

# PROLOGUE

**A**s the commander of United States Special Operations Command (SOCOM), I welcome you to an issue of *PRISM* dedicated to special operations. SOCOM is responsible for the critical dual missions of providing the U.S. Geographic Commands with trained and ready special operations forces (SOF), as well as synchronizing their actions—we are uniquely created by law to perform both service-like activities and serve as a functional Geographic Combatant Command. In addition, SOCOM serves as the coordinating authority for the Department of Defense National Military Strategic Plan to Counter Trans-Regional Terrorist Organization (NMSP-CTTO). In light of the complexity of today's security environment, SOF are spread broadly across the spectrum of conflict. As a SOF enterprise we continually strive to be ready, and I am confident we are postured to address today's trans-regional challenges by virtue of our global perspective and authorities. Nevertheless, we must push ourselves to transform to meet evolving challenges, which entails leveraging developmental technologies and critically revisiting our structures and processes, while at the same time adjusting our tactics, techniques, and procedures to enhance effectiveness.

In just the past few years we have witnessed a varied and evolving threat environment consisting of: the emergence of a militarily expansionist China; an increasingly unpredictable North Korea; a revanchist Russia threatening our interests in both Europe and Asia; and an Iran which continues to expand its influence across the Middle East, fueling the Sunni-Shia conflict. All four of these state actors utilize forms of hybrid conflict short of war that frustrate and limit traditional forms of deterrence. Nonstate actors further confuse this landscape by employing terrorist, criminal, and insurgent networks that erode governance in all but the strongest states placing weak and fragile states fighting ethnic or religious insurgencies at risk of failure or collapse. Perhaps the best way to describe today's environment is "predictably unpredictable." Special operations forces provide asymmetric capability and responses to these challenges. Operating across the range of military operations, SOF are prepared to meet these challenges through discrete activities ranging from Direct Action, Special Reconnaissance, Counter-terrorism, Hostage Rescue/Recovery, and Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction, to more enduring engagements such as Unconventional Warfare, Foreign Internal Defense, Security Force Assistance, Counterinsurgency, Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, Military Information Support or Civil Affairs Operations. Regardless of the ways in which we confront these adversities, our SOF must be innovative, adaptive, and dedicated to seeking information dominance that increases our effectiveness.

This *PRISM* issue offers many articles that provoke thought and provide a basis for dialog on topics of interest to SOF, and hopefully, everyone committed to U.S. national security. As you read this issue, it is worth highlighting that nearly 8,000 SOF are continuously deployed in over 90 countries around the globe conducting the full range of SOF missions, and providing Geographic Combatant Commands with special operations capability and expertise required to support their operations in an increasingly complex security environment. Use the ideas and discourse of this *PRISM* issue to expand your understanding of SOF and the role they can play in our national defense.

– General Raymond Anthony Thomas III, Commander U.S. Special Operations Command