



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on August 9, 2011

## U.S. Special Forces Operating Secretly in 120 Countries

This “secret force” is known as the U.S. Special Operations Command, or SOCOM. “SOCOM carries out the United States’ most specialized and secret missions,” Turse writes. “These include assassinations, counterterrorist raids, long-range reconnaissance, intelligence analysis, foreign troop training, and weapons of mass destruction counter-proliferation operations.”

As if that weren’t frightening enough, Turse describes an even more dangerous, devious, and deadly part of SOCOM:



One of its key components is the Joint Special Operations Command, or JSOC, a clandestine sub-command whose primary mission is tracking and killing suspected terrorists. Reporting to the president and acting under his authority, JSOC maintains a global hit list that includes American citizens. It has been operating an extra-legal “kill/capture” campaign that John Nagl, a past counterinsurgency adviser to four-star general and soon-to-be CIA Director David Petraeus, calls “an almost industrial-scale counterterrorism killing machine.”

JSOC also “operates a network of secret prisons, perhaps as many as 20 black sites in Afghanistan alone, used for interrogating high-value targets,” Turse adds, almost in passing. This is, in fact, a significant revelation, for President Barack Obama issued an [executive order](#) two days after taking office prohibiting the Central Intelligence Agency from operating such secret prisons. Conveniently, his order did not impose the same ban on the Pentagon, and it even gave the CIA an escape clause stating that the agency could continue to operate black sites “only to hold people on a short-term, transitory basis.” (As [The New American](#) reported recently, the CIA seems to be circumventing even the black site-friendly executive order by operating a secret prison in Somalia via the Somali National Security Agency.)

SOCOM has grown steadily in size and influence since its 1987 inception, and particularly since 9/11. Between 2001 and today both its budget and its personnel deployed abroad have quadrupled, to the point that, Turse observes, “U.S. Special Operations forces [are] approximately as large as Canada’s entire active duty military. In fact, the force is larger than the active duty militaries of many of the nations where America’s elite troops now operate each year, and it’s only set to grow larger.” The Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, now part of SOCOM, is slated for a 1,000-person increase; and incoming SOCOM chief Navy Vice Admiral William McRaven “endorsed a steady manpower growth rate of 3% to 5% a year, while also making a pitch for even more resources, including additional drones and the construction of new special operations facilities,” according to Turse.

As of last year, U.S. Special Operations forces were deployed in 75 countries, a number that SOCOM spokesman Colonel Tim Nye told Turse is expected to increase to 120 — approximately 60 percent of the world’s nations — by the end of 2011. Turse writes that Nye “hastened to add” that these forces



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were invariably deployed “at the request of the host government.” That may be true, although it seems unlikely unless all those governments have been bribed with U.S. foreign aid.

One thing is certainly true: They are not all being deployed to head off threats to the United States. Reports Turse: “In the Philippines, for instance, the U.S. spends \$50 million a year on a 600-person contingent of Army Special Operations forces, Navy Seals, Air Force special operators, and others that carries out counterterrorist operations with Filipino allies against insurgent groups like Jemaah Islamiyah and Abu Sayyaf.” Clearly, these groups have grievances with the Filipino government, not with Americans. However, by requesting, or at least acquiescing to, the presence of U.S. forces, Manila gets troops to neutralize its enemies at no cost — except to Americans — and some measure of plausible deniability should anything go wrong.

Even where U.S. Special Forces are genuinely hunting down America’s enemies — e.g., in the raid that killed Osama bin Laden — they are hardly doing so in the most constitutional or ethical of ways, as *TNA* has previously [noted](#). Worse still, says Turse, outgoing SOCOM chief Admiral Eric Olson told the Aspen Institute Security Forum that “black operations like the bin Laden mission, with commandos conducting heliborne night raids, were now exceptionally common. A dozen or so are conducted every night, he said.”

All these operations are taking place in Americans’ name, yet neither they nor most of their elected officials have any inkling of what SOCOM is up to, except when the Pentagon decides to tell them. As a result, any blowback in the form of terrorism against Americans can easily be attributed to terrorists’ hatred of freedom, not to justifiable anger (albeit not a justifiable response) toward the actions of U.S. forces.

Moreover, since Congress has not declared war on any of the countries in which SOCOM is operating, its operations are without constitutional justification. However, since Congress cannot even see its way clear to put an end to Obama’s brazen, public defiance of the Constitution vis a vis Libya, it is hardly likely to try to rein in SOCOM, especially when any such attempt would immediately get a legislator branded an “America-hater” or “terrorist sympathizer.”

That, of course, is the way the Pentagon likes it. With little, if any, congressional oversight and even less public knowledge of its actions, SOCOM can control its public image, trumpeting successes and burying failures, to give its forces “a superhuman image,” Turse avers, while gaining ever larger budgets and ever more power. SOCOM, says Turse, “is now a force unto itself,” with “power, access, influence, and aura.”

The situation is also to the White House’s liking, as Turse explains:

Whereas the late scholar of militarism Chalmers Johnson used to refer to the CIA as “the president’s private army,” today JSOC performs that role, acting as the chief executive’s private assassination squad, and its parent, SOCOM, functions as a new Pentagon power-elite, a secret military within the military possessing domestic power and global reach.

Clearly this is not the sort of power the Founding Fathers sought to vest in the President, whose role as commander in chief, constitutionally speaking, extends only to commanding forces once Congress has called them into service, under the regulations promulgated by the legislature, not to running his own personal army and hit squad. The proper role for the President in military matters is that of an executive given latitude to operate within the bounds set by the board of directors, which is appropriate to a constitutional republic with a limited government. SOCOM and other such shadowy forces,



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operating at the President's beck and call, are the forces of dictatorship and empire, inimical to limited government and liberty. The time to abolish them is now, before they become so powerful that opposing them is literally suicidal. Or has that moment already arrived?



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