the new service, though there may be controversy about remaining transfers as the Army and Navy seek to retain some space capabilities.
- Major space issues include creation of a guard and reserve component, the balance of offensive and defensive capabilities, international agreements on “responsible” behavior, and the balance between commercial and military capabilities.
- The USSF’s small size will require heavy reliance on other services, particularly the Air Force, for support functions as well as a different approach to personnel management.

#### **Special Operations Forces**

- Special Operations Forces (SOF) continues its gradual expansion and shifts focus away from counterinsurgency toward great power conflict.
- Nevertheless, the strategic shift raises questions about SOF’s long-term size.
- SOF has (so far) successfully transitioned its funding away from heavy dependence on war funding accounts.

- Institutional arrangements shifted briefly to a status like a military service, then back, but the debate continues.
- A broad set of actions to counter recent instances of ethical misconduct by its personnel seems to be having a positive effect.

### Department of Defense Civilians

- The number of DOD civilians rises slightly in FY 2022, reflecting the civilian workforce’s contribution to readiness and lethality.
- However, civilians are often seen as overhead and targeted for reduction in management reform efforts. The Biden administration’s position here is not yet clear.

### Contractors

- Contractors have become a permanent part of the federal workforce but remain controversial due to enduring questions about cost and what contractors should or should not do.
- Operational contractors continue to play a vital role in U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), though reduced with the end of operations in Afghanistan. DOD’s ongoing strategy review is unlikely to recommend more use of contractors. However, that could be the effect if DOD cuts troop numbers without reducing operational requirements.

## Space Force

The USSF, officially created on December 20, 2019, continues to mature. The split from the Air Force has been smooth, with about half the expected personnel transferred to the new service. New USSF organizations are established, and personnel transfers from the other services have begun. The new service will need to create a new organizational culture, and its small size means that it will operate much differently from the other military services.

Table 1: Space Force Personnel

	Active-Duty Military	Civilians
<b>FY 2021 Enacted</b>	6,434	3,545
<b>FY 2022 Request</b>	8,400	4,364
<b>Change</b>	+1,966	+819

Source: USAF Financial Management & Comptroller, *FY 2022 Budget Overview* (Washington, DC: May 2021), 12, [https://www.saffm.hq.af.mil/Portals/84/documents/FY22/SUPPORT\\_/FY22%20Budget%20Overview%20Book.pdf?ver=Reck2JzBUzoZmGByl9Zm-Q%3d%3d](https://www.saffm.hq.af.mil/Portals/84/documents/FY22/SUPPORT_/FY22%20Budget%20Overview%20Book.pdf?ver=Reck2JzBUzoZmGByl9Zm-Q%3d%3d). Squadron and total civilian data from Office of the Under Secretary of Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)/Chief Financial Officer, *Defense Budget Overview* (Washington, DC: May 2021), 2–8, A-3, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022\\_Budget\\_Request\\_Overview\\_Book.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf). For FY 2021 and FY 2022, these numbers are contained in the Air Force totals and are therefore not additive to the DOD total.

The Space Force and the Air Force set up a process by which individuals can opt to leave one service and join the Space Force.<sup>1</sup> The Space Force has been very attractive, with 3,700 personnel from the Army, Navy,

1. “United States Space Force- Transfer FAQs,” U.S. Space Force, accessed on November 18, 2021, <https://www.spaceforce.mil/Transfer/#:~:text=A%3A%20Career%20fields%20that%20are,inherent%20to%20space%20operations%20only;and%202.4%20K%20Airmen>

and Marine Corps applying for transfer. Fifty transferred in FY 2021. A total of 670 personnel will transfer from these services in FY 2022—603 soldiers, 49 sailors, and 18 marines—along with 259 civilian billets and \$2.5 billion in funding over the five-year period. Some transfer as individuals, some as a result of organizational transfers. The current size (8,000 military personnel) is about half the final size (16,000), so more transfers will occur, but these are still being determined.<sup>2</sup>

*The Space Force has been very attractive, with 3,700 personnel from the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps applying for transfer. Fifty transferred in FY 2021. A total of 670 personnel will transfer from these services in FY 2022.*

The Space Force has started its own recruiting in FY 2022, planning to add 500 enlisted guardians and 260 officers through direct accession.

#### **BUILDING SPACE CAPABILITIES AND A NEW MILITARY SERVICE**

The United States Space Force is a separate branch of the armed forces within the Department of the Air Force (motto “Semper supra,” “Always above”). It is “organized, trained, and equipped to . . . provide freedom of operation for the United States in, from, and to space [and] conduct space operations.”<sup>3</sup> As space operations are currently structured, the USSF is, in effect, a satellite force. It acquires satellites and the launch services, oversees two launch facilities, and operates constellations of satellites through ground stations in the United States and around the world.

Last year, the administration implemented a wide variety of organizational changes to stand up the new service and emphasize the national security space enterprise. These actions included establishing U.S. Space Command (SPACECOM), redesignating Air Force Space Command (AFSPC) as the first element of the Space Force, publishing a capstone doctrine manual (*Spacepower*), and establishing a new assistant defense secretary for space policy and an assistant secretary for space acquisition and integration (ASAF/SP) within the Air Force. The Space Force emphasizes its digital nature. General John W. Raymond noted, “As the only U.S. military service to be established during the Information Age, the United States Space Force (USSF) has the unique opportunity to be ‘born digital.’”<sup>4</sup>

DOD announced that SPACECOM, a joint command that is not part of USSF but closely connected to it, will move to the Army’s Redstone Arsenal in Alabama. The controversial decision is under review by the DOD inspector general.

The National Space Council, reestablished in 2017, has responsibility to coordinate space activities across the entire federal government, including DOD. Vice President Kamala Harris was named the administration’s lead and held the first meeting on December 1, 2021, a year after the previous meeting.

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to Transfer to Space Force Beginning September 1,” U.S. Space Force, September 1, 2020, <https://www.spaceforce.mil/News/Article/2332258/24k-airmen-to-transfer-into-space-force-beginning-sept-1/>.

2. Greg Hadley, “Space Force Selects Another 670 Soldiers, Sailors, Marines for Transfer,” *Air Force Magazine*, September 30, 2021, <https://www.airforcemag.com/space-force-670-soldiers-sailors-marines-transfer/>.

3. “The United States Space Force,” 10 U.S. Code §9081 (2021), <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10/9081>.

4. U.S. Space Force, *U.S. Space Force Vision for a Digital Service* (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, May 2021), 1, [https://media.defense.gov/2021/May/06/2002635623/-1/-1/1/USSF%20VISION%20FOR%20A%20DIGITAL%20SERVICE%202021%20\(2\).PDF](https://media.defense.gov/2021/May/06/2002635623/-1/-1/1/USSF%20VISION%20FOR%20A%20DIGITAL%20SERVICE%202021%20(2).PDF).

This first meeting under the new administration focused on “promoting rules and norms, addressing the climate crisis, [and] building on our STEM workforce.” Several members denounced Russia’s recent antisatellite test which produced a large amount of debris.<sup>5</sup> The administration expanded the membership of the council to include departments of education, labor, interior, and agriculture. It also published at the same time the *United States Space Priorities Framework*, which laid out a broad space agenda.<sup>6</sup>

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In addition to transferring more personnel into the Space Force, actions in FY 2021 and into FY 2022 focus on the acquisition organization. The Air Force Space and Missile Systems Center was redesignated as Space Systems Command (SSC) on August 13, 2021. A Space War Fighting Analysis Center stood up inside SSC. A new Space Operations Center will coordinate with the combatant commanders.

It is unclear whether the Space Development Agency and the Space Rapid Capabilities Office—both now part of the Air Force—will be aligned with the new command.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of the organizational alignments, however, the intention is to establish a more rapid and agile acquisition system, which requires congressional approval. DOD has not yet proposed specific legislation. However, USSF is leveraging the mid-tier acquisition authorities (section 804) that allow more rapid acquisition by bypassing many of the acquisition system’s requirements.

The Space Force will *not* send astronauts into orbit. That is the exclusive purview of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), a civilian agency, although Space Force personnel could be loaned to NASA to serve as civilian astronauts, as has been the case historically with the other military services. When the Space Age began, the United States intentionally made human spaceflight a civilian rather than a military function, and as a result, the military has never operated crewed spacecraft.

Neither will the Space Force control the satellites of the intelligence community. These fall primarily under the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO). However, the Space Force and the NRO have exchanged liaison cells.

## **USSF BUDGET**

Although this paper is not a budget analysis, a few budget issues bear discussion because they affect structure.

USSF is in the process of gaining control of its resources. Personnel funding is still in Air Force military personnel accounts. Other USSF appropriations—operations and maintenance; research, development, testing, and evaluation (RDT&E); and procurement—transfer in the FY 2022 budget.

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5. Teresa Hitchens, “Biden Administration to Propose New Global Norms for Military Space,” *Breaking Defense*, December 1, 2021, <https://breakingdefense.com/2021/12/biden-administration-to-propose-new-global-norms-for-military-space/>.

6. “United States Space Priorities Framework,” The White House, December, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/United-States-Space-Priorities-Framework--December-1-2021.pdf>.

7. Sandra Irwin, “End of an era: Space and Missile Systems Center is now Space Systems Command,” *Space News*, August 13, 2021, <https://spacenews.com/end-of-an-era-space-and-missile-systems-center-is-now-space-systems-command/>.

The Space Force has a massive RDT&E appropriation (\$11.3 billion) for such a small service. Much of the effort is focused on maintaining and modernizing existing satellite constellations. The RDT&E appropriation seems out of proportion with the procurement account (\$2.8 billion), though accounting rules allow the services to build some satellites in RDT&E rather than procurement.

The largest element in the Space Force RDT&E account (\$4.5 billion, or 40 percent) is classified, so it is difficult to state exactly what is going on.<sup>8</sup>

### **A DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

The Space Force's culture, organization, and personnel structure will be unique because of its specialized mission and small size.

For example, unlike the other military services, USSF will conduct almost all its operations from large facilities in the United States. As USSF describes its operations, it will "provide diverse combat effects from tactically independent elements which in many cases are not deployed into or employed from the affected area of responsibility."<sup>9</sup> That leverages USSF expertise and capabilities without needing to transport personnel and equipment during a crisis. However, it also means that USSF personnel will not share the dangers and discomforts of warfighting deployments that the other services experience.

The guidance establishing the Space Force states that it will "remain mission-focused by leveraging infrastructure of the U.S. Air Force, except in performing those functions that are unique to space or central to the independence of the new Armed Force."<sup>10</sup> That means that the Space Force will rely on a lot of Air Force organizations, as the Marine Corps does with the Navy. However, because of its small size, the Space Force will need to go much further in its reliance, so functions such as recruiting will likely come from Air Force organizations with Space Force personnel embedded.

The comprehensive plan notes that the Space Force will receive more than 75 percent of its critical support functions from the Air Force.<sup>11</sup> This structure may have the advantage of focusing the Space Force on core activities rather than having attention diverted by bureaucratic demands. Nevertheless, there will likely be continuing institutional tensions between the need to rely on the Air Force structure and the desire to stand up the full set of training, doctrine, personnel, installation, acquisition, and education organizations that the other military services have. The other military services devote thousands of personnel to these functions, numbers that the Space Force cannot match. Instead, it may use government civilians and contractors to a greater degree than the other services.

Another unique aspect is the rank structure. Currently, the Space Force consists of 46 percent officers (3,859 officers out of a total strength of 8,400), up from 43 percent in FY 2021. That ratio might change a little as more personnel and organizations are incorporated, but it is unlikely to change very much. Because so few Space Force officers will have the experience of leading large organizations and large numbers of personnel, the culture will likely evolve into one of officers as highly skilled technicians rather than as leaders.

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8. USAF Financial Management & Comptroller, *Air Force Justification Book Volume 1 of 1- Research, Development, Test & Evaluation* (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, May 2021), Space Force, V, [https://www.saffin.hq.af.mil/Portals/84/documents/FY22/RDTE\\_/FY22%20DAF%20J-Book%20-%203620%20-%20SF%20RDT%20and%20E.pdf?ver=IjGtfzXsB\\_JjzQshbt68Fw%3d%3d](https://www.saffin.hq.af.mil/Portals/84/documents/FY22/RDTE_/FY22%20DAF%20J-Book%20-%203620%20-%20SF%20RDT%20and%20E.pdf?ver=IjGtfzXsB_JjzQshbt68Fw%3d%3d).

9. USAF Financial Management & Comptroller, *FY 2022 Budget Overview* (Washington, DC: May 2021), 7-11, 12, [https://www.saffin.hq.af.mil/Portals/84/documents/FY22/SUPPORT\\_/FY22%20Budget%20Overview%20Book.pdf?ver=Reck2JzBUzoZmGByl9Zm-Q%3d%3d](https://www.saffin.hq.af.mil/Portals/84/documents/FY22/SUPPORT_/FY22%20Budget%20Overview%20Book.pdf?ver=Reck2JzBUzoZmGByl9Zm-Q%3d%3d).

10. Mark Esper, "Memorandum: Establishment of the United States Space Force," DOD, December 20, 2019, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Dec/20/2002228281/-1/-1/1/ESTABLISHMENT-OF-THE-UNITED-STATES-SPACE-FORCE.PDF>.

11. "United States Space Force Organization," USSF, Accessed on November 18, 2021, <https://www.spaceforce.mil/About-Us/About-Space-Force/Space-Force-Organization/>.

Table 2: Officer Percentage among the Services

Space Force	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force
46%	19%	16%	12%	19%

Source: Defense Manpower Data Center, *Military Personnel by Service by Rank/Grade* (Washington, DC: September 2021), <https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/api/download?fileName=rg2109.pdf&groupName=milRankGrade>.

The ability of the Space Force to produce the requisite number of joint qualified officers and senior leaders from such a small base will be a challenge that will take years to resolve.<sup>12</sup>

### MEANWHILE, UP IN SPACE

In FY 2022, the Space Force will procure five national security space launches as it transitions away from its dependence on the Russian RD-180 engine used on the Atlas V and the costly Delta IV family of vehicles. Currently, there are four eligible launch vehicle types in operation: Atlas V, Delta IV Heavy, Falcon 9, and Falcon Heavy. Under the National Security Space Launch program, the military plans to transition to the Falcon 9, Falcon Heavy, and the yet to fly Vulcan launch vehicle. USSF also procures two GPS III satellites.

Based on open-source data, planned launches include one more launch in calendar year 2021, with three planned for the first half of calendar year 2022.<sup>13</sup> The president’s budget has funding for seven launches in FY 2022.<sup>14</sup>

USSF maintains several major satellite constellations and the ground stations, satellite relays, and space launch facilities required to establish and sustain these constellations, including:

- Advanced Extremely High Frequency (AEHF) system for protected communications;
- Wideband Global SATCOM System (WGS) for global high-data-rate communications;
- Global Positioning System (GPS) for global positioning and timing;
- Defense Meteorological Satellite Program (DMSP) for weather;
- Space-Based Infrared System for missile warning (USSF is developing a follow-on, the Next-Generation Overhead Persistent Infrared system);
- Geosynchronous Space Situational Awareness Program (GSSAP) for tracking and characterization of objects in geostationary orbit; and
- Mobile User Objective System (MUOS), a constellation of five satellites recently transferred from the Navy which provides global narrowband communications.

### LOOKING AHEAD

The USSF has surmounted a key challenge, its permanence. Although some progressives have recommended that the Space Force be abolished as part of a broader effort to reduce defense spending, the Biden administration has not even hinted at restudying the question.<sup>15</sup> The Space Force is permanent.

12. For a full discussion of the personnel challenges, see Mark Cancian, “Is the Space Force of Viable? Personnel Problems on the Final Frontier,” *War on the Rocks*, May 14, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/05/is-the-space-force-viable-personnel-problems-on-the-final-frontier/>.

13. “Launch Schedule – Spaceflight Now,” *Spaceflight Now*, accessed November 29, 2021, <https://spaceflightnow.com/launch-schedule/>.

14. USAF Financial Management & Comptroller, *FY 2022 Budget Overview*, 14.

15. For an example of progressive opposition to the Space Force, see Center for International Policy, *Sustainable Defense: More Security, Less Spending* (Washington, DC: June 2019), 50, <https://www.internationalpolicy.org/sustainable-defense-task-force>. There was even a

Nevertheless, many issues remain, and how those play out will shape the Space Force of the future.

**A Dedicated Military Department:** Early concepts included eventual creation of a new military department for space, thus breaking the Space Force out from the Department of the Air Force and moving the NRO into this new department. So far, there has been no movement in that direction, and DOD's concept does not include it.<sup>16</sup> This idea appears to be dead.

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**Reserve Components:** Currently, there is no reserve component to the USSF, but there likely will be one. The politically powerful National Guard has argued for having a role since several existing guard and reserve units perform space functions. However, the states have no authorities in space, so the exact nature of a "Space Guard" needs to be determined.<sup>17</sup> A reserve component would provide strategic depth for U.S. space operations and a mechanism to retain personnel with space-related skills. The FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act does not contain provisions in this area, but pressure from the guard and reserve components will keep the issue alive.<sup>18</sup>

**The Final Composition of the Space Force:** The easy transfers have occurred. The Air Force has mostly completed its transfers. Seven Army and four Navy organizations have moved into the USSF, including the Army's Space Operations Brigade and the Navy's Satellite Operations Center.<sup>19</sup> However, the Army and Navy want to retain some space capability to ensure that their forces receive adequate support. Apparently, this is producing some contentious discussions inside the Pentagon, though the disagreements occur internally and only hints have leaked out. These discussions about where to draw the line between the USSF and service space capabilities will continue through the coming year.<sup>20</sup>

**The Role of Offensive Operations Space:** Space weapons can include space-to-space, ground-to-space, and space-to-ground capabilities. The Space Force has talked about "warfighting in space," "space power," and "space superiority."<sup>21</sup> There are hints that the United States has developed an antisatellite capability in the classified world beyond the antisatellite capabilities inherent in some existing missile defense

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twitter hashtag: #abolishspaceforce. Progressives particularly object to the "militarization" of space.

16. Department of Defense, *United States Space Force* (Washington, DC: February 2019), <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Mar/01/2002095012/-1/-1/1/UNITED-STATES-SPACE-FORCE-STRATEGIC-OVERVIEW.PDF>

17. Sandra Irwin, "National Guard Leaders Press Case for Space National Guard," *Space News*, February 12, 2020, <https://spacenews.com/national-guard-leaders-press-case-for-a-space-national-guard/>.

18. Although the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2022 is not yet passed in Congress as of this writing, the compromise bill has been published, and it contains no language about a Space Force Reserve. "Summary of the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act," Senate Armed Services Committee, December 6, 2021, <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/FY22%20NDAA%20Agreement%20Summary.pdf>.

19. Sandra Irwin, "Space Force Reveals Which Army and Navy Units Are Moving to the Space Branch," *Space News*, September 21, 2021, <https://spacenews.com/space-force-reveals-which-army-and-navy-units-are-moving-to-the-space-branch/>.

20. Abraham Mahshi, "The Asset Transfer Fight," *Air Force Magazine*, August 27, 2021, <https://www.airforcemag.com/article/the-asset-transfer-fight/>.

21. Teresa Hitchens, "SPACECOM's New Vision Targets 'Space Superiority,'" *Breaking Defense*, January 28, 2021, <https://breakingdefense.com/2021/01/spacecoms-new-vision-targets-space-superiority/>.

interceptors.<sup>22</sup> This may be making officials in the Biden administration nervous. There are long-standing criticisms about the “militarization” of space even though space has had a military function since the first human activity in that domain (what critics actually mean is the “weaponization” of space).<sup>23</sup>

Space Command became a “geographic” combatant command with responsibility above 100 km, rather than a “functional” command as it had been previously. This implies a warfighting role rather than a support role.

Instead of offensive capabilities, the Biden administration may emphasize resilience and supporting operations to the other warfighting components. The forthcoming National Defense Strategy will likely give some insights here.

**Threats from Space Debris:** Fears that space debris could render certain orbits unusable have engendered calls for restrictions on debris-producing antisatellite weapons. A recent Russian test that destroyed an inactive satellite has exacerbated these fears. A CSIS report noted that “continued tests of such systems appear to be normalizing the behavior.”<sup>24</sup> Russia claims such tests are in response to creation of the USSF. The United Nations moved to set up guidelines about responsible behavior in space, but Russia and China have frustrated such efforts so far.<sup>25</sup>

**Arms Control and International Agreements about Activities in Space:** Currently, there are restrictions on nuclear weapons in space, but that is about all.<sup>26</sup> The Biden administration is likely to push for a variety of agreements on “responsible” space behavior, driven by concerns about space debris and attacks on satellites. There is a precedent in that the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia developed a series of agreements about how their air and naval forces would interact during peacetime to avoid collisions and escalation. The same could occur in space. The United Nations has approved a new working group to develop “rules of the road for military activities in space,” though Russia and China could frustrate these as they seek to expand their space activities.<sup>27</sup>

**Reliance on Commercial Satellites versus Custom-Designed Military Satellites:** This is a perennial discussion. Military satellites offer a variety of protections, both physical and electronic, that commercial satellites typically do not offer. However, commercial satellites are often much less expensive and can be launched more rapidly. Further, when the government uses purchased services, it can adjust capacity as needed, buying more or less as the situation demands. The strategic review will give insights into where the new administration intends to draw the line between the two capabilities.

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22. Teresa Hitchens, “What Satellite Attack a Weapon Might the US Revealed Soon?,” *Breaking Defense*, August 24, 2021, <https://breakingdefense.com/2021/08/what-satellite-attack-weapon-might-the-us-reveal-soon/>.

23. Teresa Hitchens, “Biden Administration Expected to Rein in ‘Space Power’ Push,” *Breaking Defense*, February 1, 2021, <https://breakingdefense.com/2021/02/biden-admin-expected-to-rein-in-space-power-push/>. Todd Harrison of CSIS argues that space has been both militarized and weaponized. See Todd Harrison, *International Perspectives on Space Weapons* (Washington, DC: CSIS, May 2020), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/international-perspectives-space-weapons>.

24. Kaitlyn Johnson, *A Balance of Instability: Effects of a Direct-Ascent Anti-Satellite Weapons Ban on Nuclear Stability* (Washington, DC: CSIS, October 21, 2020), 7, <https://defense360.csis.org/a-balance-of-instability-effects-of-a-direct-ascent-anti-satellite-weapons-ban-on-nuclear-stability/>.

25. Ellen Mitchell, “Outcry Grows over Russian Missile Test That Hit Satellite,” *The Hill*, November 17, 2021, <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/581881-outcry-grows-over-russian-missile-test-that-hit-satellite>.

26. Harrison, *International Perspective on Space Weapons*.

27. Teresa Hitchens, “UN Committee Votes ‘Yes’ on UK-US Backed Space Rules Group,” *Breaking Defense*, November 1, 2020, <https://breakingdefense.com/2021/11/un-committee-votes-yes-on-uk-us-backed-space-rules-group/>.

**Relations with the NRO:** The intelligence community successfully fought to be excluded from the Space Force. That means that about half of U.S. military launches and satellites do not fall under the Space Force. A classified government agreement delineates the responsibilities of the NRO, Space Force, Air Force, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, and Space Command.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, there many points of potential friction.



Source: Photo by Staff Sgt. Jeremy Mosier/U.S. Space Force Public Affairs

**USSF Uniforms:** Finally, the discussion of the USSF cannot avoid mentioning the great debate over uniforms, which seems to overshadow issues about warfighting capabilities at times. The USSF wants its uniforms to be distinctive, but publicly revealed prototypes have engendered extensive commentary about their sci-fi character.<sup>29</sup>

### *Special Operations Forces (SOF)*

One long-time theme continues—gradual force growth. However, stress on the force has faded as a publicly stated concern, as is true of the rest of the department. Deployment-to-dwell numbers approach department goals. Special Operations Command’s (SOCOM) budget transitioned smoothly from its previous dependence on the wartime overseas contingency operations (OCO) funding to base funding. Strategic focus is shifting to great power conflict. Unclear is whether SOCOM can retain funding and personnel over the long term as the strategy shifts. Ethical misconduct—a disturbing theme that arose in recent years—has disappeared after extensive efforts to educate and discipline the force. Institutional arrangements shifted briefly to full status as a military service, then back to quasi-independence.

### **FY 2022 STATUS**

SOCOM consists of service component commands from four services—Army (Special Forces, Ranger Regiment, Special Operations Aviation, Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations), Navy (SEALs, Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewmen), Air Force (Special Purpose Aircraft and Combat Control teams), and Marine Corps (one “Raider” regiment). Joint Special Operations Command and seven Theater Special Operations Commands conduct operations. SOCOM develops joint doctrine and has the Joint Special Operations University, while extensive service-specific school and doctrine activities reside within the service components.

28. Colin Clark, “NRO, NGA, SPACECOM, Space Force Hammer out Boundaries,” Breaking Defense, August 24, 2021, <https://breakingdefense.com/2021/08/nro-nga-spacecom-space-force-hammer-out-boundaries/>.

29. Stephen Losey, “The Space Force Unveils Its New Sci-Fi Worthy Uniform,” Military.com, September 21, 2021, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/09/21/space-force-unveils-its-new-sci-fi-worthy-uniform.html>.

Table 3: Special Operations Forces – Military, Civilians, and Contractors

	Military End Strength (active and reserve)	Civilian FTEs	Contractors
<b>FY 2021 Enacted</b>	67,095	6,831	5,892
<b>FY 2022 Request</b>	67,524	6,917	6,006
<b>Change</b>	+429	+86	+114

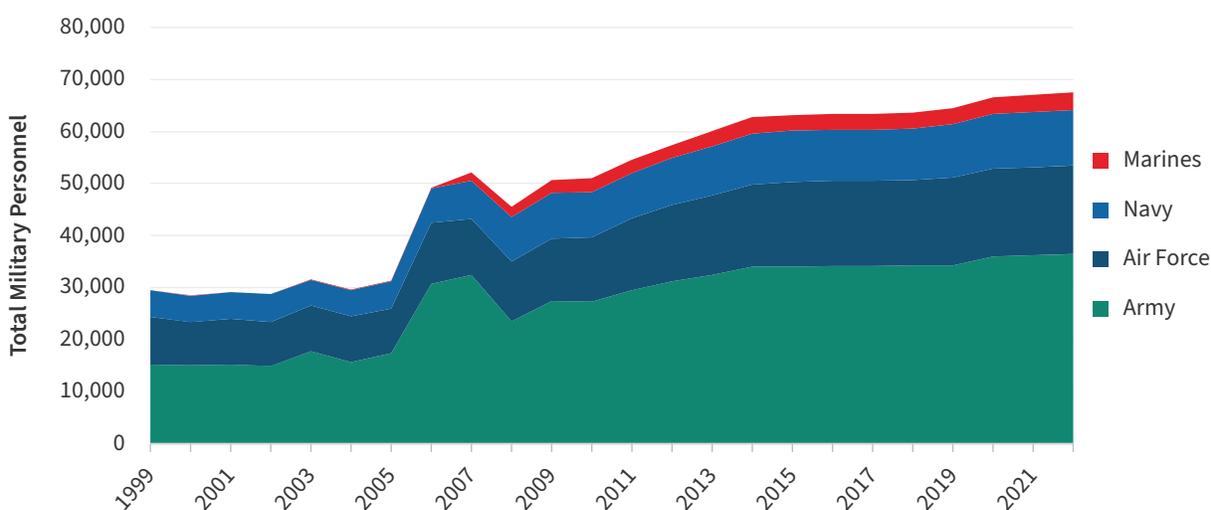
Note: SOCOM’s military and civilian personnel are reported in the respective service tables. The numbers in this table are therefore not additional to what is shown in the service numbers.

Source: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 President’s Budget, Operation and Maintenance, Defense-Wide United States Special Operations Command* (Washington, DC: April 2021), II: Force Structure Summary, SOCOM, 6, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget\\_justification/pdfs/01\\_Operation\\_and\\_Maintenance/O\\_M\\_VOL\\_1\\_PART\\_1/SOCOM\\_OP-5.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget_justification/pdfs/01_Operation_and_Maintenance/O_M_VOL_1_PART_1/SOCOM_OP-5.pdf).

As Table 3 shows, SOCOM continues to grow, though slowly. The additional personnel in FY 2022 will close “manning gaps for combat service/combat service support (CS/CSS) personnel to alleviate operational tempo stress on certain enablers.”<sup>30</sup>

**FORCE GROWTH OVER TIME**

Figure 1: SOCOM Military Personnel, 1999 to 2022, Active and Reserve Component



Note: The irregular pattern in Army numbers from 2006 to 2008 arises because some reserve civil affairs units transferred into SOCOM and then out again.

Source: Data for 2008–2022 comes from the Force Structure Summary tables in the yearly *President’s Budget Operation and Maintenance, Defense-Wide United States Special Operations Command*; Data for 2001–2007 comes from the Military Personnel sections of the respective *Operation and Maintenance Overviews, 2001–2007*. FY 1999 and 2000 data from Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Special Operations Forces: Opportunities Exist to Improve Transparency of Funding and Assess Potential to Lessen Some Deployments*, GAO-15-571 (Washington, DC: July 2015), <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-15-571>.

30. Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller)/Chief Financial Officer, *Defense Budget Overview* (Washington, DC: May 2021), 4–12, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022\\_Budget\\_Request\\_Overview\\_Book.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf).

SOCOM grew greatly during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, from 29,500 military personnel in 1999 to 67,524 today. It is now approaching the size of the regular forces of the British army (81,800 in 2021).<sup>31</sup> This large post-2001 increase was primarily in response to demand for counterterrorism operations in CENTCOM. DOD also steadily increased the number and type of missions assigned to SOCOM. SOCOM has provided DOD's core direct action and counterterrorism capabilities, in addition to conducting other SOCOM missions, such as foreign internal defense, irregular warfare, and civil affairs. Demand for all these missions grew globally as well. In addition to its traditional missions, SOCOM became DOD's Coordinating Authority for Countering Violent Extremist Organizations, Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction, and transregional Military Information Support Operations. In effect, the additional responsibilities make SOCOM a "global COCOM."

This expansion has not been without controversy. The lack of transparency in SOCOM operations and ease of committing SOCOM forces to operations bothers many commentators. As one critic observed, "The power to order pinpoint strikes and killings, often cloaked in secrecy, enables a president to act with minimal public scrutiny, and can tempt the president to substitute a few small, dramatic exploits for a more sustained strategy."<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, presidents have found the capability useful and will continue to rely on it.

*SOCOM grew greatly during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, from 29,500 military personnel in 1999 to 67,524 today. It is now approaching the size of the regular forces of the British army . . . [However,] this expansion has not been without controversy.*

The challenge for continuing expansion, as the Congressional Research Service observed, will be "how much larger USSOCOM can grow before its selection and training standards will need to be modified to create and sustain a larger force."<sup>33</sup> So far, SOCOM has not signaled any quality problems.

#### **PERSONNEL STRESS: NOW A MANAGEABLE CHALLENGE**

High operational tempo plagued SOCOM in the past, putting stress on personnel and their families, resulting in retention challenges and an increase in suicides. However, withdrawals from conflicts in the Middle East over the last few years have eased this stress. Figure 2 shows how SOCOM deployment levels have declined substantially since a surge at the beginning of the Trump administration, likely caused as part of an effort to stabilize the military situation in Afghanistan before pulling out U.S. troops. Budget documents show SOCOM deployments down from 7,533 in FY 2021 to 4,450 in FY 2022.<sup>34</sup>

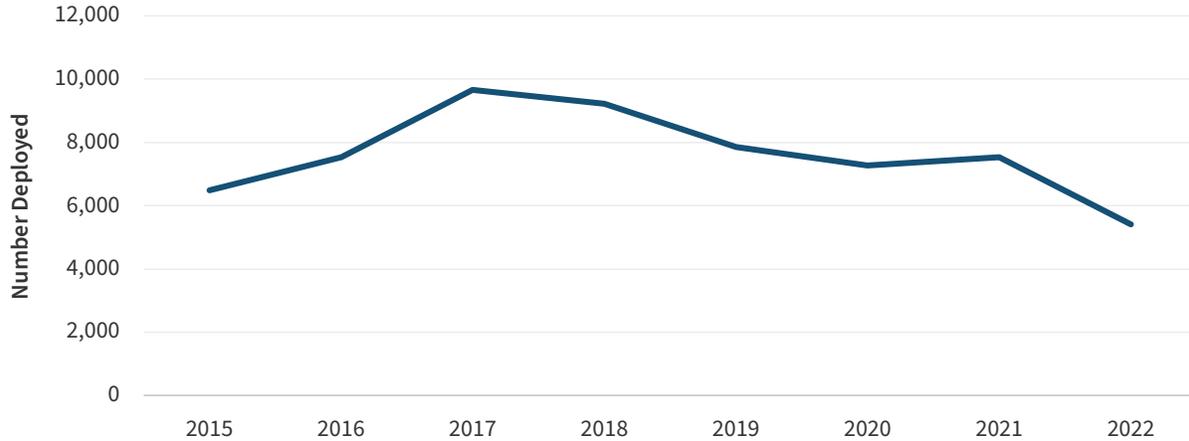
31. UK Ministry of Defense, *UK Armed Forces Quarterly Service Personnel Statistics* (London: July 2021), 4, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1018630/SPS\\_1\\_Jul\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1018630/SPS_1_Jul_2021.pdf).

32. Mark Bowden, "How Special Ops Became the Solution to Everything," *The Atlantic*, March 13, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/04/how-special-ops-became-the-solution-to-everything/618080/>; also, Stuart Parker and Ari Cicurel, "Special Ops Aren't a Substitute for Strategy," *Breaking Defense*, March 19, 2021, <https://breakingdefense.com/2021/03/ending-endless-wars-is-vital-for-special-ops/>, among many others.

33. Andrew Feickert, *U.S. Special Operations Forces: Background and Issues for Congress*, CRS Report No. RS21048 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 20, 2018), 8, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RS/RS21048/58>.

34. Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Defense Wide Budget Documentation- U.S. Special Operations Command: Direct War and Enduring Cost Appendix* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, May 2021), 4, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget\\_justification/pdfs/01\\_Operation\\_and\\_Maintenance/O\\_M\\_VOL\\_1\\_PART\\_2/SOCOM\\_DWE.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget_justification/pdfs/01_Operation_and_Maintenance/O_M_VOL_1_PART_2/SOCOM_DWE.pdf).

Figure 2: SOCOM Deployments



Source: Compiled from multiple years of SOCOM's *Direct War and Enduring Costs Appendix*, with the most recent being: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Defense Wide Budget Documentation- U.S. Special Operations Command: Direct War and Enduring Cost Appendix* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, May 2021), 3, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget\\_justification/pdfs/01\\_Operation\\_and\\_Maintenance/O\\_M\\_VOL\\_1\\_PART\\_2/SOCOM\\_DWE.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget_justification/pdfs/01_Operation_and_Maintenance/O_M_VOL_1_PART_2/SOCOM_DWE.pdf).

The current posture statement notes “nearly 5,000 SOF deployed to 62 countries” but “our deployed forces are down 15% from last year – the lowest since 2001. . . . [W]e expect to achieve a sustainable balance of deployed forces . . . and reach the DOD’s directed 1:2 deployment to dwell ratio for all SOF.” Programs such as Preservation of the Force and Family and Warrior Care have also helped ease stress.<sup>35</sup>

### **SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION OF FUNDING AND STRATEGY . . . SO FAR**

With the reduction of U.S. troop commitments to conflicts in the Middle East and a defense strategy reorientation toward great power conflict, particularly China, SOCOM faced three major challenges: reducing dependence on the controversial wartime funding account, refocusing on great power conflict and away from counterterrorism and direct-action campaigns, and maintaining its size. So far, these efforts have been successful, but size and funding are vulnerable during the strategic review.

35. Richard D. Clarke, *Posture Statement of Gen. Richard D. Clarke*, Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, 117th Cong., 2nd sess., March 25, 2021, [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Clarke\\_03-25-21.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Clarke_03-25-21.pdf). It is unclear why the posture statement cites a 15 percent reduction while the budget documents show a 41 percent reduction, as shown in Figure 2.

Table 4: SOCOM Funding

(\$ Millions)	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Operations and Maintenance	13,330	12,779	12,272
Research, Development, Testing, and Evaluation	852	813	696
Procurement	2,568	2,403	2,169
Military Construction	494	389	304
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,244</b>	<b>16,384</b>	<b>15,441</b>

Source: From FY 2021 and FY 2022 Defense-wide budget materials.<sup>36</sup>

During the wars, SOCOM was highly dependent on wartime funding, called overseas contingency operations (OCO) funding. In FY 2021, 28 percent of its total funding (\$3.7 billion) was in OCO, nearly three times the department’s rate overall (10 percent). The Biden campaign and many commentators had criticized OCO, so SOCOM’s budget was highly vulnerable.

However, as DOD’s wartime funding transitioned into the base budget, SOCOM seems to have retained adequate funding for enduring activities and not suffered in the process. Some of the funding reductions in FY 2021 and FY 2022 appear tied to wartime activities, which have declined. Other cuts resulted from Secretary Mark Esper’s *FY2021 Defense Wide Review* for the FY 2021 budget. Despite these cuts, the SOCOM posture statement does not complain about budget cuts. The FY 2023 and future budgets will be important indicators, however. The budget should stabilize as the level of overseas activities stabilizes.

During two decades of conflict in the Middle East, SOCOM focused on counterterrorism and stability operations. There was little bandwidth available to think about or prepare for the kind of great power conflicts that the National Defense Strategy has been moving toward since 2014.

However, the most recent posture statement emphasizes how SOCOM is changing its focus, noting that “nearly 40% of our deployed forces will focus on [great power conflict] requirements.” These efforts

36. Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Defense Wide Budget Documentation- U.S. Special Operations Command: Operations and Maintenance* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, May 2021), 2, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget\\_justification/pdfs/01\\_Operation\\_and\\_Maintenance/O\\_M\\_VOL\\_1\\_PART\\_1/SOCOM\\_OP-5.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget_justification/pdfs/01_Operation_and_Maintenance/O_M_VOL_1_PART_1/SOCOM_OP-5.pdf); Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Defense Wide Budget Documentation- U.S. Special Operations Command: Direct War and Enduring Cost Appendix* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, May 2021), 5, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget\\_justification/pdfs/01\\_Operation\\_and\\_Maintenance/O\\_M\\_VOL\\_1\\_PART\\_2/SOCOM\\_DWE.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget_justification/pdfs/01_Operation_and_Maintenance/O_M_VOL_1_PART_2/SOCOM_DWE.pdf); Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Defense Wide Budget Documentation- U.S. Special Operations Command: Procurement* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, May 2021), vii, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget\\_justification/pdfs/02\\_Procurement/SOCOM\\_PB2022.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget_justification/pdfs/02_Procurement/SOCOM_PB2022.pdf); Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Defense Wide Budget Documentation- U.S. Special Operations Command: Research, Development, Testing and Evaluation* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, May 2021), viii, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget\\_justification/pdfs/03\\_RDT\\_and\\_E/SOCOM\\_PB2022.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget_justification/pdfs/03_RDT_and_E/SOCOM_PB2022.pdf); Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Defense Wide Budget Documentation: Military Construction* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense), 94, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget\\_justification/pdfs/07\\_Military\\_Construction/16-Military\\_Construction\\_Defense-Wide\\_Consolidated.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget_justification/pdfs/07_Military_Construction/16-Military_Construction_Defense-Wide_Consolidated.pdf); Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Defense Wide Budget Documentation: Military Construction* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, February 2020), 103, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2021/budget\\_justification/pdfs/07\\_Military\\_Construction/19-Military\\_Construction\\_Defense-Wide\\_Consolidated.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2021/budget_justification/pdfs/07_Military_Construction/19-Military_Construction_Defense-Wide_Consolidated.pdf); and Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Defense Wide Budget Documentation: Military Construction* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, March 2019), 101, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2020/budget\\_justification/pdfs/07\\_Military\\_Construction/19-Military\\_Construction\\_Defense-Wide\\_Consolidated.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2020/budget_justification/pdfs/07_Military_Construction/19-Military_Construction_Defense-Wide_Consolidated.pdf).

emphasize competition “below the threshold of armed conflict,” such as “irregular warfare, foreign partner capacity building, clandestine activities, and information operations.”<sup>37</sup> Given the high interest in this kind of competition, SOCOM seems to be on solid ground. Nevertheless, some commentators described this as an “identity crisis,” because it is such a radical shift from what these forces have done for the last 20 years.<sup>38</sup> Unstated, perhaps because of classification, are SOCOM’s planned activities in kinetic great power conflicts.

Whether SOCOM can maintain its funding and size under the new strategy remains to be seen. The decline in deployments means that force size is no longer as critical for maintaining acceptable personnel tempo. The shift in strategy makes SOCOM a supporting player rather than the central player. During the wars in the Middle East, SOCOM capabilities were at the center of the campaigns. Although special operations forces will have a role in a conflict with China, that role will be secondary given the air and maritime characteristics of the theater.

*Whether SOCOM can maintain its funding and size under the new strategy remains to be seen. . . . The shift in strategy makes SOCOM a supporting player rather than the central player.*

#### **ETHICAL CHALLENGES OVERCOME?**

A few years ago, ethical misconduct emerged as a new and disturbing theme for SOF, raising broader questions about SOF professional attitudes and marring the reputation of SOF, especially the SEALs.<sup>39</sup> The risk with any special force is that personnel come to believe that they are not restricted by the ethical rules that bind other servicemembers.

SOCOM’s internal ethics review concluded that the force did not have a “systemic ethics problem.” However, it found that the emphasis on sustained deployments “impacted our culture in some troublesome ways.” The review recommended a variety of actions to improve leadership, discipline, and accountability.<sup>40</sup>

There is always some question when an institution investigates itself and finds that there are no fundamental problems. Nevertheless, the lack of recent incidents indicates that new policies may be working.

#### **ACQUISITION INNOVATION: LIGHT ATTACK AIRCRAFT**

In FY 2022, SOCOM requests \$2.17 billion of procurement, mostly to modify service aircraft to SOCOM configurations (e.g., MH-47Gs and MH-60s). The major SOCOM unique acquisition is the light attack aircraft program that the Air Force dropped. Called “Armed Overwatch,” the program will acquire propeller-

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37. Clarke, *Posture Statement*, 4–5.

38. Kevin Maurer, “America’s Special Operations Forces Facing an Identity Crisis,” *The Warhorse*, November 13, 2021, <https://taskandpurpose.com/analysis/americas-special-operations-force-is-facing-an-identity-crisis/>.

39. For examples of SOF abuses: Todd South, “Army Green Beret major pleads not guilty to Afghan murder charge,” *Army Times*, June 27, 2019, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/06/27/army-green-beret-major-pleads-not-guilty-to-afghan-murder-charge/>; Elliot Ackerman, “Even a War Hero Is Not Above the Law,” *New York Times*, December 17, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/17/opinion/mathew-golsteyn-trump.html>; Meghann Myers, “Two Army Green Berets plead guilty in plot to smuggle 90 pounds of cocaine from Colombia,” *Army Times*, January 4, 2019, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/01/04/two-army-green-berets-plead-guilty-in-plot-to-smuggle-90-pounds-of-cocaine-from-colombia/>; and Meghann Myers, “7th Special Forces Group soldier arrested for raping two children,” *Army Times*, April 20, 2018, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2018/04/20/7th-special-forces-group-soldier-arrested-for-raping-two-children/>.

40. SOCOM, *Comprehensive Review of SOF Culture and Ethics* (Tampa, FL: January 2020), <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/67446161/USSOCOM-Comprehensive-Ethics-Review-Report.pdf>.

driven aircraft for attack and reconnaissance that can operate from remote, austere locations. This aircraft would operate in relatively permissive environments where sophisticated jets are not needed but rapid response and forward basing are. Congress delayed the program, allowing only one aircraft in FY 2021, but SOCOM proposes to buy six in FY 2022.

In addition to operating from remote and austere locations, a key advantage is that the aircraft would be much less expensive to acquire and operate. The budget allocates about \$25 million per aircraft, with estimates of operating cost at \$500 per flying hour. By contrast, an F-35 costs about \$100 million per aircraft and \$30,000 per flight hour.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the program addresses the inconsistency of having hundred-million-dollar jet aircraft laden with sophisticated electronics and survivability features to drop bombs on insurgents armed with rifles.

The program still faces some skepticism in Congress, which is calling for additional reviews and certifications.<sup>42</sup> However, this program, if implemented, would be a radical change in the way air support is provided. The historical trend has been toward multirole jet aircraft, which can operate in both high-end and permissive environments, although at extremely high cost. It would also provide SOCOM with a new kind of capability and some independence from support by the Air Force.

#### **ORGANIZATION: ONE STEP TOWARD STATUS AS AN INDEPENDENT SERVICE, THEN PARTIALLY BACK**

Over the years, Congress has taken action to make SOF like a separate service. The commander of SOCOM has many more authorities than other combatant commanders, having influence over budgets, acquisition requirements, doctrine, promotions, and personnel assignments. The assistant secretary of defense for special operations and low-intensity conflict, or ASD(SO/LIC), has authorities like a service secretary for exercising administrative and policy control over designated forces. As a result, SOCOM operates much like a military service and unlike the other combatant commands.

In FY 2017, Congress included a requirement in the National Defense Authorization Act to “elevate special operations forces to a level on par with military departments as authorized and directed by Congress.” On November 18, 2020, acting secretary of defense Christopher Miller announced that ASD(SO/LIC) would report directly to the secretary of defense instead of through the undersecretary for policy, as had been the long-standing structure.<sup>43</sup>

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41. Overwatch procurement cost from SOCOM, *Department of Defense Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Budget Estimates, United States Special Operations Command, Defense-Wide Justification Book Volume 1 of 2* (Washington, DC: DOD, May 2021), “Armed Overwatch/Targeting,” P-1 line #52, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget\\_justification/pdfs/02\\_Procurement/SOCOM\\_PB2022.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2022/budget_justification/pdfs/02_Procurement/SOCOM_PB2022.pdf); and Department of Defense, *F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Program (F-35)* (Washington, DC: December 2019), [https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/Selected\\_Acquisition\\_Reports/FY\\_2019\\_SARS/20-F-0568\\_DOC\\_32\\_F-35\\_SAR\\_Dec\\_2019\\_Full.pdf](https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/Selected_Acquisition_Reports/FY_2019_SARS/20-F-0568_DOC_32_F-35_SAR_Dec_2019_Full.pdf). Procurement costs in FY 2021 dollars.

42. Briana Reilly, “House Panel Directs Comptroller General to Review Armed Overwatch,” *Inside Defense*, July 28, 2021, <https://insidedefense.com/daily-news/house-panel-directs-comptroller-general-review-armed-overwatch>.

43. Andrew Feickert, *U.S. Special Operations Forces: Background and Issues for Congress*, CRS Report no. RS21048 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, May 2021), 7–8, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RS/RS21048/69>.

On May 5, 2021, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin reversed this decision, returning the office to its previous organizational position. However, the office did retain some special authorities, including a direct report to the secretary on special operations’ peculiar administrative matters, and the ASD(SO/LIC) would remain a member of the senior leader forums.<sup>44</sup> The debate continues about how best to provide both operational flexibility and adequate civilian oversight, so this issue will return.<sup>45</sup>

## DOD Civilians

The number of DOD civilians will continue to grow in FY 2022. The relative strength of DOD civilian numbers occurs because civilians help readiness, most being in maintenance, base operations, and supply functions, not in headquarters (as is often believed).

Table 5: Department of Defense Civilians (Full-Time Equivalents)

	Total DOD Civilians (Excluding Foreign Indirect Hires)	Total DOD Civilians (Including Foreign Indirect Hires) <sup>46</sup>
<b>FY 2021 Enacted</b>	777,400	807,400
<b>FY 2022 Request</b>	786,000	815,500
<b>Change</b>	+ 8,600	+ 7,900

Note: Full-time equivalents rounded to the nearest hundred. Total excludes civilians under cemeterial expenses, which are funded outside the DOD budget.

Source: Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller)/Chief Financial Officer, *Defense Budget Overview: Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Request* (Washington, DC: May 2021), Figure 5.1, 5-3, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022\\_Budget\\_Request\\_Overview\\_Book.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf); and Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Operations and Maintenance Overview Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Request* (Washington, DC: DOD, 2021), 145–150, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022\\_OM\\_Overview.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022_OM_Overview.pdf).

The United States is unusual for having many civilians work in its defense establishment, a role other countries usually reserve for military personnel. DOD’s civilians perform a wide variety of support functions in intelligence, equipment maintenance, medical care, family support, base operating services, and force management. The department does this because civilians provide long-term expertise, whereas military personnel rotate frequently. Further, for all its limitations, the civilian personnel system is more flexible than the military system in that civilian personnel do not need to meet the strict standards for health, fitness, combat skills, and worldwide assignments that military personnel do.

44. Department of Defense, “Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, DoD Directive 5111.10,” DOD, May 5, 2021, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/May/05/2002635238/-1/-1/0/ASSISTANT-SECRETARY-OF-DEFENSE-FOR-SPECIAL-OPERATIONS-AND-LOW-INTENSITY-CONFLICT-CHARTER.PDF>.

45. For one opinion disagreeing with the recent change, see Betsy Woodruff Swan and Laura Seligman, “Internal Study Highlights Struggle over Control of America’s Special Operations Forces,” *Politico*, May 7, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/05/07/internal-study-defense-special-operations-forces-485825>.

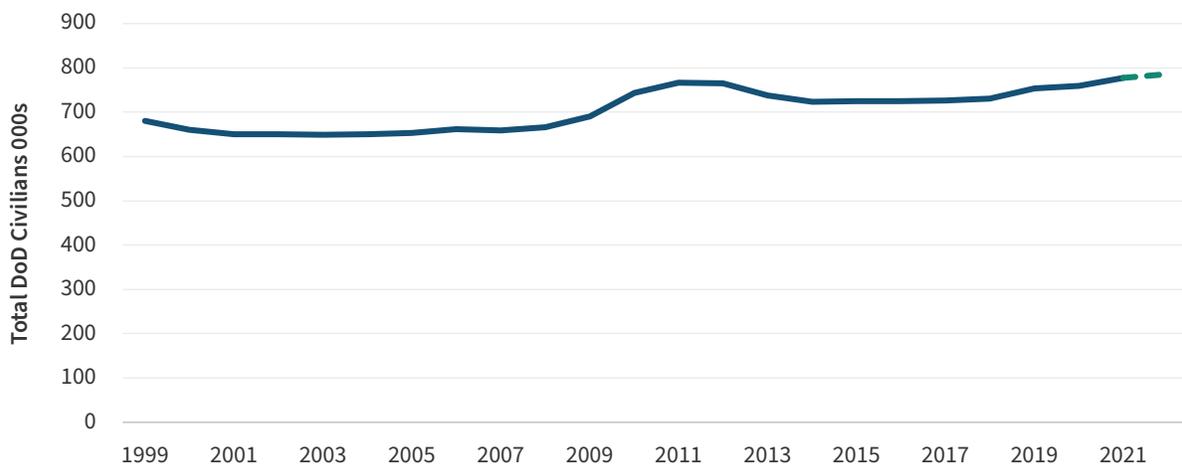
46. Full-time equivalents rounded to the nearest hundred. Total excludes civilians under cemeterial expenses, which are funded outside the DOD budget. “Foreign indirect hires” are defined as follows: “The host government serves as the legal employer of U.S. forces’ foreign nationals. Although the host government is the official legal employer of the foreign national personnel, it grants operational control to U.S. forces for the day-to-day management of such personnel.” Personnel may be paid by either the United States or the host government. “DOD Instruction 1400.25, DoD Civilian Personnel Management System: Employment of Foreign Nationals,” DOD, July 5, 2011, <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/140025/1400.25-V1231.pdf>.

Civilians are often viewed as “overhead” that staff Washington headquarters. Civilians do work mostly in support activities, but DOD considers them readiness assets since most work in supply, maintenance, and base operations. Thus, most civilians (93 percent) are outside Washington. Only about 4 percent (33,300) work in management headquarters. Most civilians (74 percent) are in the military departments, not in Defense-wide activities.<sup>47</sup>

DOD argues that “Effective and appropriate use of civilians allows the Department to focus its Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines on the tasks and functions that are truly military essential—thereby enhancing the readiness and lethality of our warfighters.”<sup>48</sup>

*Civilians are often viewed as “overhead” that staff Washington headquarters. Civilians do work mostly in support activities, but DOD considers them readiness assets since most work in supply, maintenance, and base operations.*

Figure 3: Total DOD Civilians, 1999–2022



Source: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY2022, (Green Book)* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, August 2021), Table 7-6: Department of Defense Manpower, 262–263, (Direct hire only), [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY22\\_Green\\_Book.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY22_Green_Book.pdf).

47. Data on management headquarters from Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower & Reserve Affairs, *Defense Manpower Requirements Report Fiscal Year 2020* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, April 2019), Table 2-6, Major DOD Headquarters Activities, [https://prhome.defense.gov/Portals/52/Documents/MRA\\_Docs/FINAL%20FY20%20DMRR%20Cleared%20for%20Open%20Publication.pdf?ver=2019-04-24-114457-517](https://prhome.defense.gov/Portals/52/Documents/MRA_Docs/FINAL%20FY20%20DMRR%20Cleared%20for%20Open%20Publication.pdf?ver=2019-04-24-114457-517). Data on civilians working in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area from “Federal Civilian Employment,” Office of Personnel Management, September 2017 (latest information available), <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/data-analysis-documentation/federal-employment-reports/reports-publications/federal-civilian-employment/>. Total DOD civilian employment used as denominator, including foreign indirect hires, which are entirely overseas. Data on military departments/Defense-wide activities from Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Operations and Maintenance Overview Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Request* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, August 2021), 145–150, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022\\_OM\\_Overview.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022_OM_Overview.pdf).

48. Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Defense Budget Overview*, 5-3.

The large increase in civilian numbers since 2017 occurred for two reasons:

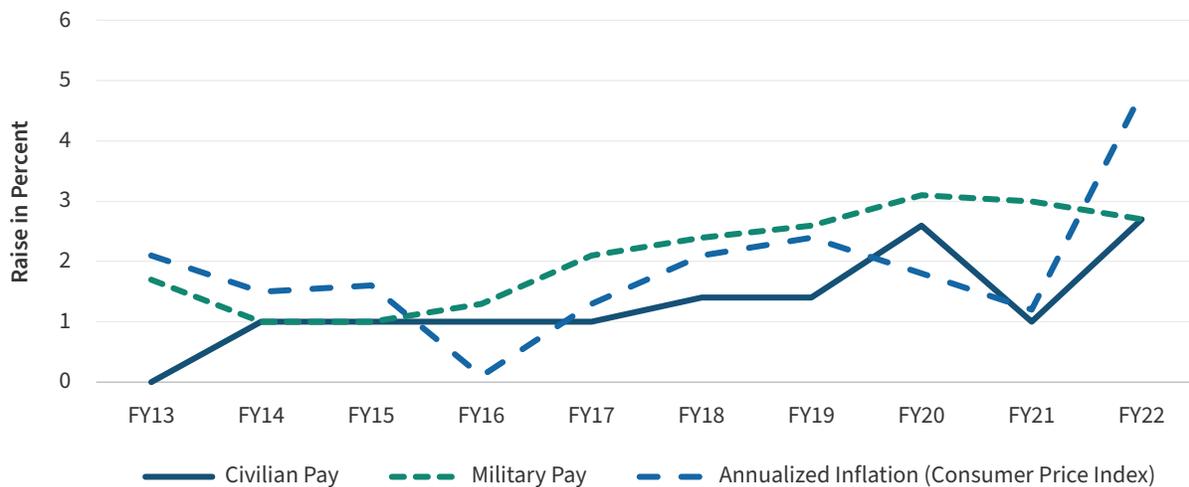
- A long-standing initiative to move functions from higher-cost, and difficult-to-recruit, military personnel to lower-cost civilian personnel; and
- Recent DOD efforts to remedy readiness shortfalls, for example, in maintenance and supply, which require more people.

This increase in civilian personnel is controversial in many quarters, particularly among Republicans. Representative Ken Calvert (R-CA), ranking member on the House Appropriations Committee defense panel, introduced a bill to cut 15 percent of DOD’s civilians. He argued that the number of civilian workers compared to military servicemembers is the highest in history and unsustainable. The bill will go nowhere given DOD and administration opposition, but it does indicate a continuing skepticism about the civilian workforce.<sup>49</sup>

### CIVILIAN PAY, BENEFITS, AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

The second key metric on how civilians are faring, after employment numbers, is the annual pay raise. For many years, parity with military pay raises was the norm, but that practice broke down in 2010. In most years since then, government civilians have received a smaller pay raise than military personnel.

Figure 4: Civilian and Military Pay Raises



Source: Office of the Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2022*; and inflation data from “Consumer Price Index, 1913-2021,” Minneapolis Federal Reserve, n.d., <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/about-us/monetary-policy/inflation-calculator/consumer-price-index-1913->.

In FY 2021, civilians received a 1.0 percent civilian pay raise (government-wide), whereas the military received a 3.0 percent increase, both levels being consistent with the Trump administration’s proposal. The Trump administration had planned that this disparity would continue into the future, with the military projected to receive pay raises of 2.6 percent in FY 2022 to FY 2025, whereas civilians would receive 2.1

49. Travis Tritten, “Too Many Civilians? Pentagon Officials and House Lawmakers Disagree,” *Military.com*, October 26, 2021, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/10/26/too-many-civilians-pentagon-officials-and-house-lawmaker-disagree.html>; and Jessie Bur, “Bill Would Cut over 100,000 DOD Jobs,” *Federal Times*, February 10, 2021, <https://www.federaltimes.com/management/2021/02/10/reintroduced-bill-would-cut-over-100000-dod-feds/>.

percent.<sup>50</sup> However, in 2022, the Biden administration proposed a 2.7 percent pay raise for both, and Congress seems likely to go along.

The Biden administration took several other actions that rescinded Trump initiatives. It restored several union privileges such as “administrative time” and office space and interpreted the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as prohibiting workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>51</sup>

A great relief to senior government civilians came with elimination of the Trump administration’s proposed “Schedule F,” which would, in effect, have made some civil service positions more like political appointments without many civil service protections.<sup>52</sup>

### **NEW PERSONNEL STRUCTURES?**

Government agencies always chafe at civil service rules, which make the hiring process slow and often unattractive to skilled or highly qualified applicants. As a result, agencies constantly propose processes and structures to get around these rules. The latest is a proposal for a civilian cyber reserve program.

Creation of such a program has bipartisan support and builds on recommendations in the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service and direction in the FY 2021 National Defense Authorization Act.<sup>53</sup> The proposal would allow private sector cyber workers to serve short-term assignments in the federal government. If implemented, this program might give DOD access to highly-skilled cyber experts without having to drive them through the cumbersome and restrictive military and civilian personnel processes. Whether this proposal will be enacted remains to be seen.<sup>54</sup>

## **Contractors**

Contractors have become a permanent element of the federal workforce. The number of service contractors seems to have stabilized at about 400,000 after several years of decline. The number of operational or battlefield contractors has also declined with the end of combat operations in Afghanistan. However, these contractors outnumber military personnel in Iraq and Syria.

Service and operational contractors remain controversial because of unresolved questions about cost and the appropriate delineation of functions. So far, the Biden administration has not shown the hostility to contractors that the Obama administration did when it entered office.

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50. Office of Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2021 (Green Book)* (Washington, DC: April 2021), 75–76, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2021/FY21\\_Green\\_Book.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2021/FY21_Green_Book.pdf).

51. Office of Management and Budget, *Budget of the U.S. Government, Fiscal Year 2022* (Washington, DC: May 28, 2021), 29–30, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/budget\\_fy22.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/budget_fy22.pdf).

52. “Executive Order on Creating Schedule F in the Federal Excepted Service,” The White House, October 21, 2020, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-creating-schedule-f-excepted-service/>.

53. National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, *Inspired to Serve: Final Report of the National Commission on Military National, and Public Service* (Washington, DC: March 2020), <https://www.volckeralliance.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Final%20Report%20-%20National%20Commission.pdf>; and U.S. Congress, Senate, *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021*, S.4049, 116th Congress, 2nd Sess., Introduced in Senate June 23, 2020, <https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/s4049/BILLS-116s4049es.pdf>.

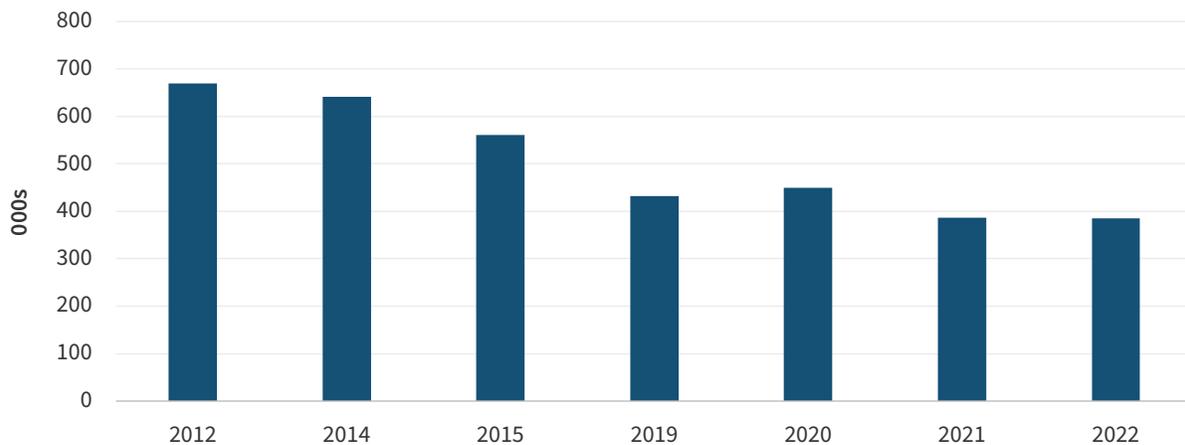
54. Miriam Baksh, “Union Supports Revised Civilian Cyber Reserve Program,” Nextgov, September 21, 2021, <https://www.nextgov.com/cybersecurity/2021/09/union-supports-revised-civilian-cyber-reserve-program/185504/>; and Niloofar Razi Howe, “The U.S. Desperately Need to Civilian Cyber Security Core,” Nextgov, July 12, 2021, <https://www.nextgov.com/ideas/2021/07/us-desperately-needs-civilian-cybersecurity-corps/183127/>.

*Contractors have become a permanent element of the federal workforce. . . . [However,] contractors remain controversial because of unresolved questions about cost and the appropriate delineation of functions.*

### SERVICE CONTRACTORS

These contractors provide services to the government and are distinct from contractors that provide products.

Figure 5: DOD Service Contractor Full-Time Equivalent (FTEs)



Note: Annual data are not entirely consistent as DOD works to improve its reporting.

Source: Data for FY 2019, FY 2020, FY 2021, and FY 2022 from Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Operations and Maintenance Overview: Contract Services*, 157; data for FY 2015, FY 2014, and FY 2012 from Defense Manpower Requirements Reports, <https://prhome.defense.gov/M-RA/Inside-M-RA/TFM/Reports/>. Data include contractors from war funding but exclude those funded in the military construction and RDT&E appropriations.

Figure 5 indicates that the number of service contractors has leveled off after declining from the wartime peak. Unfortunately, DOD’s accounting for service contractors is evolving. Recent data appears to be relatively consistent, but historical data is erratic.<sup>55</sup>

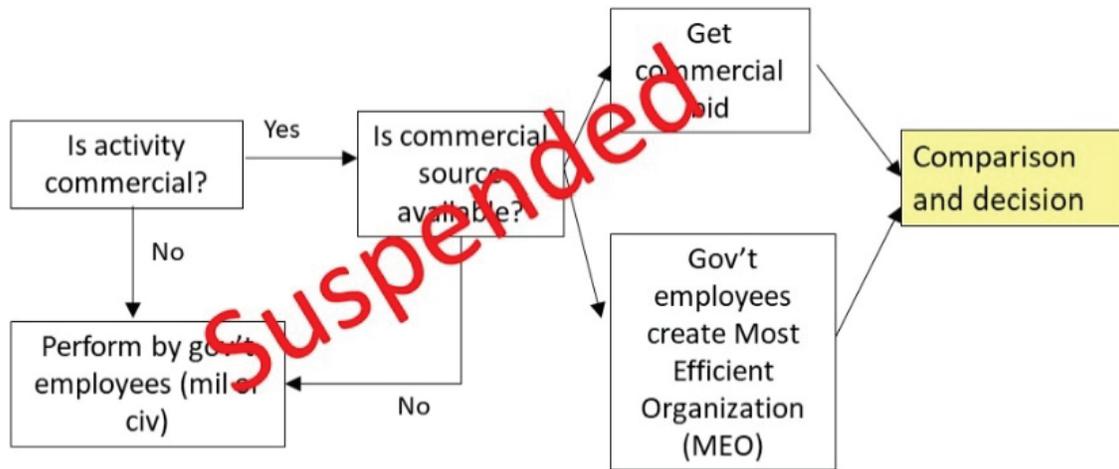
Service contractors are controversial because they raise questions about what the government should do and what the private sector should do. Many commentators also regard contractors as “the invisible government” that lacks visibility and oversight.<sup>56</sup> Government policy is bifurcated. On the one hand, government regulations (OMB Circular A-76) state that only government employees should conduct

55. Numbers for FY 2019 to FY 2022 come from an annual budget exhibit on contractor services. However, the numbers exclude service contractors in military construction, RDT&E, and classified activities. Although the reason for excluding classified activities is clear, the reason for excluding military construction and RDT&E is not. Numbers for previous fiscal years are inconsistent with numbers for later fiscal years. Numbers for FY 2012, FY 2014, and FY 2015 come from the Defense Manpower Requirements Reports for those respective years. However, they do not include classified organizations, and reporting stopped with FY 2015. These numbers appear to be inconsistent with the later numbers.

56. Paul Light, *The True Size of Government* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999).

“inherently governmental” activities. On the other hand, the same document states the government should not compete with its citizens and therefore should buy from the private sector whenever it can.<sup>57</sup>

Figure 6: Process for Converting Government Jobs to the Private Sector



Source: Derived from The White House, *OMB Circular A-76: Performance of Commercial Activities* (Washington, DC: 1999), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/circulars/A76/a076.pdf>. Created by author.

Outsourcing had been an element of the Clinton and Bush administrations’ “reinventing government” initiatives, but in 2008 to 2010, the Democratic-dominated Congress effectively shut this effort down, and then the Obama administration blocked conversions permanently. This shutdown occurred partly because of concerns about disruptions to the workforce, partly because of questions about the actual achievement of savings, and partly in response to complaints by unions anxious to protect their members’ jobs. The Obama administration believed that it would save money by bringing activities in-house. However, these savings did not materialize when all the costs of “insourcing” were considered, and the effort ended.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the balance between contractors and the federal workforce has reached a position of equilibrium—there are restrictions against moving in either direction.

The analytic problem arises from the allocation of indirect costs such as management overhead, facilities, personnel administration, security, and capital costs. Private sector prices must include all these costs if an organization is to remain in business over the long term. In government, these costs are widely distributed, so their identification and allocation are difficult.<sup>59</sup> A valid comparison requires developing fully burdened costs—that is, personnel costs with all benefits and support included. DOD and the broader community have made progress on the theoretical constructs about what costs to include, but actual numbers do not exist.

57. White House, *OMB Circular A-76: Performance of Commercial Activities* (Washington, DC: 1999), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/circulars/A76/a076.pdf>.

58. Robert Brodsky, “Pentagon Abandons Insourcing Effort: Defense Secretary Gates Says the Initiative Did Not Produce the Savings He Anticipated,” *Government Executive*, August 10, 2010, <https://www.govexec.com/defense/2010/08/pentagon-abandons-insourcing-effort/321111/>.

59. Many studies make this point, for example, Jesse Ellman et al., *DOD Workforce Cost Realism Assessment* (Washington, DC: CSIS, May 2011), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/dod-workforce-cost-realism-assessment>; and Jacque S. Gansler, William Lucyshyn, and John Rigilano, *Toward a Valid Comparison of Contractor and Government Costs* (College, Park, MD: University of Maryland, Center for Public Policy and Private Enterprise, February 2012), <https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/54492/UMD-CE-11-209.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

*The balance between contractors and the federal workforce has reached a position of equilibrium—there are restrictions against moving in either direction.*

There is broad agreement, however, that the DOD and the government as a whole do not have a clear strategy for allocating activities among the different elements of its workforce: active-duty military, reserve military, government civilians, and contractors. Organizations as diverse as the Project on Government Oversight, the Defense Business Board, and CSIS have made this point.<sup>60</sup> While there is extensive literature on the active/reserve mix, there is much less on government civilians and contractors, largely because of the lack of an assessment of the full costs of each workforce element.

**OPERATIONAL CONTRACTORS**

Operational contractor support (OCS) provides “supplies, services, and construction from commercial sources in support of combatant commander-directed operations.”<sup>61</sup> These are the contractors found on overseas battlefields who do many things that military personnel did in the past.

OCS now forms a permanent element of U.S. forces overseas, along with active-duty personnel, reservists, and government civilians.<sup>62</sup> These contractors exist worldwide in all the combatant commands. However, attention focuses on contractors in CENTCOM because they have been the most numerous and have the most data available.

As Figure 7 shows, contractor numbers in CENTCOM have tracked with the level of military personnel and operations since 2011, when reporting began.

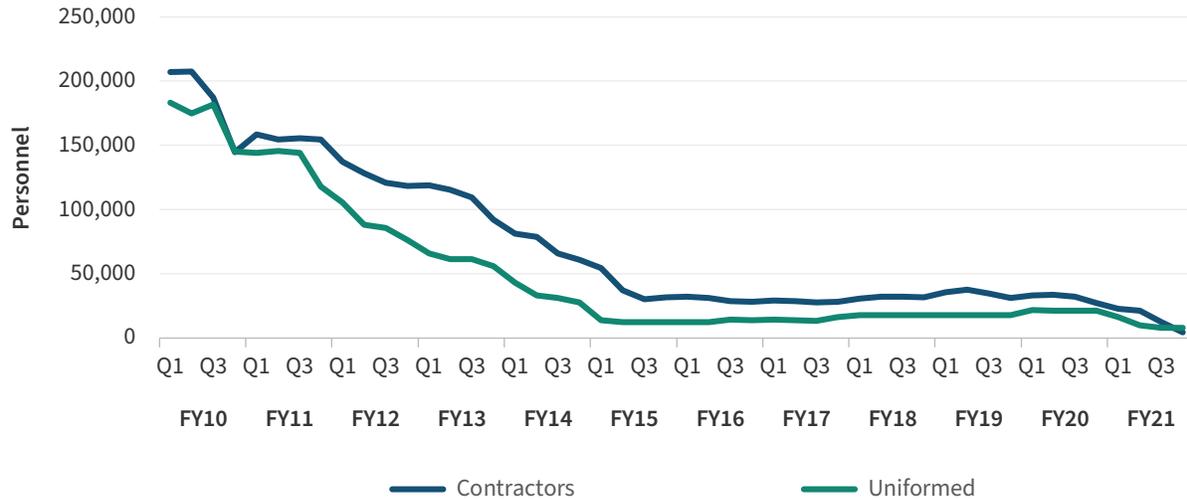
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60. Defense Business Board, *Focusing a Transition: Challenges Facing The New Administration* (Washington, DC: DOD, 2016), <http://dbb.defense.gov/Portals/35/Documents/Reports/2016/DBB%20Transition%20Report%202016%20-%2020160920.pdf>; Mark Cancian, *Reforming the Civilian Workforce: Two Carrots and Two Sticks* (Washington DC: CSIS, January 11, 2017), <https://defense360.csis.org/reforming-the-civilian-workforce-two-carrots-and-two-sticks>; and Scott Amey, “Pentagon Misses The Target When It Comes To Its Workforce,” *Defense One*, April 17, 2017, <http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2017/04/pentagon-misses-target-when-it-comes-its-workforce/137074>.

61. Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 4-10 Operational Contractor Support* (Washington: DC, Department of Defense, March 4, 2019), ix, [https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp4\\_10.pdf](https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp4_10.pdf).

62. Mark Cancian, “Contractors: The New Element of Military Force Structure,” *Parameters* 38, no. 3 (2008), <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol38/iss3/4>.

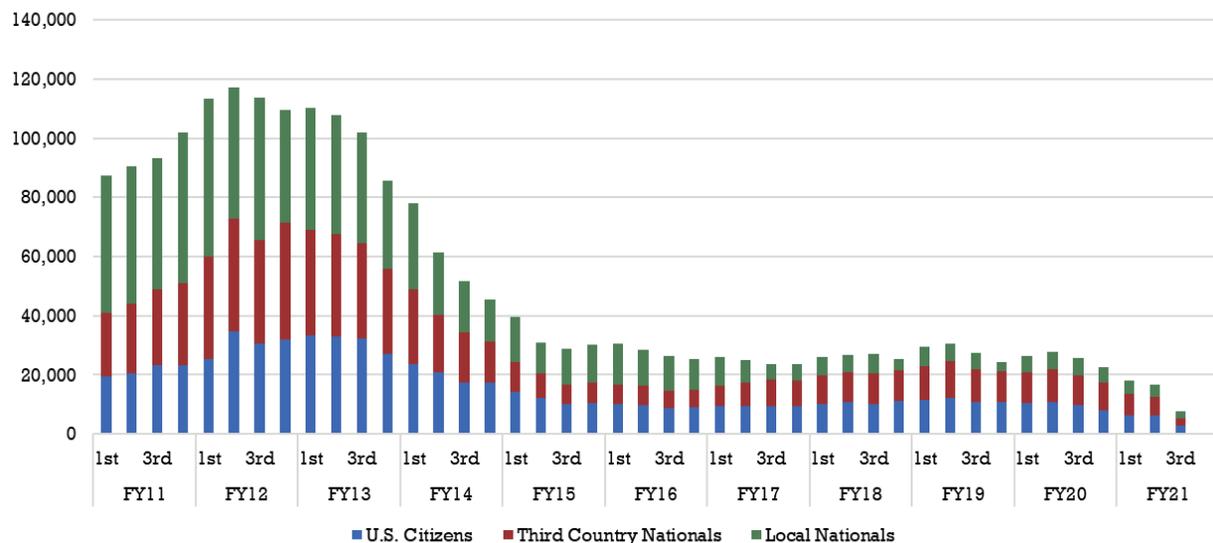
Figure 7: Military Personnel and Contractor in CENTCOM, FY 2010–FY 2021



Source: Department of Defense, *Contractor Support of U.S. Operations in the USCENTCOM Area of Responsibility* (Washington, DC: October 2021), [https://www.acq.osd.mil/log/ps/.CENTCOM\\_reports.html/FY21\\_4Q\\_5A\\_Oct2021.pdf](https://www.acq.osd.mil/log/ps/.CENTCOM_reports.html/FY21_4Q_5A_Oct2021.pdf); and military personnel from Heidi M. Peters, *Department of Defense Contractor and Troop Levels in Afghanistan and Iraq: 2007-2020*, CRS Report No. R44116 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 2021), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44116/23>.

The major change over the last year has been the end of operations in Afghanistan. As Figure 8 shows, the number of contractors in Afghanistan peaked in FY 2012 with the surge and declined after that as troop strength declined, and the U.S. mission narrowed, gradually moving away from nation building. The level remained at 20,000 to 25,000 until the final drawdown began last year.

Figure 8: Contractors in Afghanistan, FY 2011–FY 2021 (by quarter)



Source: Department of Defense, *Contractor Support of U.S. Operations in the USCENTCOM Area of Responsibility* (Washington, DC: October 2021), [https://www.acq.osd.mil/log/ps/.CENTCOM\\_reports.html/FY21\\_4Q\\_5A\\_Oct2021.pdf](https://www.acq.osd.mil/log/ps/.CENTCOM_reports.html/FY21_4Q_5A_Oct2021.pdf).

Contractor numbers in Iraq and Syria are down from a peak of 166,900 in 2008 and 2009 to 4,487 today. The ratio of military to contractors has also changed. When the United States was conducting major combat operations, the ratio was close to 1 to 1. The ratio for Iraq and Syria today is 1:1.3.<sup>63</sup>

As Table 6 shows, contractors outnumber military personnel in Iraq and Syria. Forty-five percent of operational contractors are U.S. citizens, 53 percent are third-country nationals, and the remainder are locals. The small number of local contractors reflects the difficulty in vetting candidates and the threat of adversary infiltration.

Table 6: Department of Defense Military and Contractor Personnel in CENTCOM Area of Responsibility, October 2021

	Total Military	Total Contractors	U.S. Citizens	Third-Country Nationals	Local/Host-Country Nationals
Afghanistan Only	0	0	0	0	0
Iraq/Syria Only	3,400	4,487	2,587	1,505	395
Other Locations	43,900	15,930	6,582	9,271	77
<b>AOR Total</b>	<b>47,300</b>	<b>20,417</b>	<b>9,169</b>	<b>10,776</b>	<b>472</b>

Source: Contractor data from Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Program Support), *Contractor Support of U.S. Operations in the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, October 2021), [https://www.acq.osd.mil/log/ps/.CENTCOM\\_reports.html/FY21\\_4Q\\_5A\\_Oct2021.pdf](https://www.acq.osd.mil/log/ps/.CENTCOM_reports.html/FY21_4Q_5A_Oct2021.pdf); and military personnel data from Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller)/Chief Financial Officer, *Defense Budget Overview Fiscal Year 2022*, 7-3, [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022\\_Budget\\_Request\\_Overview\\_Book.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf).

Other contractors in Iraq and Syria work for organizations outside DOD,—including the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the intelligence community—but numbers for these are no longer published.

The high proportion of contractors in CENTCOM now and during the wars reflects several factors:

- **Recent Decrease in Number of Deployed Military Personnel:** However, contractor numbers typically lag, since the contractors stay on longer to close bases and ship out equipment.
- **Troop Caps:** Because presidents often restrict the number of military personnel but typically not the number of contractors, contractors pick up some tasks formerly done by the military.
- **Limited Troop Strength:** Although the Army and Marine Corps grew during the wars, theater demands for troops far outstripped what military forces could provide.
- **Nature of the Mission:** The more stability related and less combat focused, the more the ratio tilts toward contractors, who do support and logistics functions.
- **Low Visibility:** Contractor numbers and casualties get less attention than those of servicemembers.
- **Ease of Elimination When Operations Cease:** Cutting military personnel can be traumatic and a political problem if the numbers exceed what can be accomplished through regular attrition. Contractors depart quietly when their contract ends. There has been no uproar, for example, about all the contractors who were suddenly fired when operations in Afghanistan ended.

63. Historical data from Commission on Wartime Contracting, *Transforming Wartime Contracting: Controlling Costs, Reducing Risks* (Washington, DC: August 2011), 200, 205, <http://www.acq.osd.mil/dpap/pacc/cc/cowc.html>.

As Table 7 shows, about half of contractors in Iraq and Syria perform logistics and maintenance functions, and most of the rest do base operations and administrative tasks. This has been typical in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan throughout the conflicts. Only a small number of contractors do security tasks, all likely internal. Personnel Security Detachments (PSDs), which were used in Afghanistan, are not used in Iraq and Syria. PSDs are highly sensitive because these contractors carry weapons, interact with the civilian population routinely, and have committed highly publicized abuses in the past. In general, their function is to protect high-value individuals.

*About half of contractors in Iraq and Syria perform logistics and maintenance functions, and most of the rest do base operations and administrative tasks. . . . Only a small number of contractors do security tasks.*

Table 7: Contractor Numbers in Iraq and Syria by Function, October 2021

Category	Iraq and Syria
Base	1,287
Construction	238
IT/Communications Support	247
Logistics/Maintenance	1,287
Management/Administrative	229
Medical/Dental/Social Services	18
Other	99
Security	117
Training	9
Translator/Interpreter	431
Transportation	525
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,487</b>

Source: Department of Defense, *Contractor Support of U.S. Operations in the USCENTCOM Area of Responsibility* (Washington, DC: October 2021), [https://www.acq.osd.mil/log/ps/.CENTCOM\\_reports.html/FY21\\_4Q\\_5A\\_Oct2021.pdf](https://www.acq.osd.mil/log/ps/.CENTCOM_reports.html/FY21_4Q_5A_Oct2021.pdf).

With the decline of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and Syria and stronger controls and oversight in place, contracting scandals have virtually ceased. DOD requires all contractors to conform with either U.S. or international standards for training, recruiting, and conduct. The industry is participating through its professional organizations—the Professional Services Council, the International Stability Operations Association, and the International Code of Conduct Association. The fact that no major incidents have arisen recently indicates that the oversight and controls instituted in the last decade have been effective.<sup>64</sup>

DOD recognizes that operational contractors are a permanent element of its force structure. As a result, DOD has standardized and institutionalized the contracting process that supports not just conflicts but also peacetime needs, such as natural disasters and humanitarian assistance. For example, DOD conducts operational contracting exercises, incorporates operational contract support into combatant command plans, and systematically gathers lessons learned.

The use of battlefield contractors, once a major political issue that entailed contentious congressional oversight and hearings, has thus receded into the background. Contractor visibility will fade further with the withdrawal from Afghanistan. Nevertheless,

64. Whitney Grespin, “Well Behaved Defense Contractors Seldom Make History,” *War on the Rocks*, April 21, 2016, <http://warontherocks.com/2016/04/well-behaved-defense-contractors-seldom-make-history>.

the use of contractors could flare up again as a political issue if some incident occurs or if the U.S. conducts a major force deployment.<sup>65</sup>

DOD's ongoing strategy review is unlikely to recommend more use of contractors. However, that could be the effect if DOD cuts troop numbers without reducing operational requirements.<sup>66</sup> ■

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65. For two examples of such criticism, see William D. Hartung—"The outsized influence of defense contractors has resulted in a growing militarization of American society"—in William D. Hartung, *Profits of War: Corporate Beneficiaries of the Post-9/11 Pentagon Spending Surge* (Providence, CA: Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs, September 2021), <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/papers/2021/ProfitsOfWar>; and Rachael Maddow, the MSNBC commentator, who criticized "[reliance] on a pop-up army . . . of greasy, lawless contractors," in Rachael Maddow, *Drift: The Unmooring of American Power* (New York, NY: Crown Publishing, 2012), 186–87.

66. One example of recommendations to increase the use of contractors, Richard E. Wagner, *Optimizing Defense Use of Contract Services to Mitigate the Threat of a Hollow Force* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2016).