

A View from the CT Foxhole: General Bryan Fenton, Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command

By Sean Morrow and Don Rassler

General Bryan P. Fenton is a career Special Forces (Green Beret) Officer. He currently serves as the 13th Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) where he oversees all Special Operations for the U.S. Department of Defense. Before assuming command of USSOCOM, General Fenton served as the Commander of Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). Prior to that, he was the Senior Military Assistant for two U.S. Secretaries of Defense.

General Fenton's other general officer assignments include: Deputy Commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command; Commander of U.S. Special Operations – Pacific; and Deputy Commanding General of the U.S. Army's 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii.

CTC: U.S. CT has been going through a more intense evolution over the past five years and the 'Global War on Terrorism' is a thing of the past. What are the top lessons you learned, and that you believe the CT community should take away, from the 'Global War on Terrorism' period?

Fenton: We have certainly seen an evolution in countering terrorism as we rebalance the needs of the country, but within the SOF [Special Operations Forces] enterprise, the CT mission is alive and well. As the adage goes, you may not be interested in terrorism, but terrorism is interested in you. While pressure on VEOs is crucial, we have learned that kinetic action alone is not enough to deter and defeat a radical ideology and that our actions must be informed by the root causes and needs of those who might be attracted to political violence.

Defending the homeland is still and will always remain the number-one priority for the Department; this is complementary to strategic competition and integrated deterrence. I view this as twofold: First, CT allows national attention to remain on the pacing threat without distraction, while directly supporting our teammates at DHS, FBI, and State to protect the homeland; second, CT allows us to continue valuable work with our international partners, while we protect our citizens abroad and carry the best practices forward into the future. This is especially the case with the threat of lone wolf attacks. One of the ways we couch our remit for CT and crisis response globally is that SOF helps our national leaders preserve the strategic focus for the future of the Joint Force, Department, and nation.

There has been a lot of incredible work done to protect our homeland through cooperation with partners domestically and internationally. Think about the monumental, international effort of securing a city like Paris for the Olympics this past summer; what a phenomenal effort. None of this happens magically or in isolation—there's a reason we call it a community—because it takes all of us. SOF works in concert with conventional forces, the intelligence community, our interagency partners, and of course,

our allies and partners to make these gains. Terrorists intend to surprise by nature, as demonstrated by attacks from Israel to Iran and Russia. Just as CT is the ultimate team sport, the biggest change is that we've shifted from an away to a home game. We must work faster, collectively—all to stay a step ahead of those who are willing to risk everything to do us harm.

Our forward deployed posture has changed and will continue to shift, which can alter our ability to get after bad guys and creates opportunities for VEOs to evolve. Afghanistan, Somalia, and Yemen showcase what happens absent CT pressure; the Sahel offers another example. In an era of online knowledge transfer among unlikely terror groups, the need to innovate and stay ahead of VEO adaption is paramount. Our community must recognize the evolving nature of the threats, while also continuing to evolve ourselves. I firmly believe this evolution is centered on our people, and it can't be done alone. The global SOF community must be on the cutting edge of technology and artificial intelligence. Our partners in academia are also critical to our evolution.

CTC: You previously served as the Deputy Commander of INDOPACOM and as the Senior Military Assistant for two Secretaries of Defense. After a long career conducting tactical operations with strategic impacts, did the experience at the COCOM and OSD change how you viewed the use and application of Special Operations Forces in CT or in other mission sets? How did it inform your views of SOF in strategic competition?

Fenton: I think, if anything, it reinforced that global problems require global solutions. I also learned that in pursuit of these solutions, the entire spectrum of special operations was just so critical to success. The experiences in OSD reinforced my understanding of how SOF are built for competition in a unique way. When you take a strategic view of the global security environment, it becomes quickly apparent that the threats, as outlined in the National Defense Strategy, are rapidly converging. In addition, the character of war is rapidly changing. SOF maintains unique placement and access to conduct our CT remit globally; however, this placement and access are also vital in building partnerships and relationships that underpin SOF's DNA. I see the application of SOF in both CT and competition as complementary efforts. In other words, it's actually okay to walk and chew gum at the same time. The fruits of the CT mission set in places like Ukraine, Colombia, the Philippines, and Central Asia have paid dividends over time in terms of tangible progress in strategic competition. Ultimately, both of these missions sets, when done right, require a whole-of-government approach, which is why our most senior national level leaders see many of these problem sets as intertwined across regions, elements of national power, and geopolitical divides. These global problems will require global solutions. SOF are postured

“We have to realize that while we are ready to win now, when we talk modernization, what we really mean is, ‘What do we need to be able to win tomorrow?’ That’s what modernizing is really about: Winning in the future.”

in more than 80 countries worldwide and perfectly positioned to operate across the elements of national power.

Since you brought up my time at INDOPACOM, I also want to speak specifically about that problem set. In terms of deterrence associated with a Taiwan scenario, USSOCOM takes a conditions-based approach to our day-to-day campaigning—we call it “What Winning Looks Like”—through which we increase our relative influence vis-à-vis our adversaries, deter them in the gray zone, and build warfighting advantages should deterrence fail. By taking such an approach, we can identify the way by which SOF—often with and through our allies and partners—can contribute to creating a *fait accompli* where the PRC has no choice but to accept the status quo with Taiwan and operate within the rules-based international order. We are using this “What Winning Looks Like” construct to communicate how SOF contributes to the Joint Force in competition especially—and as a way to share the “best use of SOF” globally to our fellow Combatant Commands.

I know I went a bit beyond CT here, but I think it’s important to show how SOF are taking the lessons from the past 20 years and applying them to the future while staying true to our historical roots in irregular warfare. Essentially, my time in INDOPACOM demonstrated the value of SOF to the nation across CT, crisis response, and strategic competition; all at the same time, and often integrated and intertwined. The fruits of these missions not only appeared as SOF shaped the operational environment, but also demonstrated the outsized role of SOF in relationship development with allies for the United States.

CTC: Over the past several years, the U.S. CT enterprise rebalanced and evolved so that the United States can focus more resolutely on strategic competition and prepare for threats posed by very capable state adversaries. This has pushed the U.S. CT community to place greater emphasis on the prioritization of terror threats, and to figure out ways in which it can optimize or do more with less. Given the persistence of terrorism, and the diversity of today’s terrorism landscape, navigating this shift has not always been an easy thing for the U.S. CT enterprise to do. What are some challenges and opportunities you see for this period of U.S. CT? When it comes to SOCOM’s CT efforts, which areas is the Command placing optimization emphasis on?

Fenton: I already briefly touched on it, but the operational environment is changing, as are our partners and presence globally. In an increasingly complex and contested world, how we maintain I&W [indicators and warning] matters immensely. Who and how we enable our partners will similarly become the coin of the realm

because we cannot be everywhere all the time. With that said, we need to ensure we have the right expertise at the right time. It calls into mind—the First SOF Truth—that people are more important than hardware, and building incredible teams inside the department and across the interagency and across the globe will help us succeed. We must hyper-enable our people to continue to deliver winning results for our nation. These teammates remain focused on the National Defense Strategy—our North Star for prioritization—and deliver SOF capacity to counter the PRC and Russia, while still keeping VEO threats at bay. How do we do this? By choosing the best people, then providing them with the best training and technology.

We have to realize that while we are ready to win now, when we talk modernization, what we really mean is, ‘What do we need to be able to win tomorrow?’ That’s what modernizing is really about: Winning in the future. Ultimately, AI will also play a significant role in helping us to understand and disrupt the terrorist threat with a small group of dedicated professionals, freeing up the bulk of the force, including SOF, for the challenges of integrated deterrence and state conflict. Data acquisition and processing is a huge challenge. We know we won’t have the same level of fidelity on the terrorist threat that we did when [we] were postured directly against those threats, but through leveraging technology, SOF can continue to be a small force that delivers outsized impacts for the DoD. To do so, we must be more creative in our data acquisition strategies and leverage what the private sector is doing in terms on data analysis. This means creating algorithms to quantify risk, prioritize targets, and coordinate between multiple departments, agencies, and foreign partners. SOF, as always, is at the forefront of technological innovation, making us the perfect community to experiment with the power of AI.

CTC: Part of the success of U.S. CT efforts has been sustained pressure. As resource and priorities adjust, can the U.S. CT enterprise maintain the same global pressure? How can we mitigate risk in places perhaps where groups might not have external operations capability, or where violent extremist organizations pose a threat of violence but not a threat to U.S. national security interests or those of our allies?

Fenton: Yes, we absolutely can maintain pressure on VEOs. We just have to take a different approach than we did during the height of the GWOT. To accomplish this, our SOF global posture is vital to detect and mitigate prioritized threats and keep a pulse on rising regional threats. We rigidly scrutinize our SOF posture to ensure that we influence meaningful locations at the appropriate times. Additionally, we must get better at predictive analysis, anticipate the next locus of homeland threats, and provide timely warning.

One of the greatest keys to success in the C-VEO space is our partnerships. You’ll hear me say this a lot in this interview. Our partners in the interagency, in the intelligence community, in academia, and around the world came together in an unprecedented fashion post-9/11. Those relationships are forged in sacrifice, remain strong, and continuously refine capabilities to ensure operations are more efficient, tech enabled, and almost always partnered. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in Operation Gallant Phoenix (OGP)—a U.S. interagency and multinational C-VEO initiative. Now in its 10th year, OGP has enabled international and interagency partners to share information from battlefield captures



General Bryan Fenton

to asymmetrically disrupt 16 distinct al-Qa`ida and ISIS groups in FY 2023. Coupled with counter-threat finance authorities and analytical expertise, operations like OGP provide expanded and cost-effective ways to disrupt illicit financing and deter activities. Operations for U.S. and OGP partners contributed to more than 1,500 investigations, more than 6,000 foreign disclosure releases, and support to partners repatriating more than 60 individuals in 2023. DoD counter-threat finance analysts also supported numerous Treasury designations against VEO finances and facilitators. The OGP model could apply further to countering coercive activities and deterring aggression. We have to scale and expand this model, because terrorism is an enduring problem.

CTC: You came of age in the CT community when the joint and interagency boundaries were coming down and collaboration and sharing improved significantly. How can we continue to improve on what was built? As we reduce the forward operating bases and joint operations centers around the world, how can we avoid the tendency to go back to our corners?

Fenton: At SOCOM, we seek improvement and innovation; it's inherent in our SOF DNA. This is how we continue to improve and help everyone across the CT community, joint force, and interagency. To improve upon the foundation that's been laid, we have a responsibility at the highest levels of DoD to elevate these discussions related to our posture, footprint, and military agreements. We are the canary in the coalmine for all things VEO; if that means advocacy for authorities or funding for combat support agencies and having hard conversations about emerging threats,

that's part of our job as the global coordinating authority.

We held a CT Risk Conference in 2022 and 2023 with the interagency when the cumulative cuts in CT resourcing started rippling across an interdependent community. We wanted to make sure we weren't creating too much risk in any one area. And you know what we found? The CT enterprise had become a Gordian Knot of interdependencies between departments and agencies. We couldn't untangle it if we wanted to, and the continuation of sharing people, LNOs, interns, and others among agencies is critical to sustaining these relationships. The best we can do is be circumspect about the effects our decrements have on other agencies when the Department cuts CT programs, many of which the interagency relies on as the foundation for their own capabilities. We've continued the tradition of the CT Risk Conference, and we'll have our third annual event next month. Every year, unity of effort is a key theme of the conference.

CTC: CT is an activity aimed at a specific threat, but it is also an operational design that focuses on the human element of the enemy's capabilities. What lessons learned from CT can we take into the strategic competition and conflict space? Are there ways in which the CT operational design can play a part in irregular deterrence? If so, how do you see personality-based targeting playing into future conflicts?

Fenton: We spent years in the CT fight learning how to understand organizations and the networks of humans that comprise those organizations. This type of targeting is universal; it applies to a government, a gang, a terrorist group, a private firm, etcetera. We continue to see the relevance of personality-based networks for kinetic and non-kinetic opportunities. Who makes the decisions, who influences those decisions, how do they perceive us, how do they see themselves? We've also learned a great deal about how we communicate, deliver, and shape the information as part of the operational design.

Ultimately in conflict, whether it is CT or peer conflict, the fight is largely won or lost in the human domain. This is the domain of SOF. The Navy thinks in terms of ships. The Army thinks terms of maneuver. SOF, we think about humans; it's our stock and trade. We continue to see the relevance of personality-based targets in places like Ukraine, and I suspect HVI targeting will have some role in most future conflicts. That isn't to say this type of approach should always be kinetic. It may not be, but it's critical that we consider our enemy's human terrain. Our capabilities in this arena provide one of the United States' greatest assurances to our allies. We remain the best in the world at direct action, and our forces still retain tremendous combat experience that our allies value.

After we assure our allies, we must deter our adversaries. And then when you talk about deterrence, we can deter by denial, making the enemy believe there is a small likelihood of success and also deter by punishment. All the tools for CT, both kinetic and non-kinetic, can work on any organization composed of humans, including state governments, both to cause enemy mission failure and make their actions very costly.

SOCOM is pioneering several concepts within the framework of irregular deterrence. Most of these concepts are not related to CT, but they are all done the SOF Way: irregular, asymmetric, asynchronous, and indirect.

Another great lesson from the CT fight that has tremendous

applicability in the strategic competition arena is the need to dominate the information space. This goes in both directions. First, we must ensure our messages are fast, truthful, and delivered with purpose to achieve intended effects. Next, we must remain ahead of misinformation and disinformation spread by our adversaries. We protect the homeland physically, but we also protect the homeland from the threats posed by the information operations of malign actors.

CTC: When it comes to technology, and tech innovation, what types of technologies concern you the most when it comes to future terrorism threats? What types of technologies do believe will be important, or more important, for U.S. CT in the near future?

Fenton: The ability to strike and the risk to the force, even from a terrorist perspective, is concerning. With AI and aerial unmanned and uncrewed systems, the threat is evolving in creative ways. I think investment in these systems, as well as defensive capabilities against such systems, is paramount not only in the near future but today. Our unique acquisition authority at USSOCOM is enabling us to move with greater speed to meet the needs of our people.

The Russo-Ukrainian War is doing more than displaying the battlefield upon which the joint force will have to operate; it is also giving us a glimpse into the future of both terrorism and CT. The proliferation and technological leaps in one-way attack drones, first-person view drones, and long-range uncrewed systems are both available to terrorist groups and put our deployed forces and forward installations and facilities at risk.

It's no secret that uncrewed systems are no longer limited to the large, remotely controlled, heavily armed "unmanned aerial systems" of the past. The future is all-domain, remotely controlled, *and* autonomous, and in mass. While the services are doing a great job investing in these systems at scale, we see SOF's role as the mechanism to ensure these systems can get on target. In that way, we are investing in and experimenting with our command, control, and communications networks to test how best to get targeting data to this lattice of uncrewed systems.

Anti-access, area denial is another concept that is not solely in the realm of great powers and applies directly to CT. As we look globally to the places from which external operations threats may emanate, they are often in areas that require penetration of sophisticated integrated air defense and electromagnetic spectrum systems. Our research and experimentation with penetrating those networks and operating in a comms-degraded or denied environment for CT has direct applications to warfighting. If we can punch a hole in the A2/AD bubble to conduct a CT strike or raid, then we can do the same to open a window for the Air Force to get a long-range anti-ship missile off the rails and onto target.

Finally, we need to improve our digital intelligence collection and analysis capabilities to make up for the loss in posture. The role of space and cyber in this arena cannot be overstated. SOCOM has several initiatives to do just that and has made tremendous progress. However, we still have a long way to go. We are working with the private sector to improve our capabilities at the speed of innovation.

CTC: How do you balance the innovation requirements for integrated deterrence with counterterrorism? Are you seeing

"We are always working to do things better and faster, and we're not afraid to fail fast and try again. The close coordination between SOCOM and industry enables movement at a pace we haven't seen before."

overlap, for example, in areas such as remote operations? How do you ensure CT is equipped with the technology it needs for posture-less operations without detracting from the critical innovation for peer conflict?

Fenton: Operationally, this occurs through the TSOCs. These Theater Special Operations Commands have the best feel for the needs of a region and serve as advisors to the Combatant Commanders. In support of these commanders, SOF capabilities must span the full-spectrum range of operations, so innovation efforts will focus primarily on SOF's role in large-scale combat operations against a peer adversary. This emphasis allows SOF to modernize to the most dangerous threat environment, mindful of further potential operations other than major conflict. Therefore, SOF will focus on creating multi-functional capabilities that address more than one mission area to cover the range of military operations. For the most part, we have seen that the changing nature of warfare affects all missions sets, and therefore, the innovations we've made in LSCO [large-scale combat operations] capabilities have translated well into the irregular warfare arena, including CT mission sets. The CT mission set is a key component of integrated deterrence and is an essential tool for developing partnerships and allies. There is no magic formula for balancing the innovation focus. It is both an art and a science, but we have found that innovation gains are often beneficial across the SOF mission spectrum.

CTC: USSOCOM has made important investments in liaison officers to Silicon Valley, Austin, Boston, and Washington, D.C., for acquisition, technology, and logistics. What have we learned from consistent exposure to these innovation hubs? How can our acquisition systems improve to keep up with the speed of technology?

Fenton: As SOF, we're needy—some would say discerning—and we're never satisfied. We are always working to do things better and faster, and we're not afraid to fail fast and try again. The close coordination between SOCOM and industry enables movement at a pace we haven't seen before. We are blessed to have talented officers in innovation hubs around the United States to forge partnerships and to learn from the fastest innovators in business and technology. Our connections with venture capital companies through our Defense Innovation Unit helps government learn how to move from idea to implementation in a way that's not typical for federal entities.

Thanks to congressional foresight, one of the hallmarks I mentioned before is that we have our own acquisition system. We don't have unique authorities in SOCOM, but we use the ones we

have in a unique and more rapid fashion. A major USSOCOM acquisition advantage is our acquisition executive's well-developed culture of risk identification and management at the appropriate level, which is also enabled by our organizational scale and structure coupled with proximity to our warfighter. The warfighter, through interaction with our components and TSOCs are included in all our acquisition and development programs. Additionally, efforts like SOFWERX and leveraging the nation's network of service and national laboratories, FFRDCs, and UARCs are key to rapidly innovate and allow small start-ups to get their foot in the door.

CTC: Israel has demonstrated an astounding capability in its kinetic targeting over the past two months. How do you think the decapitation of Hezbollah and Hamas leaders will impact the conflict in Israel in the near term? What long term implications might it have for the larger CT fight?

Fenton: Let me start with the long view of the impact of the Israeli crisis. First off, the impact of the Hamas October 7th attack remains to be seen, as we typically expect roughly two years after an event for effects to manifest. With that said, we know VEOs are exploiting the crisis, while groups previously unaligned with Gaza have increasingly rallied against the West. Second, this event has renewed interest in jihad like we've not seen since the Arab Spring. The crisis in Gaza will continue to galvanize those susceptible to radicalization, creating a larger pool of recruits for local operations and inspired or enabled attacks inside Western homelands. VEOs continue to advance their anti-Western ideology in media platforms criticizing U.S. and Western support of Israel, while calling for attacks in the Middle East and beyond.

CTC: We are several years into, for lack of a better term, our 'over the horizon' model of CT. What is working? What is harder?

Fenton: It's always harder when you're not on the ground, but 'over the horizon' has helped us to examine the challenge differently and develop other tools to see and sense, and where necessary, strike anywhere around the globe. We've had to get a lot better at prioritizing targets, and we'll have to get even better still as we continue to lose posture. SOF has long had the ability to reach out and interdict threats anywhere in the world. So, I think, with sufficient will, that we can conduct any OTH scenario. My worry is more about "OTH sensing"—do we know what targets are of sufficient national import to initiate an OTH operation, and do we have enough fidelity to target them? I think we have more work to do on the front end of OTH, but when the balloon goes up, I think we are confident in our abilities. SOF forces are executing OTH with tremendous success due to the innovation of our teammates, atypical partners, new forms of ISR, and well-earned trust with traditional partners.

CTC: When you look to the future of U.S. counterterrorism—a future that the SOCOM enterprise and other partners are working to build—what does that future look like? How, if at all, will it be different than what U.S. counterterrorism looks like today?

Fenton: The future often looks a lot like the past, in that we will

“We talk about a SOF renaissance: What’s old is new again. In other words, I don’t see that our emphasis or necessity with partnerships will change. I do see opportunities for us to expand and evolve those partnerships from bilateral to multilateral. We will need to think differently about these because the security environment is global and demands it.”

still conduct relentless pursuit of those who would do us harm. How we do it and who we pursue may look different. State-sponsored terrorists and proxies, while not new, increasingly offer plausible deniability to behave outside international norms. The information environment and the role of public perception continue to prove pivotal, and the challenge to be first with the truth, while meeting democratic ideals, will continue to challenge us. Terrorists, like private military firms, will continue to adapt and complicate the operational environment. Pay close attention to the convergence of adversaries.

We should not underestimate the terrorists' ability to innovate. From rapid knowledge transfers online to the use of satellite phones and imagery, the enemy will always capitalize on cheap, fast tech. We have benefited from valuable cyber targeting and disruption; however, we anticipate tech-savvy terrorists will reduce our advantage in the future. These innovations will also help us to dominate the information space, which will be a task for all of us from the tactical to the strategic levels.

CTC: Narrowing that question down, when you think about the future of CT through the lens of partnerships, what does that picture look like? Can you share some examples of what you think might look the same, as well what might look different?

Fenton: We talk about a SOF renaissance: What's old is new again. In other words, I don't see that our emphasis or necessity with partnerships will change. I do see opportunities for us to expand and evolve those partnerships from bilateral to multilateral. We will need to think differently about these because the security environment is global and demands it.

As for differences, there are several. We expect more activity to fall under multilateral partnerships. Things that may have been NOFORN in the past will become YESFORN in the future as the reliance on partners becomes more critical to every campaign. We also expect to spend more time moving back and forth between CT and integrated deterrence and in the spaces where they overlap.

CTC: When we walk into the Pentagon, the SOF wall shows incredible photographs of operators in action. While those operators continue to do amazing work around the globe, there is a new generation of warriors in the data, cyber, and information space who are bringing a lot to the fight. As

capabilities evolve, how has your leadership style changed or evolved along with it?

Fenton: First, that's a good reminder that at every level, an appreciation for the total team is so important, and the diversity of skills and experiences only gets vaster at echelon as you move from platoon to battalion on up to joint and international operations. Relentless improvement across our formation is paramount. We are early adopters, and it starts with the knowledge and emphasis of our leaders on developing the skills and talents necessary to win today and in the future. We continue to educate ourselves and seek opportunities to gain greater experience based on new adaptations and evolutions that occur from generating new capabilities. Take cyber and information operations, for example. As leaders, we must understand the capabilities and capacity of specific skill sets within each of these communities. Much like a Special Forces Operational Detachment – Alpha is a conglomeration of individuals with various skills, so is a cyber mission unit or PYSOPS team. We have the institutional knowledge to understand the types of missions an ODA, SEAL platoon, or Marine Raider Detachment can perform and their capacity to do so. Our understanding of cyber, robotics, and other emerging capabilities is still nascent, and we are wrestling with how much we keep those capabilities as stand-alone teams versus integration with our traditional formations. The future of SOF leadership, from my level down to, perhaps, the O-5 or O-4 level will be both joint and multi-domain. It isn't enough that we are experts in our service-specific SOF missions; we must evolve as leaders to the reality of the challenges we face.

CTC: SOCOM and JSOC have long held the proponency for hostage recovery. While this threat has never gone away, the post-October 7th experiences have put renewed attention on the complexities of these operations. Can you share your insight on what SOF brings to the table for policy makers when they have to consider the critical task of hostage rescue in their development of response options?

Fenton: Hostage rescue is a wicked problem with strategic convergence. It is complex, politically sensitive, but above all, it is a no-fail mission. Our crisis response force is specially assessed, selected, and trained to provide this capability to our nation. They rehearse these missions over and over until the mindset is that they can never get it wrong. I come back to what we've been talking about: Success requires deep trust and assistance across the interagency and with partners and allies. It's what the American public expects from us. These mission sets, at their sharp end, provide policy makers with multiple options to solve the hardest problems.

CTC: When it comes to threats, what keeps you up at night?

Fenton: Always at the forefront of my mind is the question: What do we not know? What is the adversary doing that we have not anticipated? In short, blind spots keeps me up at night. We all have them, and they will always be out there. The risk to the homeland is increasing as reductions in CT operations, I&W, and posture have enabled VEOs space and time to regenerate disrupted leadership structures and communication networks. ISIS/AQ remain coordinated, transregional organizations capable of conducting and inspiring violent attacks against U.S./allied interests globally. I think professional anxiety is healthy because it keeps us both leaning forward, but also looking over our shoulder at the same time. Staying vigilant about the active, persistent threat is the challenge. There are plenty of strategic distractions that can take us off course. CT is not going away, and it is up to all of us, collectively, to maintain a trajectory that accepts it as a reality, but simultaneously and fundamentally, rejects it as an acceptable norm. USSOCOM works very, very hard to ensure we fill in gaps in knowledge to reduce the blind spots and to remain ahead of the threat. Our people, their talent, and their effort are what mitigate those concerns more than anything. **CTC**