



UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

7701 TAMPA POINT BLVD.
MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA 33621-5323

SOJA

3 April 2025

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: Legal Review of the Global SOF Foundation SOF Welcome Reception Event– 5 May 2025

1. REFERENCES:

- a. 5 C.F.R. 2635
- b. Joint Ethics Regulation
- c. U.S. Office of Government Ethics Legal Advisory, LA-24-15, 8 November 2024
- d. DoD Standards of Conduct Advisory, 19-02, 29 March 2019

2. **BLUF:** Based on the information provided, there is no legal objection to designating the Global SOF Foundation (GSOF) SOF Week Welcome Reception on 5 May 2025 as a Widely Attended Gathering (WAG) pursuant to 5 C.F.R. 2635. Please see guidance on gift limitations and prohibitions on endorsements.

3. RELEVANT FACTS:

a. GSOF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that aims to build and grow an international network of military, government, commercial, and educational stakeholders in order to advance SOF capabilities and partnerships to confront global and networked threats. They are hosting a Welcome Reception at Sparkman Wharf in Tampa, FL, on 5 May 2025, which is open to the public.

b. The event is open to the public and approximately 5,000 people are expected to attend. Tickets will be sold from \$25-85. Tickets will cost \$25 for military and government employees. Guests from the Department of Defense, private industry (approximately 40-50 companies will be represented), state and local government, academia, and non-DoD, will receive unsolicited invitations to the event. The estimated cost per person to host the event is \$60. Invitees are not permitted to bring a guest. Free gifts may be offered at the event. If so, USSOCOM may accept gifts of little value, not to exceed \$20. No fundraising will take place at the event.

4. LAW & REGULATIONS:

a. A gift of free attendance to a widely attended gathering must be unsolicited, and attendance must be in one's unofficial or personal capacity. Pursuant to 5 C.F.R. 2635.204(g), "[a] gathering is widely attended if it is expected that a large number of

SUBJECT: Legal Review of the Global SOF Foundation SOF Welcome Reception
Event– 5 May 2025

persons will attend, that persons with a diversity of views or interests will be present, . . . and that there will be an opportunity to exchange ideas and views among invited persons.”

b. A gift of free attendance to all or appropriate parts of a widely attended gathering may be accepted upon a finding that the following are true:

(1) the event is a widely attended gathering;

(2) the employee’s attendance at the event is in SOCOM’s interest because it will further SOCOM’s programs or operations;

(3) SOCOM’s interest in the employee’s attendance outweighs the concern that the employee may be, or may appear to be, improperly influenced in the performance of official duties (i.e., must weigh the importance to SOCOM, importance of employee’s role in any matter affecting the donor, purpose of the event, other expected participants, appearance that the donor is receiving preferential treatment, whether government views differ from those of the donor, and market value of the gift); and,

(4) if the gift of free attendance is greater than \$480 and the gift is from someone other than the event sponsor, the event must be attended by more than 100 persons.

c. An unsolicited invitation of free attendance to an accompanying spouse is permitted if others in attendance will generally be accompanied by a spouse and an invitation to the employee’s spouse is from the same person who invited the employee.

d. Although there is no set number of attendees that defines a WAG, U.S. Office of Government Ethics Legal Advisory LA-24-15, dated 8 November 2024, states that, unless certain exceptional circumstances exist, such as an extremely diverse group of views or interests, a gathering of less than 20 people should not be considered “widely attended.”

5. ANALYSIS & CONCLUSIONS

a. The invitation to the event will be unsolicited and attendance will be in an unofficial or personal capacity. A large number of people will be in attendance because the event is open to the public, and 5,000 people are expected to attend from a wide variety of backgrounds and professions, including approximately 40-50 different companies. There will be an opportunity to exchange ideas and converse because the event is designed for interaction, and to raise awareness of and support the upcoming SOF week activities.

b. This event is a widely attended gathering. SOCOM has an interest in appropriate personnel attending because it will further SOCOM’s relationship with other members of

SUBJECT: Legal Review of the Global SOF Foundation SOF Welcome Reception
Event– 5 May 2025

the public, DoD, and private industry among others. The event provides an opportunity for them to speak to a diverse group of people about SOF Week and SOCOM's mission, goals, successes, and value, gaining additional public support. There is little risk that USSOCOM will have the appearance of being improperly influenced by their attendance because the hosts do not have influence over SOCOM operations, and diverse group of professionals from a variety of backgrounds and industries will be in attendance. It is important that USSOCOM personnel do not give any preferential treatment to the NFEs at this event.

c. Appropriate USSOCOM personnel may accept the free invitation to the event.

5. **FUNDRAISING:** Government employees should not actively and visibly participate in such activities. Approved employees should not solicit any donations, serve as an honorary chairperson, stand in a reception line, and/or sit at either the head table or any of the sponsorship tables set aside based on level of donation. USSOCOM personnel must not directly or indirectly endorse GSOF, other NFEs, sponsors, or donations generally. USSOCOM personnel must not give the appearance of DoD endorsement in any regard. USSOCOM personnel must avoid the appearance of DoD endorsement, and the appearance that they are acting in any fundraising capacity.

6. **GOVERNMENT ENDORSEMENT CONCERNS:** Approved employees' attendance must not be used by event organizers to promote the event and they should not endorse any of the NFEs associated with the event, to include the hosts.

7. **POC:** The point of contact for this action is the undersigned at michael.s.coblin.mil@socom.mil

MICHAEL COBLIN
LTC, JA, USAR
Legal Advisor
USSOCOM