



ANNUAL REPORT

2025



SOAA

SPECIAL OPERATIONS
ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

SPECIAL OPERATIONS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Advocating for the Special Operations Community — From the Front Lines to the Halls of Congress

Table of Contents



From Our Founder	01
SOAA Operations: Bringing a Family Home from Gaza	02
SOAA Operations: Honoring Sgt. Michael Verardo	03
Project Valkyrie	04
Reintroducing the Jax Act	05
Policy & Advocacy	06
Engagement Numbers & Growth	07
Events & Thought Leadership	08
Fundraising & Donor Spotlight	09
Thank You	10

From Our Founder

2025 was, in every measurable way, the most significant year in SOAA's history. Not just in what we accomplished—though the accomplishments speak for themselves—but in what we proved: that this organization has grown into something the SOF community can count on, year after year, bipartisan and able to withstand the winds of change.

When I started SOAA, the goal was simple—make sure the men and women who carry the full weight of this nation's security are not forgotten when they come home, and that the decision-makers in Washington actually understand the ground truth before they make decisions that affect operators' lives. That mission hasn't changed. What has changed is our capacity to fulfill it.



This year, we grew in ways I'm genuinely proud of. Our community expanded by the tens of thousands by way of new members and new supporters across our social media. Our online reach went from averaging 50,000 engagements per month to several million by the end of 2025 going into 2026—meaning the stories we tell, the veterans we champion, and the issues we elevate are reaching an audience we couldn't have imagined just a few years ago. We added six new staff members, deepening the team's ability to operate at a higher level across every department.

The stories in this report capture what that growth made possible. Our team was in Gaza when a Navy corpsman's family needed to get out—and we got them out. We were in the Oval Office alongside Sgt. Michael Verardo, a warrior whose sacrifice and resilience represent everything this community stands for. We launched Project Valkyrie, a one-of-a-kind program to prepare SOF veterans for their next mission as business leaders. And we continued to fight—on the Hill, in the media, and in the public square—for legislation that treats our operators with the dignity and care they have earned.

None of this happens without you. Every donor, every dollar, every member, every partner who has chosen to invest in this mission has made each of these stories possible. SOAA does not take that trust lightly. We never will.

The mission continues. We are just getting started.

With deepest respect and appreciation,

Daniel Elkins

Founder, Green Beret, SOF Combat Veteran



SOAA OPERATIONS

Bringing a Family Home from Gaza

On September 5, 2025, SOAA got word that the family of a U.S. navy corpsman serving with the 5th Marines was stuck in harm's way. The service member's mother, siblings, nieces, and nephews were in Gaza, surrounded by the Israel Defense Forces as they battled with Hamas. To assist them in escaping from the chaos that reigned around them, SOAA Board Director Alex Plitsas took charge and replicated tactics from withdrawal-era Afghanistan and Ukraine by developing a Signal chat filled with diplomats and former defense department officials who worked behind the scenes to create and sustain a plan.

To legally manage the hurdles of bureaucracy, a former State Department spokesperson worked to obtain legal permissions from surrounding countries for the family to leave Israel and enter Jordan.

With approvals in hand, the family then had to manage their escape to the Israeli border under cover of darkness. They navigated the war-scarred landscape with help from Plitsas and the corpsman, who used satellite imagery and mapping programs to direct the group around collapsed buildings and other obstacles.

When they safely crossed the Israeli border, SOAA's team had achieved a permanent victory for one service member's family. They had also proved once again that skilled veterans and diplomats can work within the boundaries of the law to nimbly approach security challenges in the most austere environments.

Read the story as chronicled by the [Washington Post](#) or on [the SOAA blog](#).

Honoring Sgt. Michael Verardo



SOAA was invited to the Oval Office on Wounded Heroes Day, April 24, 2025, to join President Donald Trump and senior officials within his administration in honoring multiple veterans who were severely wounded during the Global War on Terror.

SOAA founder Daniel Elkins was honored to be invited, and accompanied SOAA board advisor Sarah Verardo and her husband, U.S. Army Sgt. Michael Verardo, who had fought through 120 surgeries over 15 years after being wounded in separate improvised explosive device attacks in the Arghandab Valley of Afghanistan in April 2010.

Just four months later, Michael Verardo passed away on August 26, 2025. SOAA leadership assembled alongside senior administration officials to support Sarah and the couple's three daughters **as Michael was laid to rest** at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors on November 19, 2025.

Our commitment endures: to honor Michael's memory, uplift his family, and advocate for veterans still contending with Operator Syndrome, Post-Traumatic Stress, suicidal ideation, or the physical wounds they continue to bear after the battle.

Project Valkyrie

A New Mission: From the Battlefield to the Boardroom

This year, SOAA announced the creation of a unique transition program that combines health optimization protocols with leadership support and a venture accelerator pathway that will help SOF veterans take on roles as CEOs or leaders in a variety of defense- and finance-affiliated industries. The program consists of Project Phoenix and Lions Leadership.

Project Phoenix

Taking into account the impacts to health that operators experience during the course of a SOF career, Project Phoenix is a holistic, 60-day program that combines correctional exercise, functional medicine, quarterly bloodwork panels, and behavioral health programming to ensure that Project Valkyrie's participants are mentally, physically, and behaviorally prepared to succeed.

Command Stewardship™

Program participants are paired with proven industry experts and entrepreneurs for one-on-one coaching and mentorship as they prepare for career success. While many participants in Project Valkyrie will take on roles as CEOs of established companies, others may prefer to pivot towards leadership roles in a wide range of industries tied into SOAA's nexus.

Future Cohorts

SOAA cofounders, Ian Boeye and Dr. Ryan Ziegler, have developed a foundation of venture capital, private equity, and non-dilutive capital to support the initial cadre of four SOF veterans taking part in the program and to sustain additional cohorts. With recruitment for the second Project Valkyrie contingent underway, if you're a SOF veteran on a business founder path or want to move into an executive position, please reach out to Ian or Ryan for application instructions. ian@soaa.org or Ziegler@soaa.org.



Reintroducing the Jax Act

In November, Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA) **reintroduced the Jax Act**, named after SOAA board member Jaclyn 'Jax' Scott. A member of the Cultural Support Teams (CSTs), Jax was one of 310 women specifically trained to support SOF elements in direct action missions or participate in village stability operations to expand male units' ability to engage with Afghan women and children.

CST members faced many challenges, including managing the cutthroat competition between prospective members vying for a finite number of CST billets and integrating into a traditionally all-male environment.

Once deployed, CST members engaged in direct action missions faced an often unforgiving kinetic environment. CST member Rebekah Edmondson recalled "utter chaos" while traversing Afghanistan under cover of darkness to seek out high value targets. During one mission, she had no choice but to keep operating when she endured a concussion after being buried under the rubble of a collapsing wall. Jax felt similar pressures to perform. Always aiming to "prove herself" to her male colleagues, Jax often offered to carry a 35-pound IED jamming system in addition to her 100-pound kit during four-day missions across rough terrain under cover of night.

When Jax returned to her unit after her CST deployment with the Green Berets, she found that her combat service had not been properly documented. This made it impossible to receive recognition as a combat veteran and difficult to obtain benefits when she experienced a traumatic brain injury and problems with her knees.

Upon reaching out to Issa's office for support with her Department of Veterans Affairs claims in 2022, Jax found allies in Issa and his staff. She also found support at SOAA, which connected her to two TBI clinics that she says "changed [her] life."

Though the Jax Act currently will specifically acknowledge the contributions of CST members, Jax says that this is merely the jumping off point for gaining support for other women who have served in combat roles during the Global War on Terror, including Female Searchers, women in Team Lioness, and members of Female Engagement Teams.



Policy & Advocacy

SOAA has built a track record of legislative impact—championing bills that originate from within our own community, working alongside coalitions to pass landmark legislation, and informing Congress on the issues that matter most to the SOF community.

The Jax Act – Reintroduced in November by Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA), this legislation would clarify combat-related presumption for Cultural Support Team Veterans, ensuring they receive service-connected care for injuries incurred while serving alongside Rangers and Special Forces in direct combat. The bill originated with SOAA board member Jaclyn "Jax" Scott.

PACT Act – SOAA worked alongside the Toxic Exposure in the American Military (TEAM) working group—a coalition of more than 20 VSOs—for over two years to help pass one of the largest Veterans benefits bills in history, codifying service-connected presumption for conditions caused by toxic exposure and expanding VA care access for Veterans and their families.

Camp Lejeune Justice Act – Successfully rolled into the PACT Act, SOAA continues to push for additional legislation affirming these Veterans' right to trial and expanding courts of jurisdiction to cut through bureaucratic obstruction.

Mission Act – SOAA supported codifying clear VA access standards and establishing a nationwide community-care network, giving Veterans the ability to receive specialty care outside the VA when and where they need it.

Plant-Based and Alternative Therapies – SOAA is championing DoD pilot programs to give qualifying servicemembers access to breakthrough therapies for PTSD, TBI, Major Depressive Disorder, and Substance Use Disorder—conditions strongly correlated with suicide in the SOF community.

Army SOF Testosterone Study & Operator's Syndrome – SOAA secured FY26 NDAA Report Language directing the Army to study testosterone therapy for SOF members in the context of health, readiness, Operator's Syndrome, and TBI.

Moral Injury – FY26 NDAA Report Language secured by SOAA directs the DoD to report on current assessments and treatments of moral injury across the uniformed services.

GI Bill Parity Act – Reintroduced this Congress, this legislation would guarantee National Guard and Reserve members eligibility for and accrual of federal education benefits while on qualifying duty statuses—closing a gap that has shortchanged those who answered the call.

Engagement Numbers

2025 was a year of consistent growth for SOAA. Across every metric including community size, social reach, media presence, and legislative impact, the organization continued to broaden its reach.

1,991,383

TOTAL SOCIAL MEDIA REACH

73,813

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

123,186

SOAA WEBSITE VISITORS

400+

LEGISLATIVE ENGAGEMENTS

6

NEW STAFF ADDED IN 2025



Events & Thought Leadership



SOAA-IWI South America in Competition Conference

JULY 16–17, 2025 • CARAHSOFT HQ, RESTON, VA

During two days in July 2025, the SOAA and Irregular Warfare Initiative (IWI) teams hosted a successful conference in Reston, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C. Leaders from government, industry, the intelligence community, and academia gathered to discuss emerging threats to the United States in South America, including cartel and proxy activity, critical minerals and supply chain vulnerabilities, the SOF-Space-Cyber nexus, and other strategic challenges. The conference successfully connected Washington decision-makers with practitioners and subject matter experts possessing deep operational and technical expertise.

Registration is now live for the 2026 SOAA and IWI Conference on Critical Minerals. [Sign up here.](#)



Welcoming the 119th Congress

As a new Congress was seated, SOAA hosted a welcome event to build relationships with incoming Members and their staff—ensuring that SOAA's network of SOF veterans and advocates has direct lines of communication with freshmen legislators from day one.



Library of Congress OSINT Panel

SOAA hosted its Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) panel at the Library of Congress, convening senior members of the intelligence and national security community alongside private sector leaders to discuss the rapidly evolving landscape of open-source intelligence and its role in special operations.



Additional Events

SOAA maintained an active presence at industry events throughout 2025, including Shot Show and a staffer welcome event supporting continued Congressional relationship-building.

Fundraising & Donor Spotlight

SOAA's work is only possible because of the individuals and organizations who choose to invest in this mission. In 2025, that support reached a new high—with 76,000 raised to fund advocacy, operations, and programs serving the SOF community.

2025 FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

TOTAL REVENUE

\$895,637

TOTAL EXPENSES

\$542,124

Donor Spotlight: Leonid Capital & The Sentinel Foundation

SOAA is deeply grateful to [Leonid Capital Partners](#) and the [Leonid Sentinel Foundation](#) for their generous \$75,000 donation in 2025 in support of our mission. Leonid's commitment to dedicating 50% of after-tax profits toward supporting veterans, service members, and military families reflects a shared belief in strengthening America's national security community through sustained advocacy, innovation, and service. Their partnership empowers SOAA to continue elevating the voices of the special operations community and advancing initiatives that support warfighters and their families.

To every donor, partner, and supporter who made 2025 possible: thank you. Your investment translates directly into operators who receive care, families who get answers, and policymakers who hear the ground truth.

Thank You

Your partnership and support have been instrumental in everything we achieved for the SOF Community this year.

This mission belongs to all of us. Thank you for standing with the men and women of Special Operations.



DONATE
[SOAA.ORG/DONATE](https://soaa.org/donate)

LEARN MORE
[SOAA.ORG](https://soaa.org)

FOLLOW US
[LinkedIn](#) [X](#) [Facebook](#) [Instagram](#) [TikTok](#)