

Special Military Ops Around the World: Crisis within America's Special Operations Command (SOCOM)

By [Sophie Mangal](#)

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Inside Syria Media Center

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Militarization and WMD](#)

The current commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command, known as SOCOM, General Raymond A. Thomas, addressing the Senate Committee on Armed Services said that Special Operations Forces (SOF) are not able to maintain the current intensity of operations. He stated the servicemen are psychologically exhausted, which is reflected, among other things, in a large percentage of suicides.

The general stressed that [8,000 U.S. Special Forces fighters](#) are now participating in special operations in more than 80 countries around the world. At the same time, 55.3% of servicemen are in the Middle East, 17.3% in Africa and 12.7% in Europe. About 500 commandos are in Syria. Such active involvement of Special Forces has a negative impact on the stress-resistance of the units.

General R. Thomas expressed concerns about [the number of suicides](#) among military personnel. At the same time, he did not cite specific data, deciding not to go into the 'terrible statistics'.

In this situation, attention is drawn to the information of several media, according to which the peak of suicides among servicemen of special units of the United States took place [in 2012](#). Then, an agreement on strategic partnership in the military sphere was concluded between the United States and Afghanistan, and an active phase of confrontation in Syria began. According to Reuters, more than 350 cases of suicide were officially registered then. [In 2014](#) - the beginning of the military intervention of the international coalition in Syria and Iraq - 275 servicemen committed suicide. In 2016, more than 400 cases were recorded.

Moreover, the head of the Special Forces expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that recently Special Forces have been increasingly used as universal means to solve any problems. He believes that U.S. SOF are currently forced to solve tasks that go beyond their usual functions.

According to the American general, the SOCOM experiences [difficulties with the staffing](#), which are caused by the wide geography of troop's deployment, as well as the long terms of their missions. As an example, Thomas pointed out the operation in Afghanistan, which, according to plan, was to end as early as 2014.

The general stressed that in recent years, the SOCOM command has doubled and even tripled its efforts to provide psychological assistance. With this purpose, two years ago, a contract was signed with [the American Association of Suicidology](#) to develop a program to prevent suicides and identify early signs of possible tragedies.

These tragedies are unfortunately not surprising, after [almost 16 years](#) of uninterrupted wars. As early as 2015, the former commander of the Special Forces, General Joseph Votel, as well as [Adm. William McRaven in 2014](#), warned of the excessive pressure on them. Now the soldiers of the U.S. SOF negatively speak about the rules of combat, their small number and high mortality in Iraq and Syria.

Special Forces were eagerly waiting for the inauguration of Donald Trump. In December 2016, Trump, speaking in North Carolina, said that the U.S. will concentrate on combating terrorism and defeating the IS, and not at overthrowing governments. It seems that these plans will not come true, as at such a pace, the United States may soon disable its most combat-ready forces.

**Stenographic Transcript
Before the**

**COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES**

UNITED STATES SENATE

UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

Thursday, May 4, 2017

Washington, D.C.

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UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

Thursday, May 4, 2017

U.S. Senate
Committee on Armed Services
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m. in Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. John McCain, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators McCain [presiding], Inhofe, Wicker, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Perdue, Cruz, Reed, Nelson, McCaskill, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Donnelly, Hirono, Kaine, King, Heinrich, Warren, and Peters.

1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN MCCAIN, U.S. SENATOR
2 FROM ARIZONA

3 Chairman McCain: Good morning. The Senate Armed
4 Services Committee meets this morning to receive testimony
5 on the posture of the U.S. Special Operations Command, known
6 as SOCOM.

7 I would like to welcome Ms. Theresa Whelan, who is
8 representing the Office of the Assistant Secretary of
9 Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict,
10 and General Tony Thomas, the Commander of SOCOM. I thank
11 our witnesses for appearing before the committee and for
12 their many years of dedicated service to the Nation.

13 The purpose of today's hearing is to hear directly from
14 the senior civilian and military leaders responsible for
15 ensuring our special operations forces are trained,
16 equipped, and ready to confront what is the most complex and
17 daunting set of national security challenges our Nation has
18 faced since the Second World War.

19 In response to the increasing threats, our combatant
20 commanders around the world have developed a seemingly
21 insatiable demand for the unique capabilities of our special
22 operators. That is especially true in the fight against
23 terrorism.

24 For the last 15 years, special operations forces have
25 been heavily engaged in the fight against global terrorist

1 STATEMENT OF THERESA M. WHELAN, ACTING ASSISTANT
2 SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS/LOW-INTENSITY
3 CONFLICT

4 Ms. Whelan: Thank you, Senator. Chairman McCain,
5 Senator Reed, and distinguished members of the committee, I
6 am honored to appear before you today in my capacity as the
7 Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations
8 and Low-Intensity Conflict. I am pleased to share the table
9 with General Tony Thomas, who has served at the forefront of
10 the special operations forces at all levels of command. Our
11 entire SOLIC team is proud to partner with him and his
12 command in forging the future of DOD special operations.

13 I would like to thank you and your predecessors for the
14 foresight to create SOLIC and USSOCOM 30 years ago, and for
15 your commitment to maintaining that vision over the last 3
16 decades. We are grateful for this committee's strong
17 support for special operations, as evidenced by the
18 resources, authorities, and depth of understanding you
19 provide in your oversight. Our military is stronger and
20 more capable due to your efforts.

21 Today, I will focus on three topics: winning the
22 current fight and defeating emerging threats, building on
23 the foundations of Section 922 ASD/SOLIC authorities, and
24 continuing to hone the edge of SOF personnel and
25 capabilities.

1 STATEMENT OF GENERAL RAYMOND A. THOMAS III, USA,
2 COMMANDER, UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND
3 General Thomas: Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed,
4 and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for
5 the opportunity to appear before you today. I am especially
6 grateful to be here today with Principal Deputy Assistant
7 Secretary Whelan in a session dedicated exclusively to
8 special operations as it provides us the opportunity to
9 discuss in detail the unique requirements, capabilities, and
10 challenges associated with your United States Special
11 Operations Command.

12 This body legislated us into existence a little over 30
13 years ago to act as a unique Department of Defense
14 organization, a dual-hatted, service-like entity responsible
15 for the manning, training, and equipping of special
16 operations forces, as well as a globally focused, functional
17 combatant command.

18 In fulfilling the first role, which continues to be our
19 primary function, I believe we have consistently provided
20 the world's best special operations forces to the geographic
21 combatant commanders. However, it is in the second role, as
22 a globally focused combatant command, where SOCOM has
23 evolved the most.

24 As we carry out both of these roles today, special
25 operations forces are more relevant than ever to the current

Read about the real situation in U.S. SOCOM and try to analyze the great delusion at the stenographic transcript of the meeting between General Raymond A. Thomas and the Senate Committee on Armed Services that is available [here](#).

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