

# 2027 CALL FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS PAPERS

MODERN WARFARE

The Academic Year (AY) 2027 JSOU Call for Special Operations Papers topics examine ways that SOF can integrate with the joint force to modernize for the future fight. Topics were derived from Commander's Decision Round Table after-action reviews and senior leader discussions, in coordination with the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Doctrine and Lessons Learned team, to ensure relevance and alignment with the USSOCOM Commander and Command Senior Enlisted Leader priorities of WIN, PEOPLE, and TRANSFORM.

## TOPICS and SUGGESTED PAPER QUESTIONS

### WIN

#### CATEGORY 1. TARGETING

##### The Role of SOF in Dynamic Targeting Networks (up to SECRET)

SOF play a critical role within dynamic targeting networks. Operating forward in contested and denied environments, SOF provide unique capabilities as sensors, intelligence collectors, target developers, decision enablers, and strike coordinators across the joint force. **This paper should examine SOF's ability to rapidly identify, validate, and track targets while integrating with conventional forces, partner nations, and emerging technologies** and demonstrate SOF's role as a key contributor to decision advantage.

Suggested paper questions:

1. What unique capabilities and advantages does SOF bring to the joint find, fix, track, target, engage, and assess (F2T2EA) cycle, and how can SOF maximize its contribution to deliberate and dynamic targeting in contested environments?
2. How can SOF develop resilient decentralized command, control, communications, computers, cyber, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeting (C5ISR) architectures that enable sensing, targeting, and decision-making when communications and networks are denied, degraded, intermittent, or disrupted?
3. How can SOF balance the increasing power, connectivity, and signature requirements of advanced technologies with the need for low-signature, self-sustaining operations in anti-access/anti-denial (A2/AD) environments?

4. How should SOF integrate with and influence joint all-domain targeting networks to accelerate the transition from sensing to decision and action?

## **CATEGORY 2. JOINT WARFIGHTING**

### **SOF as Stand-In Forces: Advancing the Joint Warfighting Concept in Contested Environments (up to SECRET)**

As the joint force adapts to strategic competition and distributed operations, the stand-in force (SIF) concept offers new opportunities and challenges for SOF. This topic examines how SOF can operate as persistent, forward-positioned forces inside contested areas to support deterrence, sensing, targeting, influence activities, and campaign objectives. **This paper should assess SOF's role within SIF concepts**, including operational design, command and control, partner force integration, logistics, survivability, and contributions to joint and combined force operations in contested environments.

Suggested paper questions:

1. How can joint SOF task forces best operationalize the integration of space, cyberspace, and electromagnetic spectrum (EMS) capabilities at the tactical edge to achieve decision advantage against peer adversaries?
2. How can SOF adapt its operational approaches across all core activities to effectively increase allied and partner defense burden-sharing in support of mutual security objectives?
3. How can SOF integrate with conventional maritime, air, land, and cyber forces?
4. What unique risks and opportunities does the SIF concept create for SOF, and what must change in SOF force design, training, education, authorities, and sustainment to make the concept viable?

## **PEOPLE**

### **CATEGORY 3. RECRUITING & RETENTION**

#### **Evaluating Recruitment Models for SOF (UNCLASS)**

SOF have traditionally recruited experienced personnel from conventional military units, but evolving missions, recruiting challenges, and demand for specialized skills have increased interest in direct-accession programs from civilian populations. **This paper should examine the advantages, disadvantages, risks, and strategic implications of "from the street" versus "from the fleet" recruiting models**, including the effects on operational effectiveness, readiness, retention, culture, leadership development, and long-term force sustainability.

Suggested paper questions:

1. How can the SOF enterprise recruit, develop, and retain personnel with the specialized technical expertise required to rapidly integrate, operate, and maintain transformative technologies in denied environments?
2. As SOF prioritizes the new competencies required for globally integrated, multi-domain joint force operations, what traditional training and education requirements or legacy skill sets should be de-prioritized or divested to optimize the force generation pipeline and preserve unit readiness?
3. How do different recruiting models affect attrition rates during selection and training and what lessons can be drawn from U.S. Army Special Forces, Navy SEALs, Marine Raiders, Air Force Special Warfare, and allied SOF organizations?
4. What attributes—not merely skills—will the future SOF operator require, and how should SOF selection, education, training, and career development evolve to develop them?

## **TRANSFORM**

### **CATEGORY 4. AUTONOMOUS WARFARE**

#### **Autonomous Warfare and the Future of Special Operations (up to SECRET)**

Rapid advances in AI, autonomous systems, machine learning, robotics, and human-machine teaming are transforming the character of warfare. From autonomous aerial and maritime systems to AI-enabled decision support and targeting, emerging technologies are changing how military forces sense, decide, and act across the battlespace. **This paper should examine how SOF use autonomous capabilities and opportunities to enhance persistence, survivability, precision, and operational reach while reducing risk to personnel in contested environments.**

Suggested paper questions:

1. How can SOF better leverage AI/machine learning, quantum computing, and autonomous systems in tactical, operational, strategic, and contested environments?
2. How can autonomous systems support stand-in forces, distributed operations, and joint warfighting concept objectives?
3. What lessons from current conflicts inform the future employment of autonomous systems?
4. How will SOF adjust its training and education to ensure its operators exploit technology rather than depend on it? How can we ensure human agility is enhanced by, rather than reliant on, technological superiority?
5. How can unconventional warfare models be adapted and applied to the modern battlefield?

**Submissions are due March 1, 2027**

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