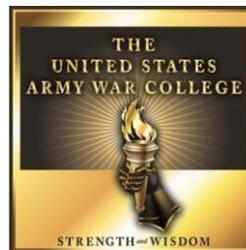


Generational Resilience in Support of the Global Special Operations Forces

by

Colonel Walter James Wiggins
United States Army



United States Army War College
Class of 2015

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT: A

Approved for Public Release
Distribution is Unlimited

This manuscript is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved--OMB No. 0704-0188

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 01-04-2015		2. REPORT TYPE STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Generational Resilience in Support of the Global Special Operations Forces				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Colonel Walter James Wiggins United States Army				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Dr. Thomas J. Williams Senior Leader Development and Resiliency				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Avenue, Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Word Count: 7,380					
14. ABSTRACT In order to sustain the Global Special Operations Forces (SOF) Network while waging a generational fight against violent extremist networks, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) must make a cultural shift toward building the long-term resilience of its most precious asset--highly trained, skilled, and experienced people. Resilience is achieved by adaptation in the face of pressure. Adaptation occurs when people who are screened, assessed and selected for SOF are given time and opportunity to learn, grow and adjust to the demands of volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environments. It is essential that SOCOM and its components invest in screening and selection processes that test for adaptability, build disciplined systems of time management to maximize black space, and leverage the preservation of the force and families programs to build a sustainable competitive advantage over future adversaries. Good leadership is critical to enabling adaptation and therefore SOCOM must invest in leadership development as the foundation upon which generational resilience is built.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS USSOCOM, POTTF, Adaptation, Screening, Assessment and Selection, Time Management, Leadership					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 34	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UU	b. ABSTRACT UU	c. THIS PAGE UU			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (w/ area code)

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

Generational Resilience in Support of the Global Special Operations Forces

by

Colonel Walter James Wiggins
United States Army

Dr. Thomas J. Williams
Senior Leader Development and Resiliency
Project Adviser

This manuscript is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the United States Government.

U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

Abstract

Title: Generational Resilience in Support of the Global Special Operations Forces

Report Date: 01 April 2015

Page Count: 34

Word Count: 7,380

Key Terms: USSOCOM, POTTF, Adaptation, Screening, Assessment and Selection, Time Management, Leadership

Classification: Unclassified

In order to sustain the Global Special Operations Forces (SOF) Network while waging a generational fight against violent extremist networks, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) must make a cultural shift toward building the long-term resilience of its most precious asset--highly trained, skilled, and experienced people. Resilience is achieved by adaptation in the face of pressure. Adaptation occurs when people who are screened, assessed and selected for SOF are given time and opportunity to learn, grow and adjust to the demands of volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environments. It is essential that SOCOM and its components invest in screening and selection processes that test for adaptability, build disciplined systems of time management to maximize black space, and leverage the preservation of the force and families programs to build a sustainable competitive advantage over future adversaries. Good leadership is critical to enabling adaptation and therefore SOCOM must invest in leadership development as the foundation upon which generational resilience is built.

Generational Resilience in Support of the Global Special Operations Forces

What is the future of the global security environment? Although it is impossible to predict with any precision the future security challenges the United States (U.S.) will face, given present trends, the threats are sure to be characterized as more volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA).¹ It is within this VUCA security threat environment that our Nation expects the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) to not only succeed, but also thrive in order to provide feasible, suitable and acceptable options for solving complex security problems to national level policy makers.

The SOCOM *Special Operations Forces (SOF) Operating Concept* identifies SOCOM and the expansion of the Global SOF Network (GSN) as the best way to provide these policy options for this VUCA world.² The GSN will consist of globally distributed small teams and individual SOF functioning as part of an interconnected web of inter-agency, coalition, industry and academic partners operating within the "Human Domain" to build partner capacity, capability and information sharing to re-assure allies, deter enemies and defeat adversaries.³ The concept emphasizes that these teams and individuals will "build and sustain enduring relationships" to "understand and influence relevant populations," and that it will require "resilient, adaptive, well-trained, and professionally educated (emphasis added)" people to realize this capability.⁴

A key assumption underlying the SOF Operating concept was expressed by Admiral William H. McRaven in his 2014 Congressional testimony. In it, Admiral McRaven emphasized that the U.S. is, and will remain for the sometime, engaged in a generational conflict with irreconcilable violent extremist networks.⁵ The trends over the last ten years indicate that his underlying assumption and concerns are well founded. Since 9/11, the number, size, reach and influence of violent extremist organizations

have expanded despite the thirteen-year global war to contain, degrade and destroy these organizations and the networks that support them.⁶

The SOCOM has increased substantially in personnel, funding and authorities to meet this threat. Since 2004 SOCOM has increased in end-strength from 47,649 to 69,700 personnel, its budget has expanded from \$6 to \$9.2 billion, and its people are deploying to over 150 countries worldwide.⁷ Additionally, SOCOM has proposed changes to the *Unified Command Plan* that would expand its Title 10 U.S.C. responsibilities to include synchronizing the planning, coordination, deployment, and, when directed, the employment of special operations forces globally against not just terrorist organizations but any threat networks.⁸ At the same time in an era of fiscal austerity, SOCOM has grown force structure by 3,400 positions in Fiscal Year 2014. The SOCOM's current Commander, General Joseph L. Votel has determined that SOCOM has the right size of force structure to meet current requirements.⁹ However, if the world is becoming more VUCA, necessitating a greater demand for SOF, then the concomitant pressure to do "more with less" will only increase and this pressure will exist beyond this present generation of SOF.

Generational Fight and Demands for Resilience

The nation's increasing dependence on SOCOM to lead a generational fight against expanding violent extremists combined with the challenge of sustaining a high-quality force makes individual resilience an absolute imperative for building and sustaining the Global SOF Network. In fact, some analysts have stated that in the future, organizational resilience may become important than an organization's individual leadership. Even if a leader's actions are "delayed, wrong, inadequate, or just missing . . . Building resilience into the organization improves [its] chances to survive the

moments of weak leadership and to get through the strategy shifts.”¹⁰ Individual resilience is so critical to future success that SOF must shift its collective mindset towards ensuring long-term, generational resilience.

Resilience has a number of definitions depending on the context. The U.S. Army defines resilience as: “a set of processes that enables good outcomes in spite of serious threats,” or in simpler terms, “the ability to persist in the face of challenges and to bounce back from adversity.”¹¹ Another definition offered by *Institute for the Future* is “the ability to adapt to changes in a socially positive way.”¹² For the purpose of assessing resilience among the force, SOCOM has defined resilience as “the ability to positively adapt to or recover from physical or psychological trauma or adversity.”¹³

These definitions indicate that two elements are key for building individual resilience: pressure and adaptation. Pressure builds from increasing demand to meet continuous threats and challenges to the individual caused by unexpected or underestimated changes in the physical, operational, and social environments in which he is expected to function. To ensure short-term survival, the individual must recognize the threat and then respond appropriately to mitigate its effects. However to build long-term resilience organizations must create the conditions through which individuals can adapt and ultimately dominate in the new environment. Pressure and adaptation must be balanced to make an organization resilient. Too much or too sudden pressure and the organization cannot adapt fast enough to remain resilient, and conversely, too much adaptation wastes resources.

The SOCOM Commander Admiral Eric T. Olson first identified the nature and extent of the pressure experienced by SOF and their families in 2010. Admiral Olson

expressed his concern that the demands of OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF), and the *Global War on Terrorism* were “fraying” the force.¹⁴ In order to properly study and understand the threat posed by this change in environment, Admiral Olsen stood up the *Pressure on the Force and Families Task Force* (POTFF-TF). Admiral McRaven continued in this effort after taking command in 2011. At that time research indicated that the operational environment was more difficult than what either SOF service members or their families expected. A primary source of that difficulty was a lack of time to adjust to the stress brought on by “perpetual absences.”¹⁵

Preservation of the Force and Families

Admiral McRaven acted promptly and decisively to address the threat. He changed the “P” in the POTFF acronym from “Pressure” to “Preservation” in an effort to emphasize the Task Force’s now *proactive effort* to build resilience into the individual SOF warrior by leveraging pre-existing service programs and tailoring or adding to them to meet the unique needs of SOF.¹⁶ The Task Force was tasked to identify and implement “valuable solutions across the SOCOM Enterprise aimed at improving the short and long-term well-being of our Special Operations Forces (SOF) warriors and their families.”¹⁷

The POTFF-TF was designed to focus on four lines of effort to address the holistic well-being of the individual; physical, mental, social and spiritual. By synchronizing the four lines of effort through an inter-disciplinary approach to resilience, SOCOM provided resources (people and money) to address problems at the unit level. The process of identifying and solving problems was meant to be iterative in nature with users at the unit level driving requirements. In his testimony before the Senate Armed

Services Committee Admiral McRaven stated that ultimately the POTFF program is not only a moral imperative for the SOCOM's warriors and families but is key and essential to ensuring the readiness of its people across the force. For this reason, he emphasized that preservation of the force and families is, "**Our number one priority here at home!**" (emphasis was included in the original source document).¹⁸ General Votel vowed to continue the emphasis on building resilience in the force through the POTFF-TF in his advance policy questions for Senate confirmation.

After nearly 13 years of sustained high operational tempo, our people need help with mending their mind, body, and spirit. The nation asks much of our Special Operators and their families, and they have always delivered. Much more will be asked of them, and, if confirmed I will seek to preserve our most precious asset – our people.¹⁹

In order to understand the needs of the force, SOCOM started an annual survey to identify and evaluate the impact of both POTFF and service-provided programs designed to "improve the short and long-term well-being of SOF warriors."²⁰ The first two surveys, commonly referred to as *Wave I* and *Wave II*, focused specifically on overall resilience of the force. Resulting data showed that as a whole, SOF service members and their spouses report a high degree of resilience.²¹ When analysts combined the number of deployments experienced over the previous ten years with aggregate scores pertaining to indicated levels of post-traumatic stress (PTS), they found that respondents "clustered" into three distinct groups. Those who had less than 3 deployments and reported low levels of PTS, those who had between 4 and 6 deployments and reported high levels of PTS, and those who had 7 or more deployments and reported low levels of PTS.²² The analyses found that those in the low deployment group and the high deployment group possessed greater levels of resilience than those in the middle group.

According to the definition of resilience proposed above, resilience requires both pressure and an ability to adapt. Assuming the respondents in the first group experienced lower levels of pressure and PTS because of low numbers of deployments, it is uncertain whether or not this group experienced enough pressure to test adaptation. That is, was the pressure high enough to validly determine true levels of resilience? Those whose results placed them in the middle group proved the least resilient presumably because the majority of this group reported experiencing a level of environmental pressure that overwhelmed their ability to adapt. The group reporting six or more deployments and low PTS were the most resilient and, therefore, proved to be highly adaptive. The analysts concluded there is an apparent “tipping point” between the first group and the third where service members who do not have, “The capacity to cope with multiple deployments and the consequent psychological reactions” are much more likely to attrite from the military.²³

To push the theoretical tipping point as far to the right as possible it is essential that SOCOM identify the key factors that caused the second group to attrite and the third group to endure. While the factors contributing to adaptation likely differ across individuals, those factors are generally categorized into three domains: Personal aptitude, time, and opportunity.

The Importance of Screening, Assessment, and Selection

Although not a perfect metric for determining personal aptitude for adaptation, selection or screening processes are valuable tools for assessing whether or not volunteers have the attributes required to adapt and maintain long-term personal resilience. Therefore, rigorous assessment and selection of SOF volunteers is not only

a foundational principle upon which competent SOF are created, but also a foundational principle for maintaining generational resilience within SOF.

If designed and executed properly, an assessment and selection process should illuminate individual character by creating adversity, forcing mistakes, and allowing the opportunity to persevere, learn and grow in wisdom and maturity. Selection offers much more than a rite of passage to evaluate physical and mental toughness. It must also involve psychological screening and a commander's board or interview that seeks to discover a candidate's ability to self-assess, learn, and adapt in the face of adversity. Specific questions must be crafted to assess the resilience of the individual and his family throughout his life and career. This requirement should not only exist for operators. Selection of support Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs) should also concentrate on psychological screening and interviews to assess personal resilience prior to assignment to SOF.

The *Wave I* and *Wave II* surveys described above provide evidence to support this notion as respondents who were pre-screened reported higher levels of resilience than those directly assigned to SOF.²⁴ Assuming that most "operators" go through assessment and selection prior to their assignment to SOF, it should come as no surprise that analysts found that, as a whole, operators were significantly more resilient than support personnel.²⁵

There are some SOF units that run an assessment and selection process for support personnel. An example is the 75th Ranger Regiment in which all personnel are volunteers and are required to pass an assessment process, to include a psychological evaluation. All officers, warrant officers and senior non-commissioned officers are

required to pass a commander's board regardless of MOS.²⁶ In addition to a rigorous selection process for operators, Special Mission Units also screen support personnel through psychological assessments and interviews prior to assignment. In future surveys it would be valuable to compare screened vs. directly assigned support personnel to determine if there is an appreciable difference in resilience between these populations.

Assessment vs. Assignment: Resilience in the Force

It is important to note that over 61% of the respondents in the *Wave II* survey were directly assigned to SOCOM and therefore did not go through a screening process.²⁷ This suggests that the survey and its resulting analyses provide more insight into the resilience levels of those individuals never formally assessed for the rigors of SOF than it does for those who were specifically assessed to either conduct or support SOF operations. Without a selection process, commanders are left guessing as to whether or not their personnel have the attributes required to be resilient in the face of a generational conflict. The question senior leaders in SOF must ask themselves is, "Are we expecting too much of people who do not have the level of adaptability required to maintain long-term resilience in a VUCA environment?" If the answer is yes, then either leaders must adjust their expectations or place greater emphasis on screening personnel, regardless of rank or MOS to ensure they have the minimal attributes needed for long-term resilience in SOF.

Thorough screening, assessment, and selection provide information to the organization on potential strengths and weaknesses affecting a candidate's long-term resilience. Once candidates are selected, long-term resilience is cultivated with the

organization places value and emphasis in both time management and opportunities for personal growth and professional excellence.

Personnel Operations Tempo and Resilience

High personnel tempo (PERSTEMPO) is frequently raised as the most critical factor affecting individual resilience. When respondents were asked, “What are the Top 3 things that SOCOM can do to help preserve the force?” more respondents listed “controlling PERSTEMPO” than any other category.²⁸ The PERSTEMPO is a congressionally mandated program directed by the Office of the Secretary of Defense. It directs the services to track off-duty time individual service members spend away from his/her primary residence for the purpose of carrying out official duties.²⁹ Simply put, individual PERSTEMPO accumulates anytime a service member is not sleeping in his/her own bed because of deployments, training, or temporary duty (TDY). Dwell time, or time between deployments, is also tracked by the respective services to ensure that “no individual service member, irrespective of their unit, is subjected to repeated combat tours, disproportionate deployments or extended periods of time away from their home stations.”³⁰

In 2014 Admiral McRaven instituted a PERSTEMPO policy intended to reduce overall PERSTEMPO while at the same time meeting mission requirements. The policy mandates that service members spend a minimum of 250-days at home, “head on the pillow” within a span of 730 days (two years). In order for any commander to break the PERSTEMPO policy for any individual, an exception from Commander, SOCOM is required.³¹ To assist commanders in this effort, SOCOM began a *Program of Record* to develop, institute, and maintain a computerized system of monitoring PERSTEMPO for every member of SOCOM, called *Defense Ready*. The system, which is installed at all

commands down to the O-5 level and run by a contracted civilian, gives commanders immediate and accurate data on individual PERSTEMPO rates.³²

The policy itself is very liberal with respect to PERSTEMPO ratios and gives the operational commander tremendous flexibility to deploy and train personnel to meet mission requirements.³³ When assessing the effects of this directive, the overall results indicate that it achieved its intended goal with a drop in PERSTEMPO across all SOCOM components when compared to baseline numbers. Average time away from home in a 24-month period in 2012 was 10.76 months and dropped to 8.75 months in 2013.³⁴ However, averages across the SOCOM enterprise do little to reflect an accurate picture of true PERSTEMPO at the individual and unit level where deployment and training demands differ across locations, missions and individual MOS's.

Family Resilience: Warrior's Time Away from the Family

In a 2003 white paper entitled "The Army Family," Army Chief of Staff Erik K. Shinseki wrote that actual time spent away from home is just one of the factors that are detrimental to building strong and resilient soldiers. The paper notes that, "Contrary to popular opinion, the inclination to reenlist does not go down as days away from home go up nor does family support for such reenlistment."³⁵ Rather the Army found that, "back-to-back deployments without sufficient recovery time, poorly managed deployments attended by confusion and lack of notification, or circumstances wherein family support is perceived to have been ignored" was much more a factor in hurting retention rates than time spent away from home.³⁶

These factors also seem to hold true for SOCOM. Service members need enough dwell time between deployments to properly recover physically, socially, mentally and spiritually. Too often, time between deployments is filled with training,

exercises and TDY trips that prevent sufficient recovery but remain well within the PERSTEMPO policy for overall dwell time. Additionally, lack of predictability is a significant factor affecting their ability to reconnect with family and friends.³⁷ Inability to make sufficient plans for leave or other personal matters because of uncertainty within training and personnel schedules makes spouses especially feel under-appreciated or ignored.

Although unforeseen contingencies and requirements also contribute to the lack of quality dwell time, survey respondents indicate that poor time management is often a greater problem. Poor time management while at home station leads to uncertainty during the times in which the variables that contribute to a short- and mid-range planning are controllable. From the perspective of those serving in small units or in support positions, uncertainty and frequent changes on the calendar while in home station are too often construed as resulting from either incompetent or uncaring leadership. This negative perception is compounded when commanders do not take the time to personally involve themselves in the family readiness business (i.e., to hear grievances, communicate with family members, and take an active role in solving problems).

Poor time management includes time spent on tasks that do not relate, either directly or indirectly, to mission accomplishment. As one respondent noted,

Our time at home should be thoroughly analyzed to ensure that we are not breaking ourselves needlessly. Often times I felt that we had a plethora of tasks back home that were simply worthless. I was never sure what was more important, staying until 8 PM to do some sort of mundane task or to attempt to balance my personal life.³⁸

Mandatory “Navy Knowledge Online” or *Army Regulation 350-1* requirements such as suicide prevention, Information Assurance and Anti-Terrorism/Force Protection, that are

created to educate and train the entire Department of Defense to the lowest common denominator, are often perceived as a waste of valuable time better spent training or at home. Too often, they become a “check the block” drill rather than a beneficial use of time. Leaders mitigate these perceptions when they invest time and effort to communicate to their subordinates the strategic context behind the requirement while modifying the content to suit the audience. When leaders communicate to superiors the reason and extent of the modification it brings attention to the problem while also providing a solution. All of this takes time and effort, but it communicates directly to people that their time is valued and important.

Global SOF Network and Force Generation Priorities

For SOF operating in a VUCA world, mission requirements are not likely to decrease as authorities, budgets and requirements for maintaining the Global SOF Network increase. But in order to sustain the force for a generational conflict, the component commands must better prioritize force generation planning and execution. SOCOM must transition from a demand focused, pull system to a supply-based push system of force generation that will help drive prioritization of missions across the enterprise. This is not a problem that is unique to SOCOM; all the services are wrestling with post-OIF/OEF force generation models in the midst of a drawdown of force structure.³⁹ Each SOCOM component command will have to develop force generation models that work according to its unique requirements.

Determining the right model will require an iterative process. Even the best models will have flaws due to the dynamic nature of the VUCA world and the inherent capabilities of SOF to operate in that environment. However, no matter which force generation model or models are adopted, SOCOM will have to assume short-term

operational risk in some missions within GCCs in order to maintain the resilience of the force. If risk is not assumed by SOCOM, then risk is successively pushed down to lower levels until our most junior commanders and leaders are forced to make a choice between growing mission requirements and long-term resilience.

Force generation models aside, the responsibility for time management is a shared responsibility throughout the chain of command. The more volatile and uncertain the world becomes, the more valued, critical, and important disciplined command oversight of training and time management become. Disciplined battle-rhythm events for reviewing short and long-term training calendars is up to unit-level commanders and staffs to enforce. Staffs can develop good systems and processes to manage training, but only commander involvement throughout the chain of command ensures there is enough “black space” on the calendar and that some modicum of predictability is built within the force generation process.⁴⁰ This may mean that commanders will need to carefully manage their own goals with respect to how much they can push their organization to accomplish in the course of a two-year command and accepting short-term risk for the sake of long-term resilience.

POTFF to Strengthen the Force: Effectiveness and Acceptability

Starting with the creation of the POTFF-TF, SOCOM senior leaders have invested considerable time, energy, and resources into developing programs that provide an important opportunity for service members to improve adaptability and resilience. Although the *Wave II* survey showed some improvement in the overall level of awareness of the POTFF-TF and the expertise it offers, there remains a critical gap in communication between the command and the force as a whole.⁴¹ Importantly, these results showed that 54% of respondents were unaware of POTFF-TF, its programs and

its available expertise. Additionally, of those who were aware, less than half (23% of total respondents) said that the resources were only somewhat beneficial or not beneficial at all.⁴² The authors of the survey indicate that this overall lack of awareness contributed to the programs' lack of effectiveness and is best attributed to the fact that the nascent POTFF enterprise contract and resulting staff hiring were still underway during the period of the survey. They concluded that a robust messaging campaign is needed to help inform the force of the POTFF-TF assets available to them.⁴³

However, another possibility is that the overall message is not resonating with the force. Instead of increasing the frequency and the volume of the message with respect to programs, perhaps it is the message itself needs modification. Rather than focusing on what is ailing the force, SOCOM must shift its message toward investing in people for the purpose of maintaining a competitive advantage over our adversaries. By making that investment leaders not only improve near-term readiness, but also they provide an avenue to drive adaptation through which the force can maintain this competitive advantage well into the future. Additionally, SOCOM's service members are much more likely to use a program that helps them realize and maintain a competitive advantage. To illustrate this point, one needs to look no further than the Human Performance Program (HPP) within POTFF.

Although survey results ranked HPP at eighth out of ten programs on the hierarchy of needs list in 2012, HPP climbed to third behind medical care and childcare by 2014.⁴⁴ Many of the comments from respondents to the 2013 survey focused on the positive impact of the United States Army Special Operations Command's (USASOC's) Tactical Human Optimization Rapid Rehabilitation and Reconditioning (THOR3), Naval

Special Warfare Command's Tactical Athlete Program, and Marine Special Operations Command's (MARSOC's) Performance and Resilience. Designed primarily with the operator in mind, these programs provide direct and tangible benefits to operator effectiveness in the everyday execution of their primary responsibilities. Just like a high-level sports team, the physical strength and conditioning offered by these programs are designed specifically to maintain the operator's edge over an adversary on the battlefield.

It is essential to keep in mind that the effectiveness of the program is largely dependent upon *how* the program is developed. Those programs developed and controlled at the tactical level give the user direct input into the final product. That is, tailoring the program to the particular needs of the unit give it a much better chance of success in SOF. In this way, locus of control is pushed down as far as is possible. In the case of the THOR3, the program is largely decentralized with human performance teams attached to groups and detached battalions under the supervision of the unit S-3. A RAND study on the THOR3 program found that the decentralized approach is beneficial "if it can be adopted without significant loss of technical functionality."⁴⁵ By pushing down the locus of control, USASOC also fosters a culture that drives innovation and is very much in line with what service members expect when they join Special Operations.⁴⁶

Similarly, if the psychological, social and spiritual pillars of the POTFF program demonstrate that they bring a competitive advantage to the warfighter, then service members are more likely to leverage these programs. For example, the psychological pillar is largely centered on "behavioral health" which implies that the only reason to

seek out a behavioral health specialist is when there is a behavior problem. While there are some individuals and families who do have particular psychological, social or spiritual challenges brought on by combat, lengthy separation, or other job and personal stress, the *Wave I* and *II* surveys revealed the overwhelming majority of SOF service members do not. Therefore, although having behavior health specialists available at the unit level is critical for those who recognize they have a problem and are willing to seek help, SOCOM should focus on the potential capability advantages of embedding operational and sports psychologists at the unit level. Just as embedded psychologists provide professional sports teams with a cognitive competitive advantage, so too can commanders use them to provide a competitive advantage at the tactical level within SOF.⁴⁷ The SOF personnel require “strength of mind” to maintain the mental agility to anticipate and react positively in environments full of uncertainty, chance and friction.⁴⁸ Interacting with a psychologist should be a routine event for SOF, not for the sake of diagnosing problems in an office, but rather for the sake of making service members better thinkers and problem solvers out on the range, in the planning bays, in the field, and forward in the GSN. The secondary benefit of a routine, positive and proactive relationship between the psychologist and unit personnel is that stigma associated with seeing the psychologist for problems when they do arise likely diminishes.

The same is true of Chaplain-led programs. Although overall usage of these programs is low, those service members who did participate in Chaplain sponsored marriage retreats, family retreats, father-son and father-daughter events found them very beneficial.⁴⁹ It is likely that these respondents already invest in family relationships and therefore value the opportunity to invest command sponsored time and resources

into making them even better spouses and parents. However, there is an element inherent in programs purposed to build social and spiritual resilience that strengthens SOF's competitive advantage through adaptation.

Social and spiritual resilience programs help to build the critical competencies needed for robust emotional intelligence, an essential quality of effective leadership and arguably a critical skill required for building an effective Global SOF Network. Research shows that these critical competencies are not innate; they are learned through training and practice.⁵⁰ Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management are skills taught, practiced and honed in the controlled environment of a marriage retreat, family retreat, or a father-child adventure weekend.⁵¹ When chaplains sponsor events with operational effectiveness in mind, it shifts the perspective of participants from a reactive or preventive mindset to a positive, pro-active and strengthening mindset. When service members realize that these events are designed to improve their operational effectiveness, they will be more likely to participate. The second order effect of this shift is that SOF marriages and families are strengthened and become more adaptive in the midst of environmental pressure.

The SOCOM fought for and recently gained the authority to spend up to \$5 million annually on three family support pilot programs. This presents an opportunity that commanders need to leverage through their unit chaplains. The three categories of pilot programs are Family Orientation, Information, and Referrals; Pre and Post-Deployment Preparation, Reintegration and Decompression; and Family Relational Enhancement.⁵² Each category is broad enough to allow commanders ample room to, innovate and discover the best way in which to invest their service members and

families. Examples include pre and post-deployment family retreats using venues such as *The Great Wolf Lodge*, “Becoming a Man” father-son adventure weekends, and Father-daughter retreats using privately run and operated adventure camps.⁵³ Each of these programs are highly successful and valued by service members because the command provides the time and resources through which they can immerse themselves in being the very best possible spouse and parent.

When considering future opportunities for promoting resilience in the force, it is critical to keep in mind that the vast majority of SOF are not physically, mentally, socially, or spiritually broken. Only 7% of respondents to the 2013 survey reported high levels of post-traumatic stress (PTS) and 86% of reported low PTS.⁵⁴ Additionally 93.3% of service members and 91.8% of spouses reported low levels of depression.⁵⁵ Yet, for many in the force the message of “preservation” implies “vulnerability.” The fact is that SOCOM service members and families are highly resilient and many service members resent the inference that they are not. When asked about the most important thing necessary to preserve the force from the 2013 survey, one respondent stated, “Stop assuming everyone is broken. Expectations lead behavior.”⁵⁶ Yet another commented, “Stop reminding me that the force needs ‘preservation.’”⁵⁷ As Dr. Carroll Green, the command psychologist for MARSOC stated,

The un-sensational--and therefore unspoken--truth is that seventy-five to ninety-five percent of our warriors and their families experience long-term growth, family pride, enhanced self-esteem, strength development from stress inoculation and many other benefits from their service, acceptance of risk and personal sacrifices.⁵⁸

Programs that seek to build upon the fact that SOF are comprised of resilient people who want to grow personally and excel professionally will resonate with the force.

Whether conducting a proper Olympic lift, optimizing cognitive performance, re-

connecting with a spouse, camping with a child, attending a leadership seminar, earning a master's degree, or interning with a top CEO, direct investments in people provides a competitive edge and builds generational resilience.⁵⁹

Develop Leaders; Not Programs

Selection, time management and promoting opportunities for building physical, mental, social and spiritual resilience are essential to maximizing adaptation and thus building generational resilience in a VUCA environment. One must admit that not all SOF are screened or selected for long-term resilience, nor is time fully optimized. In addition, no program, regardless of how it is imagined, developed, communicated and executed, meets the needs of every member of a diverse command like SOCOM. Yet, when emphasized and synchronized through good leadership, these three aspects can have an appreciable impact in leveraging the inherent adaptive strength of SOCOM service members to build long-term generational resilience.

Good leaders are required to develop and critically evaluate systems of screening, assessment and selection to identify people who are adaptive in their careers and lives. Good leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of their people, how well they adapt in the face of pressure, and manage time and demands in order to effectively balance PERSTEMPO with mission requirements. Good leaders not only take advantage of the opportunities afforded by POTFF programs for their units and themselves, they are essential to encouraging innovative, bottom-up solutions for leveraging POTFF to sustain a competitive advantage over our future adversaries. Developing leaders of high moral character who are committed to building generational resilience within SOF will make the difference in sustaining a competitive advantage over our adversaries. Conversely, dissonant leaders who are tuned-out to the needs of

their subordinates will erode SOCOMs competitive advantage over time.⁶⁰ As one respondent to the 2013 survey stated, “Develop leaders, not programs. Leaders change and preserve units, not programs.”⁶¹

Therefore, it is critical that SOCOM make leader development the cornerstone of its effort to promote generational resilience in the force. Commanders at all levels need to create “deliberate, continuous, sequential and progressive” plans for leader development that are grounded in SOCOM and service organizational values.⁶² Leader development to achieve generational resilience needs to be prominently featured during the unit Quarterly Training Briefs and serve as a key component of individual counseling and mentoring. Command climate surveys, 360-degree evaluations, and regular performance and career counseling are essential feedback mechanisms that assist leaders in creating a climate that is aligned with a culture that values long-term resilience.

Although SOCOM does possess exceptional leaders throughout the force, the POTFF surveys indicate that leader development is too often assumed rather than enacted. Unbalanced and even “toxic” leadership was often cited among survey respondents as a current issue affecting the resilience of the force.⁶³ This feedback should cause SOF leaders at all levels to think critically about their own programs and systems of leader development. Arguably, if the human being is the cornerstone of SOF capability then selecting, developing and promoting leaders who possess a generational mindset toward resilience is critical to ensuring SOF’s qualitative edge over a generation.

Conclusions

Admiral McRaven proclaimed during his change of command speech last summer that, “This is the golden age of SOF.”⁶⁴ Clearly SOF is increasingly the cornerstone of the U.S. strategy to counter a generational conflict. The pressure that is brought about through our Nation’s increasing dependence on SOF to operate in and thrive within a VUCA world is not likely to subside even while budgets and force structure limitations persist. In order to extend the “golden age of SOF” and maintain generational over-match against any and all potential adversaries in the VUCA world, SOCOM will increasingly depend upon the resilience of its highly trained professionals.

The SOF now has an opportunity to take advantage of its “golden age” to reshape its culture toward building long-term resilience through adaptation in the face of pressure. The key elements to promoting adaptation are: ensuring SOF are screened, assessed and selected to have the personal attributes and experiences that demonstrate adaptation and resilience; developing force generation systems and methods of time management that will aid in maximizing limited time, promote predictability and assist commanders in evaluating risk to short-term mission requirements versus long-term individual resilience; and, maximizing opportunities to build adaptability through programs that are focused on not preserving the force in a “protective sense,” but rather growing individuals with skills that will maintain SOF’s competitive advantage over future adversaries.

The key elements for developing adaptation do not, in and of themselves, ensure resilience. However, when taken together and empowered by leaders who possess a generational mindset toward resilience, the elements work in concert to extend the “tipping point” in which individual members of SOF choose to either endure for the long-

term fight or attrite from the military. If SOCOM is to extend the “golden age of SOF” for a generation and beyond, then it is essential that building resilience extends beyond any particular programs to preserve the force and families. That is best achieved by adopting a generational mindset within the force that seeks to maximize adaptation in order to dominate adversaries while thriving in a VUCA world.

Endnotes

¹ Bob Johansen, *Leaders Make the Future: Ten New Leadership Skills for an Uncertain World*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koeler Publishers, 2012), 2.

² United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command Special Operations Forces Operating Concept* (McDill AFB, FL: USSOCOM, May 2013).

³ *Ibid.*, 3, 5. The Human Domain as defined in the USSOCOM *SOF Operating Concept* is “the totality of the physical, cultural and social environments that influence human behavior to the extent that success of any military operation of campaign depends on the application of unique capabilities that are designed to fight and win population-centric conflicts.”

⁴ *Ibid.*, ii.

⁵ William H. McRaven, *Posture Statement of Admiral William H. McRaven, USN, Commander, United States Special Operations Command*, Posture Statement presented to the 113th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Navy, March 11, 2014), http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/McRaven_03-11-14.pdf (accessed March 31, 2015), 2.

⁶ Gary LaFree and Erin Miller Michael Jensen, "Global Terrorism Data Show That the Reach of Terrorism Is Expanding," *The Washington Post Online*, August 15, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/08/15/global-terrorism-data-show-that-the-reach-of-terrorism-is-expanding/> (accessed February 12, 2015).

⁷ Lauren R. Baker and Ralph T. Buckles, *A Comparative Analysis of Congressional Budget Adjustments for U.S. Special Operations Command* (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, December 2011), 13-14, 16; USSOCOM, *FY 2015 Budget Highlights* (MacDill Air Force Base, FL: USSOCOM, 2014), 5-6; Nick Turse, "The Golden Age of Black Ops," *Middle East Online*, January 21, 2015, <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=69798> (accessed January 26, 2015).

⁸ Andrew Freikert, *U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) Background and Issues for Congress* (Washington DC: U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, May 8, 2014), 2.

⁹ Joseph L. Votel, *Advanced Questions for Lieutenant General Joseph L. Votel, USA: Nominee for Commander, United States Special Operations Command* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2014), 8, http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Votel_07-10-14.pdf (accessed 21 November 2014).

¹⁰ Liisa Valikangas, *The Resilient Organization: How Adaptive Cultures Strive When Strategy Fails* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010), 91.

¹¹ Karen J. Reivich, Martin E. P. Seligman, and Sharon McBride, "Master Resilience Training in the U.S. Army," *American Psychologist* 66, no. 1 (January 2011): 25.

¹² Institute For The Future, "Households: The Resilient Interface," http://www.iff.org/uploads/media/IFTF_TYF_2011_Households_02.pdf (accessed January 16, 2015).

¹³ Rob Neff and Ryan Caserta, *Preservation of the Force and Families Needs Assessment Results 2012* (MacDill AFB, FL: USSOCOM, January 23, 2013), 24.

¹⁴ Donna Miles, "Defense.Gov News Article: SOCOM Strives to Boost Operators' Resilience, Readiness," June 14, 2014, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=120289> (accessed 18 November 2014).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ USSOCOM *Preservation of the Force and Family Home Page*, <http://www.socom.mil/POTFF/default.aspx> (accessed January 2, 2015).

¹⁸ McRaven, *Posture Statement of Admiral William H. McRaven*, 9.

¹⁹ Votel, *Advanced Questions for Lieutenant General Joseph L. Votel*, 5.

²⁰ Ryan Caserta and Rob Neff, *USSOCOM Enterprise Report: Preservation of the Force and Families Wave II Needs Assessment* (MacDill AFB, FL: USSOCOM, 2014), 2.

Although widely distributed, the first two surveys in 2012 and 2013 were answered by about one-sixth of the force (10,270 service members and 1,415 spouses in the 2012 survey and 10,686 service members and 1,839 spouses in the 2013 survey). According to the authors of the 2014 USSOCOM enterprise report, the survey size is sufficient enough to, "ensure a high degree of confidence in its findings." See Neff and Caserta, *Preservation of the Force*, 5.

²¹ Neff and Caserta, *Preservation of the Force*, 24.

²² Ibid., 25.

²³ Ibid., 26.

²⁴ Ibid., 30.

²⁵ Caserta and Neff, *USSOCOM Enterprise Report*, 11.

Operators are defined by the individual service component commands and include a wide variety of occupational specialties across SOCOM. These include: Special Forces, Infantry (Ranger), Civil Affairs, PSYOPS, SEALs, SEAL Delivery Vehicle (SDV) crew, Special Warfare Combat Craft (SWCC) crew, Pararescue (PJ), Combat Controllers, Special Operations air crews (to include Remotely Piloted Aircraft pilots and sensor operators), Special Operations weathermen, and Marine Special Skills. Ryan Caserta, email message to author, March 16, 2015.

²⁶ U.S. Department of the Army, "Ranger Assessment & Selection Program: The Making of an Army Ranger," <http://www.goarmy.com/ranger/training/rasp.html> (accessed January 19, 2015).

²⁷ Caserta and Neff, *USSOCOM Enterprise Report*, 5.

²⁸ Neff and Caserta, *Preservation of the Force*, 58.

²⁹ U.S. Army Human Resources Command, "Personnel Tempo," <https://www.hrc.army.mil/TAGD/Personnel%20Tempo> (accessed February 13, 2014).

³⁰ Edward J. Filiberti, *Generating Military Capabilities* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2015), 2.

³¹ USSOCOM Office of Communications, *Command Talking Points - Issue 1.0* (MacDill AFB, FL: USSOCOM, November 12, 2014), 24.

³² Ibid.

³³ To further clarify the 1:1/2 dwell ratio, in order to break the PERSTEMPO policy a service member would be home for less than one-half a month for every month he is deployed over a two-year period.

³⁴ Neff and Caserta, *Preservation of the Force*, 8.

³⁵ Erik K. Shinseki, *The Army Family: A White Paper* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Army, June 9, 2003), 18.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ F.B. Zimmerman, "USSOCOM Taking Care of the Force and Families to the Next Level," March 13, 2012, <http://www.socom.mil/News/Pages/USSOCOMtakingcareoftheForceandFamiliestothenextlevel.aspx> (accessed 21 February 2015).

³⁸ USSOCOM Wave II Needs Assessment (Open-Ended Comments), unpublished raw data (USSOCOM POTFF-TF, 2014), 210.

³⁹ Filiberti.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Allen, "What is the Preservation of the Force and Families Task Force?" *Tip of the Spear*, February 20, 2013, 4. Black space is time on the calendar that is specifically designated for individual service members to use as they see fit. Most often this is designated

training holidays or block leave, but it can also be limited training days or any other time that the commander deems as necessary to ensure the resilience of service members and families. Most importantly, and just like any other critical training event, black space is deliberately scheduled far enough in advance to ensure that service members and their families can take full advantage of the time allotted. USASOC has scheduled 4-day weekends on a monthly basis often by adding training holidays to federal holidays. Several respondents in the 2013 POTTFF Wave II Survey specifically commented that the monthly 4-day weekend policy is a practice that should be sustained.

⁴¹ Caserta and Neff, *USSOCOM Enterprise Report*, 38.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Ryan J. Caserta, email message to author, January 28, 2015.

⁴⁵ Ralph Masi Terrence K. Kelly, et al., *An Assessment of the Army's Tactical Human Optimization, Rapid Rehabilitation and Reconditioning Program* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013), x.

⁴⁶ Andrew Hill, *The Shock of the New: Theories of Innovation and the Military* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, June 2014), 23.

⁴⁷ Matthew Futterman, "Shrink on the Seattle Seahawks' Sideline: The Super Bowl Champions Swear by a Sports Psychologist," *The Wall Street Journal Online*, January 27, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-shrink-on-the-seattle-seahawks-sideline-1422402204> (accessed March 31, 2015).

⁴⁸ Thomas J. Williams, "Strategic Leader Readiness and Competencies for Asymmetric Warfare," *Parameters*, Summer 2003, 26.

⁴⁹ Caserta and Neff, *USSOCOM Enterprise Report*, 25.

⁵⁰ Daniel Goleman, et. al., *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 38.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵² Commander USSOCOM Admiral William H. McRaven, "U.S. Special Operations Command-Sponsored Family Support Activities and Programs," memorandum for Headquarters USSOCOM, USSOCOM Component Commands and Sub-Unified Commands, MacDill Air Force Base, FL, April 21, 2014.

⁵³ Author's personal experience as a member of a Special Mission Unit (SMU) from June 2002-June 2014.

⁵⁴ Caserta and Neff, *USSOCOM Enterprise Report*, 11.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁶ USSOCOM *Wave II Needs Assessment* (Open-Ended Comments), 132.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Kyle McNally, "MARSOC PERRES Continues to Grow," *Defense Video Imagery Distribution System*, January 15, 2013, <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/100533/marsoc-perres-continues-grow#.VNPGIUK3ATs> (accessed February 5, 2015).

⁵⁹ Robert Lively, CSM, U.S. Army, email message to author, February 1, 2015.

⁶⁰ Goleman, 50. In his book *Primal Leadership* Daniel Goleman writes, "Empathy is key to retaining talent. Leaders have always needed empathy to develop and keep good people, but whenever there is a war for talent, the stakes are higher. Of all the factors in a company's control, tuned-out, dissonant leaders are one of the main reasons that talented people leave – and take the company's knowledge with them."

⁶¹ USSOCOM *Wave II* Needs Assessment (Open-Ended Comments), 4.

⁶² U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Leadership: Competent, Confident and Agile*, Field Manual 6-22 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, October 2006), 8-9.

⁶³ In the 2013 POTFF *Wave II* survey there were 36 open-ended comments, which mentioned "toxic leaders" or "toxic leadership" as an issue within their units. Additionally, respondents cited that leaders frequently do not set a good example by working excessive hours while in garrison, building up excessive leave by refusing to take leave on a regular basis, not utilizing the services available to them, not taking an active role in educating their organizations on POTFF, or by not actively shaping POTFF programs for their units.

⁶⁴ Turse.