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New MOS and formations could come to Army spec ops in tech-savvy era

By **Davis Winkie**

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A Green Beret with the 5th Special Forces Group manages a drone during a raid exercise at the Muscatatuck Urban Training Center, Indiana, March 15, 2021. (Staff Sgt. William Howard/Army)

The Army's special operations forces are considering new tech roles and unit structures to complement their growing partnership with space and cyber personnel across the Defense Department, according to Army Special Operations Command's top general.

Some of changes could be accomplished internally, though others, like any new jobs, would require Army approval.

Lt. Gen. Jonathan Braga raised the potential moves when asked during a Wednesday Association of the U.S. Army event about lessons the Army SOF community is learning from the war between Russia and Ukraine, plus other recent conflicts.

Army Times also interviewed Braga via phone after the event, where he pitched a new irregular warfare triad that features SOF, space capabilities and cyber units.

“How we’re organized was optimized for counter-terrorism, and we recognize that a lot of that has to change to be ready for large-scale combat operations,” he said. “I cannot imagine a future state of warfare that does not have more drone technology and an application of AI.”

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Currently, the service’s publicly acknowledged special operations forces don’t have a clear career pathway for operators who are skilled in modifying and using small drones, 3D printing, AI and coding, or similar skills.

Braga wants to change that, and he says the options on the table extend to curriculum modifications at USASOC’s schoolhouses and shifts in force structure.

“We’re experimenting even with force design...What is the SOF unit of action of the future?” he speculated. “Is it two people and 20 drones? Is it one person and 100 drones?”

The 12-solder Operational Detachment-Alpha, the default unit of the service’s Special Forces, is even up for review. Braga highlighted that its structure was set in 1952, when the three domains of warfare were land, sea and air.

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“Today, that same organization, that unit of action has to operate in land, sea and air, cyber and space and the information environment and do all the things they were doing previously,” the USASOC commander said. “So can you ask those same people to do all of those same things?...Those are the things I think we have to really take a hard look at.”

Could a new Special Forces MOS be on the way?

After the panel, Braga offered insight on where discussions to innovate USASOC tech talent management currently stand. He thinks that many of the people who could fill tech-centered roles are already in the SOF community — they just need a chance to specialize and advance.

“We have some amazing individuals who are building drones from scratch...programming drones, creating backdoors, 3D printing, learning Python on their own. These people already exist,” he argued. “What we don’t have right now is a proper career field and pipeline for them to maintain that talent and reinforce that [technology in special operations] can still be a successful career [for them].”

The general indicated the command is leaning towards proposing a warrant officer career field specializing in technology on the modern battlefield — with potential roles including “drone operator, drone integrator, drone builder, robotics, manned-unmanned teaming, leveraging artificial intelligence, coding, tactical cyber” and more.

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But because creating a new MOS requires significant study and Army-level approvals, “an immediate target” is finding other ways to identify and retain tech-savvy soldiers, like through additional skill identifiers, Braga explained.

The USASOC chief isn’t sure, though, whether such a future career field would need to be an 18-series MOS code alongside the other Special Forces troops, which require prospective members to pass selection and a rigorous qualification course. There’s a

chance that ongoing Army-wide efforts to integrate technology and small drone technology could “adapt and absorb” any ARSOF-specific role.

“I could envision a future where I would need and want and desire, an 18-series who might be needed to go further in the contact layer, and maybe do something that might be more physically demanding on a physical operation,” explained Braga. “I could envision someone who I don’t need to do that...[they] might be a drone integrator, drone builder, drone operator, that could [fight] remotely.”

And although the analysis process for establishing a new career field can take time, Braga is confident that his command has the resources and flexibility to ensure that his operators have access to the skills and tech they need in the interim.

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USASOC controls three centers of excellence that produce its operators, plus “we own our whole warrant officer pipeline, we have a lot of flexibility,” explained Braga.

“This is where we’re going...because I think we have to move out.”

About [Davis Winkie](#)

Davis Winkie is a senior reporter covering the Army, specializing in accountability reporting, personnel issues and military justice. He joined Military Times in 2020. Davis studied history at Vanderbilt University and UNC-Chapel Hill, writing a master's thesis about how the Cold War-era Defense Department influenced Hollywood's WWII movies.

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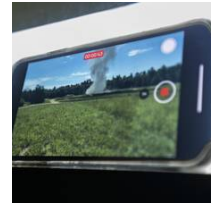
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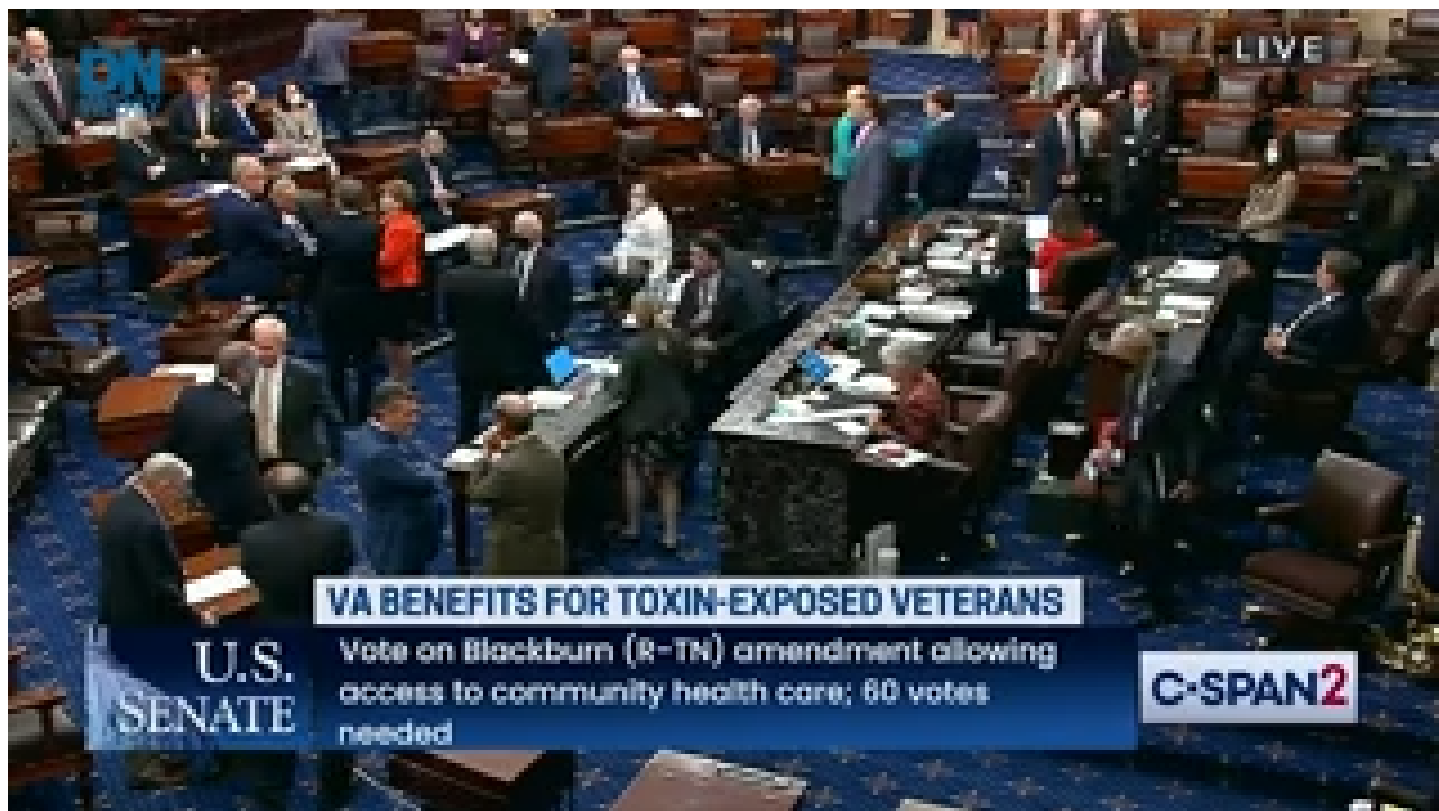
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