

UNITED STATES ARMY
SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND



Army Special Operations Forces Strategy



Commander's Foreword

The 2018 National Defense Strategy was clear in its call to shake off strategic atrophy – to maintain competitive advantage against our Nation's adversaries we must evolve. As state and non-state actors actively threaten our national security objectives, it is our professional obligation to provide the Army and the Joint Force with the most ready and lethal Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) in our history.

The ARSOF Strategy charts our course to drive evolutionary changes in how we man, train, and equip our formations in the Information Age. Our priority focus areas of *People, Readiness, and Modernization* become actionable through the ends, ways, and means described in this document.

To the military and civilian professionals across our formations – this strategy challenges us to be a force for the changes we seek to implement. To succeed, we must exhibit leadership agility and adaptability; we must question our assumptions; and do all we can to empower the key to victory, our world-class Men and Women.

In today's crisis or tomorrow's war, our highly trained Men and Women must be ready to be positioned on the leading edge of the Department of Defense, capable of providing our chain of command options to erode the influence of our near peer threats, and when directed, win on any battlefield.

Handwritten signature of Francis M. Beaudette in black ink.

**Francis M. Beaudette
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army
Commanding General**

ADAPTING TO THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Great power competition means we are in conflict right now. The character of warfare is evolving, and so will we. While we remain ready and engaged against violent extremist organizations, we are also adapting to compete against Russia and China, and preparing for war as part of the joint force. We will shift from a mindset of inhabiting secure forward operating bases to one of surviving and thriving in large-scale combat operations. ARSOF will provide the Nation with **disciplined and premier problem-solvers** who are the **Army's force of choice in competition and set conditions to win in war.**

This strategy describes how the ARSOF enterprise integrates with the Army and synchronizes with U.S. Special Operations Command to fulfill our Title 10 responsibilities. It articulates the ARSOF Mission and Vision, describes how we will fight tomorrow, and provides the strategic approach required to support the Army of 2028. The ARSOF Capabilities and Programming Guidance, Force Modernization Strategy, and annual EXORDs will operationalize this strategy.

ARSOF MISSION

Our **Army Special Operations Forces Mission** is to prepare for any conflict and arm the joint force with the world's premier Army Special Operations Forces. Army Special Operations Forces are vital to the Nation through our unique capabilities— **advancing partnerships, influencing adversarial behavior, executing special operations, and responding to crisis.**

ARSOF VISION

ARSOF will be globally postured and **ready to compete, deter, and win** against adversaries across the range of military operations, anytime and anywhere, as part of a joint force. ARSOF will **leverage adaptive and innovative institutions, empowered Soldiers, and integrated units** capable of delivering unmatched special operations capabilities to provide joint force commanders options to achieve advantage over our adversaries.

HOW ARSOF FIGHTS TOMORROW

America's **adversaries avoid provoking a conventional military response** to fracture our alliances and win without fighting. They advance their interests by avoiding U.S. strengths, creating ambiguity, and weaponizing information at scale. They are **simultaneously modernizing to threaten U.S. global power projection** and our ability to conduct strategic, operational, and tactical maneuver. Four interconnected trends shape this increasingly complex and volatile security environment.

TRENDS IN THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

- **GLOBAL HYPER-CONNECTIVITY** - The rapid diffusion and rate of technological change will empower state actors, non-state actors, and individuals with competitive advantages that *favor those with the agility and creativity to quickly exploit emerging capabilities and weaponize information.*
- **ENVIRONMENTAL SHIFTS** - Drastic changes to global social patterns, the climate, and economies *will drive political instability and resource competition.* Population growth, urbanization, and littoralization reduce the physical space between people while communication technologies minimize the virtual separation between local and international groups.
- **EXPANDED COMPETITION SPACE** – Unpredictable, rapid technological change will *expand the competition space across the physical, virtual, and cognitive aspects of the environment.* Responses to these dynamics will result in redistributions of political, military, and economic power, as well as influence.
- **PROLIFERATION/ACCESS TO WMD** - The *barriers associated with acquiring WMD technology continue to diminish* due to the sharing of expertise from experts and via the internet.

ARSOF will adapt to deliver proactive and scalable military options across the entire continuum of conflict under conditions of ambiguity and hyper-lethality. Our culture will be grounded in a shift on two fronts: *brilliant at the basics* and *revolutionary*. Everything we do will emphasize survivability, lethality, and agility.

BRILLIANT AT THE BASICS: We will be ready to endure the physical and mental demands of high intensity combat and thrive in chaotic complexity. We will empower our formations to act—our Soldiers are the key to victory; operate well in denied areas; operate when technology no longer works. ARSOF will get back to the basics—comprehensive fitness, battlefield maneuver, land navigation, weapons expertise, relationships, and innovation—these basic ingredients will generate the edge required for victory.

REVOLUTIONARY: While humans will always be more important than hardware, ARSOF will integrate rapidly changing technology with game-changing concepts to revolutionize the capability pillars that form the foundation of what ARSOF provides for our Nation. This includes hardened communications and ISR platforms, weapons that can reach out and kill the enemy undetected, anti-access penetration capability, the ability to hide in plain sight, and the logistics to survive in denied environments. If technological solutions aren't mobile or empowering the individual at the point of need, we don't want them.

The entire ARSOF formation *will understand* what it will bring to future **Multi-Domain Operations:**

IN COMPETITION BELOW ARMED CONFLICT: As experts in Irregular Warfare, *ARSOF serves as the Army force of choice for dominating in competition*. ARSOF supports joint force and interagency efforts, primarily through a partnered approach, to proactively advance U.S. interests, defeat adversary attempts to expand the competitive space, and deter an escalation of violence. ARSOF *strengthens alliances and attracts new partners, counters coercion and subversion, raises the costs of adversary behavior, and sets conditions to enable a rapid transition to armed conflict*.

IN LARGE-SCALE COMBAT OPERATIONS: ARSOF's preparation of the environment facilitates the surge of war-winning forces. ARSOF's global posture *delays and degrades enemy advances* through unilateral action or with partner forces, enables the joint force to *penetrate and dis-integrate A2/AD systems*, and *opens windows of opportunity for exploitation* by decisive operations. Working in concert with joint SOF, cyber, and space forces, ARSOF strikes in the physical, virtual, and cognitive realms of the deep maneuver and deep fires areas to *create second fronts that present multiple dilemmas*. ARSOF then *contributes to consolidating strategic gains* that set conditions for sustainable outcomes and long-term deterrence.

IN HOMELAND DEFENSE: ARSOF's persistent forward presence protects the homeland and its approaches by relentlessly *disrupting and degrading VEO networks* that threaten core U.S. interests.

STRATEGIC RISK

The men and women of ARSOF are the Department of Defense's premier problem-solvers. We will take a holistic approach to risk to ensure we sharpen America's competitive edge.

Critical **risks to avoid** are those which undermine ARSOF's long-term position and performance.

- ***Reputation:*** we will earn and maintain trust in ARSOF's ability to accomplish our mission for the Nation and empower the Soldiers within our formation.
- ***Inflexibility:*** we will overcome obstacles that cause bureaucratic paralysis and failure to adapt.
- ***Hubris:*** we will play team ball with any and all partners to advance mutual interests.

Essential **risks to take** are those opportunities ARSOF must invest in.

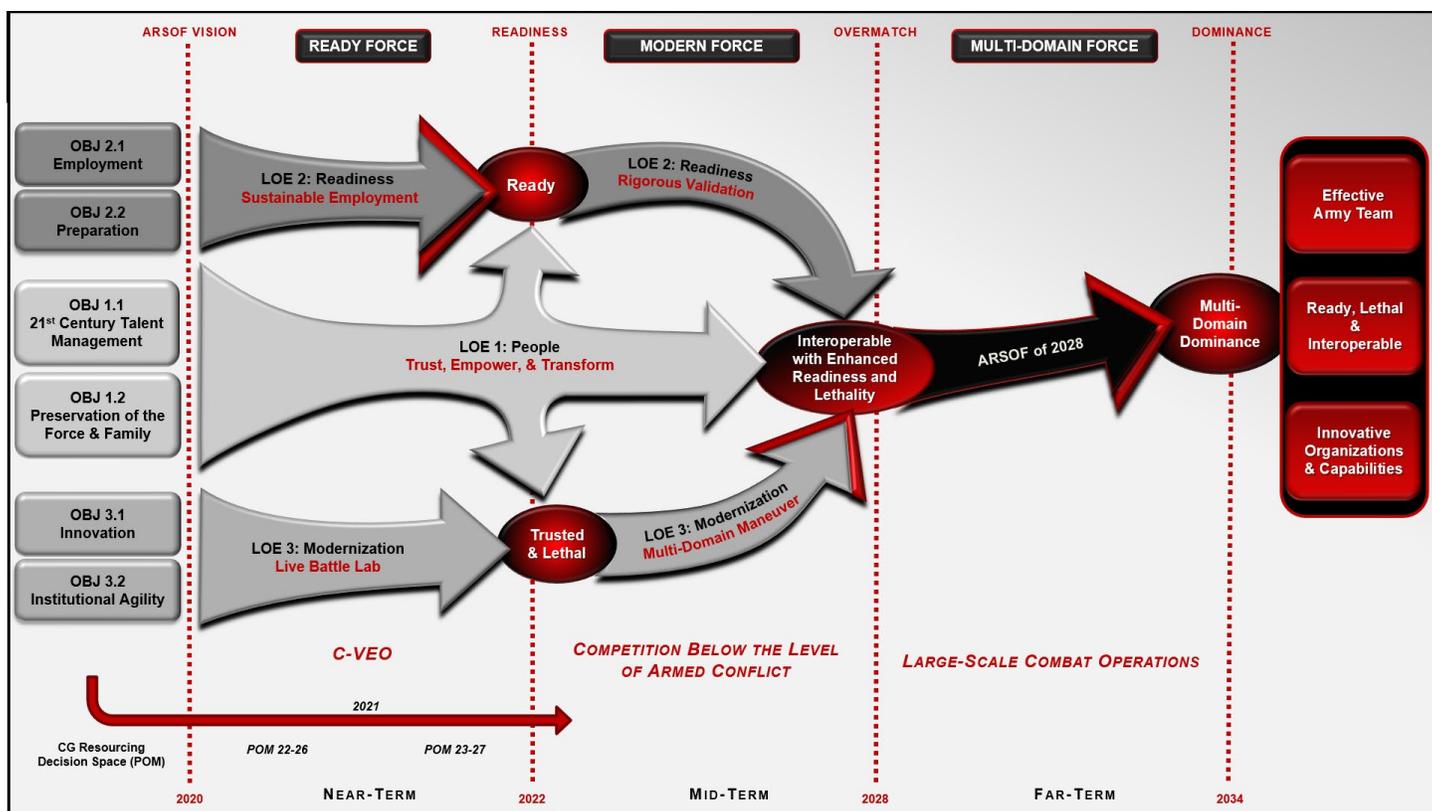
- **SOF for Life:** every effort to invest in our people as ARSOF’s most valued resource.
- **Innovation:** bold experimentation, unafraid to fail en-route to revolutionary concepts/technology.
- **Divestiture:** focus on what we must do to adapt and sustain readiness, and divest of legacy missions, force structure, and equipment.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

The ARSOF Strategy ensures that ARSOF is *integrated with the Army* and *synchronized with USSOCOM*. Three **strategic ends** will help achieve the ARSOF Vision.

- An **effective Army team with premier ARSOF and civilian capacity** to meet requirements, and world class care for Soldiers and families.
- **Ready and lethal ARSOF** competing with enhanced capabilities, optimized mission command, trusted and empowered Soldiers, and joint, interorganizational, and multinational **interoperability**.
- **Innovative ARSOF formations** operating and fighting with a competitive advantage as Irregular Warfare experts across the conflict continuum.

Three mutually supporting lines of effort (LOEs), based on the Command priority areas of focus, support these ends. The LOEs are: **People, Readiness, and Modernization**.



- **Near-Term (ARSOF Ready Force):** This phase spans FY20–FY21. It achieves near term priorities supporting the Army posture objectives of Ready and Lethal by 2022. ARSOF’s **Main Effort is LOE 2, “Readiness.”** We will sustain Counter-VEO operations while shifting focus to near-peer competition by 2022. Supporting Effort LOE 3, “Modernization,” identifies capability gaps and solutions to set conditions to achieve the ARSOF Modern Force in the mid-term.
- **Mid-Term (ARSOF Modern Force):** This phase spans FY22–FY27, where ARSOF achieves the Army’s posture objective of Ready, Lethal, and Modern by 2028. ARSOF’s **Main Effort transitions to**

LOE 3, “Modernization.” Employment will focus on competition below the level of armed conflict as we modernize for large-scale combat operations in a multi-domain fight.

- **Far-Term (ARSOF Multi-Domain Force):** ARSOF of 2028 will be globally postured and ready to compete, deter, and win against adversaries across the range of military operations, anytime and anywhere, as part of the joint force.

The following section describes the LOEs and supporting objectives. The ARSOF Strategy Annual EXORD assigns Intermediate Military Objectives (IMOs) to achieve near-term end states by FY22 and beyond.

LOE 1: PEOPLE

LOE 1: People. People are our platform and will always be our priority. We will build trust, empower our Soldiers, and accelerate into the information age by powering-down mission command to the lowest levels while fighting against micromanagement. We will capitalize on trust and professionalism as ARSOF’s primary relationship enablers.

(OBJ 1.1) 21st Century Talent Management. ARSOF will execute Enterprise-wide talent management focused on attracting and retaining the best Soldiers and civilians, leveraging their expertise throughout their entire careers and beyond. Manning is our top challenge. If you are an ARSOF Soldier or civilian, you are a recruiter for the Enterprise. We will target marketing, funding, and incentives to ensure ARSOF formations are filled to meet mission requirements. Top-tier talent will go to recruiting billets, and we will compete and innovate to attract the Nation’s best performers.

(OBJ 1.2) Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF). We will move to the next ridgeline of POTFF by enabling the holistic health of every ARSOF Soldier through innovative and multidisciplinary approaches to physical health, cognitive enhancement, as well as social and spiritual wellness. We will analyze down to the neuron-level to improve Soldiers’ ability to meet requirements and maintain high levels of resiliency throughout their careers and beyond.

LOE 2: READINESS

LOE 2: Readiness. Readiness is a healthy force that is brilliant at the basics. We will strike the right balance between preparation and execution that allows ARSOF to dominate on the objectives of our choosing. Protection of time will drive our decisions. We will maximize predictability and reduce uncertainty for our Soldiers while ensuring ARSOF is ready to out-manuever adversaries in the competition space and win in war. Readiness is our Main Effort in the Near-Term.

(OBJ 2.1) Employment. ARSOF will exercise discipline in sourcing to achieve a sustainable 1:2 deployment to dwell as we continue to execute Counter-VEO operations while shifting to compete with near-peer adversaries. We will build capacity of our Special Operations Joint Task Force headquarters to provide expeditionary campaigning in contingencies. We will expand and leverage our irregular warfare capabilities and partnership networks, and operationalize the CONUS base whenever possible to support information warfare. We will no longer deploy to redline. We must maintain a reserve for our Nation.

(OBJ 2.2) Preparation. We will rigorously train and validate our Soldiers for the most demanding war plans. ARSOF will capitalize on Combat Training Center (CTC) investments, making them the most dynamic training venues to converge capabilities as an Army team. We will approach CTCs as opportunities to task organize cross-functional teams for purpose and incorporate enablers as early as

possible, rather than simply as EXEVALs. Reality in readiness will be achieved using cyber and information warfare in all aspects of training.

LOE 3: MODERNIZATION

LOE 3: Modernization. ARSOF will be the standard for agility and adaptation as the Army transitions to the information age. Our formations excel in ground-up innovation. We will take this to the next level, using the live battle labs of combat zones and CTCs to experiment and industrialize what works. At the headquarters level, we will reduce bureaucracy and optimize our processes to deliver what the ARSOF warfighter requires at the speed of need. Modernization is the Main Effort in the Mid-Term.

(OBJ 3.1) Innovation. ARSOF will secure quick access to technology and develop revolutionary force structure through the new USASOC Force Modernization Center (UFMC). We will focus on Soldier lethality, mobility, and survivability, decreased reliance on C2 systems, and capabilities that enable us to better understand the information environment and weaponize information. “Buy, try and decide” will be our motto, using rapid acquisitions and experimentation to “out-innovate” our adversaries.

(OBJ 3.2) Institutional Agility. We will reform our systems, processes, and bureaucracy to prioritize agility and flexibility. This requires assessing what we will divest of, and building resource resiliency. We will ensure flexibility to task organize for any challenge and avoid becoming handicapped by legacy processes. We will also develop architecture for leveraging artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML) across the Enterprise to improve talent management, decision support, and operational data management.

CONCLUSION

The 2018 National Military Strategy requires the joint force to maintain the strength, agility, endurance, resilience, flexibility, and awareness to fight and win against any adversary. ARSOF’s strategic value lies in our ability to *expand the options necessary for decision-makers to wield influence and manage escalation in the competition space, and enable decisive operations by the joint force in war.*

ARSOF’S STRATEGIC VALUE

- **Expanding options to wield influence and manage escalation in the competition space**
- **Enabling decisive operations by the joint force in war**

While ARSOF must modernize to survive and thrive on the increasingly lethal multi-domain battlefields of Europe and Asia, we will remain engaged in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America—regions that provide access to adversary weakness and opportunity for strategic competition. This harsh reality requires **hard choices to optimize ARSOF’s contribution to the Nation’s defense.** To mitigate uncertain threats, ARSOF leaders will recognize and cultivate the unique talents of every ARSOF member. With our men and women, there is no problem we cannot solve.

PROTECT THE NATION

WITHOUT FEAR,

WITHOUT FAIL,

WITHOUT EQUAL.

SINE PARI



AIRBORNE

