



SPECIAL
OPERATIONS
RESEARCH
TOPICS:
**ACADEMIC
YEAR 2027
ADDENDUM**

EDITED BY Juan Garcia, DBA
JSOU Report 26-11

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JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION

OUT-OF-CYCLE UPDATE FOR AY26-27

The Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) presents this out-of-cycle Research Topics Addendum to the *2026 Special Operations Research Topics* (SORT) booklet for Academic Year 2026-2027. To keep pace with a rapidly evolving strategic environment, this update introduces critical new areas of inquiry aligned with the 2026 National Defense Strategy (NDS) and the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Commander's Approach.

To reflect current priorities, the research questions within each topic are categorized across three foundational pillars: **Win** (our mission), **People** (our competitive advantage), and **Transform** (our imperative).

The goal of this addendum is to advance academic and professional knowledge in these vital areas, providing practical, data-driven insights to inform SOF leadership. Further, these topics will serve as the foundational guidance for JSOU's 2027 Call for Special Operations Papers.

We strongly encourage submissions from a broad community of interest. We welcome academic writing and applied research submissions from professional military education students, faculty, and research fellows, as well as any military professional, independent academics, and industry partners. By addressing these questions, researchers and practitioners will directly help close critical knowledge gaps and shape future SOF doctrine.

Juan Garcia, DBA

June 2026

DEFENDING THE HOMELAND: SOF IMPERATIVES AND CAPABILITIES

DESCRIPTION: As the 2026 NDS prioritizes the defense of the U.S. homeland, SOF must evaluate its role and readiness against a spectrum of evolving threats. This topic explores SOF's capacity to integrate with interagency partners, leverage advanced technologies, and adapt its operational footprint to detect, deter, and defeat attacks on critical infrastructure without compromising global commitments.

WIN:

- ◆ How can SOF modernize its operational frameworks to effectively detect, defend against, and respond to counter multiple, simultaneous threats targeting the U.S. homeland?
- ◆ How can SOF optimize joint training, education, and exercise opportunities with interagency and partner nations to enhance interoperability and capability for homeland defense and security missions?

PEOPLE:

- ◆ What is the force and liaison network structure necessary to ensure SOF has sufficient personnel with the required placement and access across the interagency for cohesive homeland defense operations?
- ◆ How will the increasing demand for SOF in homeland defense and security missions impact global operational capacity and personnel tempo?

TRANSFORM:

- ◆ What hardened facilities, defensive systems, and sensors do SOF need to develop or procure to protect its operations against advanced nuclear, long-range strike, cyber, and space-based threats?
- ◆ How can SOF improve interoperability with the Department of Homeland Security and other domestic agencies to streamline crisis response?

◆ **ORGANIZATION:** USSOCOM

◆ **SOF CATEGORY:** Homeland Defense, Counterterrorism, Cyber, Space

◆ **KEY TOPIC:** Yes

WINNING THROUGH INNOVATION: INTEGRATING TRANSFORMATIVE TECHNOLOGIES

DESCRIPTION: Maintaining a decisive competitive advantage against China and other global competitors and adversaries requires SOF to rapidly integrate and master transformative technologies, from AI to autonomous systems. This topic examines the balance between high-tech integration and fundamental warfighting skills, ensuring operators can succeed in contested or fully denied environments.

WIN:

- ◆ How can SOF better leverage AI/machine learning, quantum computing, and autonomous systems in tactical, operational, and strategic environments?
- ◆ How can SOF prepare for operational scenarios involving a partial or total loss of computing and communications capabilities?

PEOPLE:

- ◆ 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?
- ◆ How can SOF balance high-tech capability requirements with the need to maintain essential low-tech/no-tech operational skills and culture?

TRANSFORM:

- ◆ What decentralized architectures must SOF adopt to ensure command, control, computing, communications, cyber, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeting (C5ISR) resiliency; fault tolerance; and automated recovery in denied, degraded, intermittent, and limited electromagnetic and cyber environments?
- ◆ How can SOF resolve the tension between the increasing power demands of advanced technologies and the tactical imperative for low-signature, self-sustaining operations in anti-access/area denial environments?
- ◆ What rapid integration and acquisition frameworks are required for SOF to accelerate the fielding of transformative technologies from the commercial sector to the tactical edge?

◆ **ORGANIZATION:** USSOCOM

◆ **SOF CATEGORY:** AI, Cyber, Unconventional Warfare

◆ **KEY TOPIC:** Yes

COUNTERING MULTI-DOMAIN THREAT CONVERGENCE

DESCRIPTION: Peer adversaries increasingly employ transregional, all-domain, and multifunctional strategies that challenge traditional operational boundaries. This topic investigates how SOF can achieve seamless interoperability and tactical superiority across all domains.

WIN:

- ◆ How can SOF evolve its live, virtual, and constructive training and education environments to realistically integrate non-kinetic effects (space, cyber, electromagnetic spectrum [EMS]) into tactical maneuvers?
- ◆ How can joint SOF task forces best operationalize the integration of space, cyberspace, and EMS capabilities at the tactical edge to achieve decision advantage against peer adversaries?
- ◆ What training and education is required to enable joint SOF formations to better integrate with joint force and allied/partner space, cyberspace, and EMS activities?

PEOPLE:

- ◆ How must the SOF enterprise adapt its assessment, selection, and retention models to cultivate operators who can seamlessly transition between traditional kinetic operations and complex, non-physical domain warfare?
- ◆ As warfare becomes increasingly dependent on space, cyber, and EMS effects, how should SOF balance the need for highly specialized technical experts with the traditional requirement for broadly capable, cross-functional operators?

TRANSFORM:

- ◆ How must SOF modernize its operational and technical frameworks to achieve seamless interoperability and tactical execution across all domains?
- ◆ What conceptual frameworks for planning and execution best prepare joint SOF task forces to adapt and succeed in technologically degraded or denied environments?

◆ **ORGANIZATION:** USSOCOM

◆ **SOF CATEGORY:** Joint All-Domain Operations, Space, Cyber, Command and Control

◆ **KEY TOPIC:** Yes

ENHANCING GLOBAL INTEGRATION AND ALLIED BURDEN-SHARING

DESCRIPTION: Effective global integration and allied burden-sharing are critical to campaigning and deterring aggression on a global scale. This topic explores how SOF can dismantle institutional barriers, synchronize operations across combatant commands, and incentivize partners to assume greater mutual defense responsibilities.

WIN:

- ◆ How should joint SOF military education curricula be redesigned to prepare leaders to overcome institutional boundaries and synchronize operations across multiple theaters?
- ◆ 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?

PEOPLE:

- ◆ What specific competencies and experiences must be prioritized to cultivate joint SOF leaders and staff capable of planning, coordinating, and executing globally integrated joint force operations?
- ◆ As SOF prioritizes the new competencies required for globally integrated 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?

- ◆ What specific knowledge, skills, and abilities are essential for SOF personnel to successfully navigate and operate within a complex, globally integrated environment?

TRANSFORM:

- ◆ What modern collaborative planning tools, assessment systems, and organizing frameworks can best improve SOF's ability to synchronize operations globally?
- ◆ How can SOF overcome existing bureaucratic and institutional data-sharing barriers to enable agile synchronization with the joint force and allied/partner nations?

◆ **ORGANIZATION:** USSOCOM

◆ **SOF CATEGORY:** Security Force Assistance, Foreign Internal Defense, Interoperability

◆ **KEY TOPIC:** Yes

CALL FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS PAPERS

The topics in this SORT: Academic Year 2027 Addendum will be used as the basis for JSOU's AY2027 Call for Special Operations Papers, which runs from August 2026 to March 2027.

Submissions must be no more than 5,000 words, unclassified, and related to an identified Call for Special Operations Papers topic. Papers are welcomed from scholars from across the SOF enterprise, including professional military education students and military practitioners, international allies and partners, civilian scholars and academics, and fiction writers.

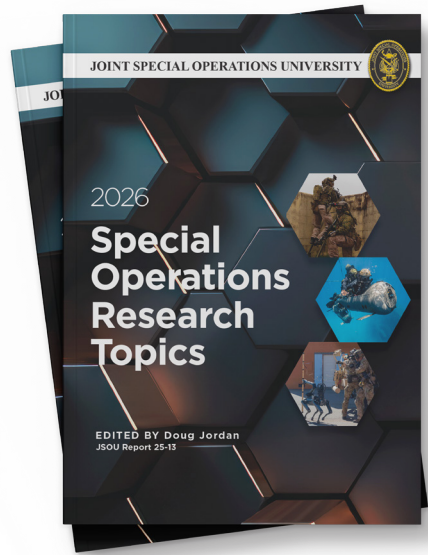
Winners will be recognized by the USSOCOM commander and JSOU president and published by the JSOU Press.

To see previous winning papers and learn more about Call for Special Operations Papers submission guidelines, visit www.jsou.edu/press/callforpapers.



This 2026 Special Operations Research Topics: Academic Year 2027 Addendum booklet addresses a rapidly evolving strategic environment. Aligned with the 2026 National Defense Strategy and current USSOCOM priorities, the topics presented in this booklet establish foundational guidance for military professionals, academics, and industry partners to explore critical research questions.

Topics are divided into four key areas—homeland defense, technological innovation, multi-domain threat convergence, and global integration—categorized across the core pillars of Win, People, and Transform. Ultimately, this addendum drives the data-driven insights needed to close critical knowledge gaps and shape future SOF doctrine.



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