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**THREE DECADES LATER: A REVIEW AND  
ASSESSMENT OF OUR SPECIAL  
OPERATIONS FORCES 30 YEARS AFTER  
THE CREATION OF U.S. SPECIAL  
OPERATIONS COMMAND**

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HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS  
AND CAPABILITIES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

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COMMAND**

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES,  
*Washington, DC, Tuesday, May 2, 2017.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:05 a.m., in room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Elise M. Stefanik (chairwoman of the subcommittee) presiding.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ELISE M. STEFANIK, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM NEW YORK, CHAIRWOMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES**

Ms. STEFANIK. I call this hearing of the Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee to order. I am pleased to welcome everyone this morning to a very important hearing entitled, “Three Decades Later: A Review and Assessment of U.S. Special Operation Forces 30 Years After the Creation of U.S. Special Operations Command.”

This year marks the 30-year historical point for our special operations forces [SOF] when Congress added an amendment to the Goldwater-Nichols reform legislation that created the United States Special Operations Command [USSOCOM]. Since that time, this force has been preserving strategic options for our Nation, and their track record is second to none.

During my time in Congress and as chair of this subcommittee, I have traveled to many war zones and embassies and seen this force in action. I can say from firsthand experience that I am continually impressed and humbled by the men and women conducting these important missions, and our Nation can truly be proud of their accomplishments.

And although this hearing offers an opportunity for reflection, in some ways the threats that special operations forces respond to are as timeless as warfare itself and have existed in the form of irregular and asymmetric challenges from state and nonstate actors alike. These challenges, and indeed those of the past 16 years since 9/11, have demanded a heavy focus on counterterrorism and direct action skills for this force, but how much that experience will shape our thinking about future conflicts remains to be seen. And despite this constant theme, the world at large continues to change, and we must not let today’s war overshadow the need to prepare for the wars of tomorrow.

While the global CT [counterterrorism] fight continues, adversarial advances in synthetic biology, quantum computing, information warfare, and, indeed, the proliferation of more than 10 trillion sensors and devices connected to the internet presents risks for tomorrow. However, if managed right, these risks become great opportunities for this highly capable force.

In thinking about the years ahead, we must ask hard questions after nearly 16 years of constant war, including: What parts of this force are broken and what needs to be repaired quickly? What adversarial nation-states are advancing faster and achieving a qualitative edge over our forces? And what must we do to ensure that our special operations forces are postured for the next 30 years to mitigate our most pressing national security concerns and to continue to preserve strategic options for our Nation?

As in the past, Congress will play a major role by aligning resources and policy to keep special operations effective, silent, globally postured, and when necessary, absolutely lethal. To do that, we will need the help of our witnesses before us this morning: Ms. Theresa Whelan, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict [ASD(SO/LIC)], and General Raymond Thomas, Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command.

It is worth noting that Ms. Whelan, although also performing the duties of Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, is appearing today before the committee in her capacity as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense.

I would like to turn now to my friend and ranking member, Mr. Jim Langevin from Rhode Island, for any comments he would like to make.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Stefanik can be found in the Appendix on page 25.]

**STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES R. LANGEVIN, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM RHODE ISLAND, RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES**

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, Chairwoman Stefanik.

And thank you, Ms. Whelan and General Thomas, for being here today. I look forward to your testimony this morning. And, General, in particular, I want to thank you for your service to the Nation, and all the men and women who serve under your command.

Despite not having a detailed budget request submitted by the administration, there are many issues regarding the command and our special operations forces to be discussed by the committee today. Approximately 30 years ago, Congress established SOCOM to ensure joint and ready special operations forces capable of defending U.S. national security interests.

For the last decade and a half, we have relied heavily on SOF to perform activities in support of counterterrorism operations. However, we must keep in mind that SOF activities, such as unconventional warfare [UW], foreign internal defense, counter-messaging, and hostage rescue, remain equally important to countering aggression of other actors, including nation-states.

Despite drawdowns of conventional forces and overseas contingencies, the demand for SOF remains high across the combatant

commands. SOF is still very much engaged in battle. Sadly, we lost three Army Special Forces in Afghanistan fighting ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] just in April. This high operation tempo has created stress on the force and has affected readiness. Precision and discrimination in use of SOF remain fundamental to not breaking the force.

We must also ensure that SOF are employed under policies, guidance, and authorities conducive to achieving our broader national security goals and objectives set forth in clear strategies. This includes both in and outside areas of active hostilities in each theater, against each threat. This requires us to be mindful when considering or legislating operational authorities.

SOCOM and the Assistant Secretary for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict clearly have a lot on their plate. In addition, last year SOCOM was assigned the responsibility for synchronizing the countering weapons of mass destruction [CWMD] mission from Strategic Command [STRATCOM]. SOCOM has always been involved in CWMD and brings a depth of knowledge to employing a left-of-boom approach conducive to our strategy.

The threats our Nation faces today are ever-evolving and complex and will continue to shape our special operations forces and policies for employment of those forces. I certainly look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on these topics.

Again, I thank you for all the extraordinary work that you and the special operations forces perform on behalf of our Nation day in and day out in very dangerous areas, performing very dangerous missions, and we thank you all for your service.

With that, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you, Mr. Langevin.

Immediately following this open hearing, the committee will reconvene upstairs in 2337 for a closed classified roundtable discussion with both of our witnesses.

Before we begin, I remind our witnesses that your full written statements will be submitted for the record, and we ask that you summarize your comments in 5 minutes or less.

Secretary Whelan, we will begin with you, and we look forward to your opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THERESA WHELAN, PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS/LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT**

Ms. WHELAN. Thank you. Chairwoman Stefanik, Congressman Langevin, and distinguished members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today in my capacity as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict. I am pleased to share this table with General Tony Thomas, who has served at the forefront of the special operations forces at all levels of command. Our entire SO/LIC team is proud to partner with him and his command in forging the future of DOD [Department of Defense] special operations.

I would like to thank you and your predecessors for the foresight to create SO/LIC and SOCOM 30 years ago, and for your commitment to maintaining that vision over the last three decades. We are grateful for this committee's support for special operations, as

evidenced by the resources, authorities, and depth of understanding you provide in your oversight. Our military is stronger and more capable due to your efforts.

Today I will focus on three topics. First, winning the current fight and defeating emerging threats. Second, building on the foundations of section 922 ASD(SO/LIC) authorities. And third, continuing to hone the edge of SOF personnel and capabilities.

SOF is a vanguard force in countering emerging threats at the leading edge of the modern security landscape. In the last 15 years, we have encountered a networked enemy. We flattened our organizations and accelerated our targeting cycles and we built a network to defeat them. We now face advanced transregional threats that demand greater levels of coordination and collaboration, and we are redoubling our focus on building relationships with international and interagency partners.

Today, SO/LIC provides oversight and advocacy for the special operations budget, which is approximately 1.8 percent of our defense budget in 2017, and we directly manage over \$2 billion in various budgets that support counterterrorism and counternarcotics efforts.

The three-decades-long partnership between SOCOM and SO/LIC has generated a force capable of dealing with emerging threats, and a force that is able to translate those gains across the Department. We will win the fight against the VEOs [violent extremist organizations] and protect our citizens' vital interests, allies, and partners. This requires a long-term strategic approach that combats terrorists, disrupts terrorist networks, discredits extremist ideologies, and diminishes factors that contribute to recruitment and radicalization.

Sustaining funding and flexible legislative authorities have been instrumental to these efforts. I want to thank the committee for establishing section 127e, formerly known as section 1208, as a permanent authority. The maturation of this program has provided our warfighters a powerful tool to employ to support our allies, attack our enemies, and protect our force, and is a great example of interagency synergy, enabled by strong congressional support and oversight.

Congressional support for countering threat finance and transnational organized crime is also crucial to our overall efforts. Terrorists, insurgents, and other threat networks depend upon illicit revenue streams and criminal facilitators for logistic support, money laundering, and also obtaining weapons and fraudulent documents.

Thank you also for codifying the responsibilities of ASD(SO/LIC)'s important oversight role comprised of the complementary tasks of monitoring and advocacy in the fiscal year 2017 NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act]. USSOCOM has made dramatic advances during wartime in response to urgent battlefield demands, gains that require an institutional foundation to endure.

The service secretary-like authorities in section 922 serve as a strategic linchpin, ensuring that we lock in these hard-won gains. These authorities empowered the Special Operations Policy Oversight Council, which we have used in the past year to resolve base infrastructure and casualty evacuation issues among USSOCOM and the services.



Ultimately, these gains can be leveraged across the entire force with SOF best practices in technology and talent management serving as templates for the Department in addressing emerging challenges.

A key part of SO/LIC's role is to advance the state of the art in concepts, technologies, and strategies for both humans and hardware. Our Combating Terrorism Technical Support Office [CTTSO] leads this effort within SO/LIC by developing cutting-edge technologies for SOF, the interagency, and law enforcement.

The SOF truths state that humans are more important than hardware. As we continue to provide agile and innovative capabilities, we must also continue to maintain and sustain an elite workforce suited to the unique and diverse demands of 21st century warfare.

For more than 30 years, SOF has remained at the leading edge of global megatrends. We have employed SOF in consequential battles and we have seen SOF diminish threats before they evolve. We take lessons from every operation, and those lessons have informed and fostered innovation through SOF and across the larger force and Department. We will continue to work closely with Congress to ensure that we have the right policy, agile authorities, and necessary resources to employ SOF effectively.

I thank Congress for its continued support of our men and women in uniform and their families, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Whelan can be found in the Appendix on page 27.]

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you, Ms. Whelan.  
General Thomas.

**STATEMENT OF GEN RAYMOND A. THOMAS, USA,  
COMMANDER, U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND**

General THOMAS. Chairwoman Stefanik, Ranking Member Langevin, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am especially grateful to be here with Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Whelan in a session dedicated exclusively to special operations, as it provides us the opportunity to discuss in detail the unique requirements, capabilities, and challenges associated with your United States Special Operations Command.

This body legislated us into existence a little over 30 years ago to act as a unique Department of Defense organization, a dual-headed service-like entity responsible for both the manning, training, and equipping of special operations forces, as well as a globally focused, functional combatant command.

In fulfilling the first role, which continues to be our primary function, I believe we have consistently provided the world's best special operations forces to the geographic combatant commanders. However, it is in the second role, as a globally focused combatant command, where SOCOM has evolved the most.

As we carry out both of these roles today, special operations forces are more relevant than ever to the current and enduring threats facing our Nation. We have been at the forefront of national security operations for the past three decades, to include con-

tinuous combat over the past 15½ years. This historic period has been the backdrop for some of our greatest successes as well as the source of our greatest challenge, which is the sustained readiness of this magnificent force.

We are thankful for the resources you have provided not only to operate this force, but also to perform the critical sustainment efforts that underpin our most precious resource, our people.

Last month was particularly difficult for USSOCOM, losing its 407th hero, Staff Sergeant De Alencar, in a firefight in Nangahar Province in Afghanistan while operating alongside his Afghan partners. Then, last week, we lost Ranger Sergeants Thomas and Rodgers, our 408th and 409th casualties, respectively. This comes on the heels of 16 other combat fatalities since I assumed command a year ago and is a stark reminder that we are a command at war, and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

My current priorities for the command fall into three broad categories.

First, we must win the current fight, which consists of carrying out assigned missions running the gamut from defeating Islamic extremism, both Sunni and Shia, to countering Russian aggression, to preparing for contingencies in Korea, as well as various security operations to defend the homeland.

Second, we must continue to transform our enterprise to remain relevant in this rapidly changing security environment.

Finally, we must take care of our people and their families, as they form the foundation upon which our force is built.

My first year in command has seen us focused on these priorities as we transform the way DOD looks at many of the national military strategy challenges, in our role as the coordinating authority for countering transregional threats, and more recently we have also poured significant resources into defining our role as the DOD synchronizer for countering weapons of mass destruction.

Both of these substantive roles are additive to the current missions, where approximately 8,000 SOF are deployed in over 80 countries working with international, interagency, and DOD partners in support of the geographic combatant commanders' priorities.

This focus is also occurring during a period of unprecedented recapitalization of substantive parts of our warfighting capability, to include the conversion of our entire C-130J—our fleet to J model C-130s, as well as other major platforms. We are extremely thankful to the services for enabling this transformation to the force, as it sets us on the path of success for decades to come.

We are equally grateful to the support of Congress for required resourcing that in turn has produced a SOCOM which is relevant to all the current and enduring threats facing the Nation. We appreciate the continued oversight and advocacy for your United States Special Operations Command.

I look forward to your questions today as well as the planned closed session to follow. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of General Thomas can be found in the Appendix on page 34.]

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you, General Thomas.

I ask unanimous consent that nonsubcommittee members be allowed to participate in today's hearing after all subcommittee members have had the opportunity to ask questions. Is there objection?

Without objection, nonsubcommittee members will be recognized at the appropriate time for 5 minutes.

My first question is for Ms. Whelan. In your written statement you note that adversarial powers are increasingly turning towards unconventional warfare to pursue their objectives, including Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea.

And as you know, this committee shares this concern, and in the NDAA for FY 2016 we included a provision directing the Secretary of Defense to coordinate with the interagency and submit a strategy to counter these unconventional threats. This strategy, which is now almost 2 years late, ultimately can help provide a way to ensure that our ends, ways, and means are aligned to help counter these unconventional threats.

So I have two questions on that front. Can you provide an update on the strategy and how the Department is coordinating with the interagency, and also when Congress can expect to receive it?

Ms. WHELAN. Yes, ma'am. Thank you, Congresswoman, for the question.

We have been engaged on the issue of UW, and actually we appreciate the language in the NDAA in fiscal year 2016 asking us to focus on this issue set. We have been, I think as you noted in your opening statement, quite focused on the counterterrorism fight for the last 15 years, and UW is an emerging area.

We have as a consequence had to shift resources to focus on this and develop capabilities and knowledge bases that had to a certain extent atrophied over the years. But also because the nature of UW has fundamentally changed because of 21st century technologies and techniques, we really in many ways have been starting from scratch, and that has been one of the challenges that we faced as we dug into this over the last 18 to 24 months.

We have been working with our interagency partners, and actually, as we have conducted that work with our interagency partners, we have begun to realize the extent to which UW in the 21st century really is an interagency team sport involving multiple parts of the U.S. Government and posing multiple threats to the U.S. Government because of the ways that our adversaries are using it.

Studies by USASOC [U.S. Army Special Operations Command], and also work that Georgetown University has done on UW, have indicated that our adversaries, particularly the more sophisticated ones, are actually focusing on the seams between our organizational entities and trying to exploit those seams and decision-making cycles in order to gain advantage on us in the space that essentially is below conventional war, the space that we now refer to as the gray zone or hybrid warfare.

What we are doing and have set in motion is two research projects. One, Johns Hopkins University is conducting a study on the nature of Russian unconventional warfare in particular. We also have engaged CTTSO, our RDT&E [research, development, test and evaluation] enterprise, to look at developing predictive analytic technologies that will help us identify when countries are

utilizing unconventional warfare techniques at levels essentially below our normal observation thresholds so that we can identify these early and be able to use that to develop our strategies. Once we complete the Russia UW strategy, we will also move on to look at Iran and China.

Again, this continues to be an evolving threat. So we look forward to continuing to work with you as we iterate and try to get our heads around what is probably one of the most interesting areas in terms of the emerging warfare techniques in the 21st century. We do expect to have an interim answer with our thoughts to you before the end of June.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you, Ms. Whelan.

My second question is for both you and General Thomas. In terms of countering unconventional warfare threats, are we any closer to linking all of our tools and capabilities, such as conventional, unconventional, economic, cyber, intel, and IO [information operations], in an effort to counter adversarial threats?

Ms. WHELAN. Thank you, Congresswoman.

I think you actually hit on the problem, the challenge that we are facing right now, is how to achieve that level of exquisite integration across multiple components of not only the Defense Department, but also the U.S. Government, and also to include the issues that bleed into the homeland space where, of course, we have a number of different laws and authorities that govern how we in the Defense Department operate, let alone how DHS [Department of Homeland Security] operates. These are some of the very things that we are trying to understand better as we look at the tactics and techniques that our adversaries are trying to use to exploit us.

Ms. STEFANIK. General Thomas.

General THOMAS. Chairwoman, to really dovetail with the first question as it plays to your second one, we are working closely with the Department for the overall strategy, but I think as importantly and more practically, we are focused on the resources and the authorities that would underpin that strategy. So we actually are having some pretty substantive discussions, specifically as it applies towards countering Russian aggression.

On that end, and to your second question, I do think you are seeing an increasingly enhanced and capable blend of everything that we bring to the table in terms of military capabilities, information operations, influence operations, partner capacity, all the way through to DA [direct action], although less applicable in some of the UW environments that we are currently in, but always kind of the hold card, but also cross-cued with everything the interagency can bring and with our host nations.

I do think that you are seeing a trend in the right direction, as I think your question hopes we are moving in that regard.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you.

I now recognize Mr. Langevin.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, thanks to our witnesses today for your testimony.

Ms. Whelan, section 922 of the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2017 focused on solidifying the roles and responsibilities of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Oper-

ations and Low-Intensity Conflict as related to the administrative matters of SOCOM.

Can you please provide an update on how this provision is being implemented and how the relationship between ASD(SO/LIC) and SOCOM has been shaped by the provision?

Ms. WHELAN. Thank you for the question, Congressman.

We very much actually appreciate the language in the NDAA for fiscal year 2017 in section 922 that further clarified and strengthened the role of ASD(SO/LIC) in the oversight and management of the Special Operations Command in the context of its service-like responsibilities for the joint SOF enterprise. This is, we think, a very important step forward in terms of enhancing the joint SOF enterprise.

What we have done so far internally within the Department is we have established a tiger team under the direction of Deputy Secretary of Defense Work—now, of course, that will continue into the future—to fully flesh out the areas in which we need to organizationally adjust ourselves within the Office of Secretary of Defense and within ASD(SO/LIC) to more effectively carry out these responsibilities.

But in the interim, we have also achieved seats on the Deputy's Management Action Group. It is an independent seat for ASD(SO/LIC), so that ASD(SO/LIC) can, similar to the other service secretaries, represent the service interests of SOCOM. We have achieved a similar seat on the Special Access Programs Oversight Committee for the same purpose, to represent the interests of the joint SOF enterprise. We have also made gains in achieving for ASD(SO/LIC) the authorities provided to other service secretaries with regard to management of some personnel and hiring issues for SOCOM.

So we are slowly establishing greater precedents for ASD(SO/LIC) to act in those service-like secretary functions within the Department. We will continue to find ways to work more effectively to represent SOCOM in the Department and to the Secretary of Defense, and we appreciate, again, the language and the clarity that was provided in the terms of the role that ASD(SO/LIC) should be providing.

Mr. LANGEVIN. So ASD(SO/LIC) office has not seen an increase in resources for many years. In your opinion, is the office of ASD(SO/LIC) properly resourced to carry out the roles and responsibilities outlined in section 922?

Ms. WHELAN. Thanks for the question, Congressman.

So you are correct, we have not seen an increase. In fact, we have actually downsized because of requirements for downsizing of the Federal workforce, particularly at major headquarters organizations.

However, that is one of the functions of the tiger team, is looking at the language in 922, determining what functions the ASD(SO/LIC) must provide in order to fully implement that language, and then essentially determining a troop-to-task requirement and whether or not, how we can meet those in terms of the workforce while staying within the requirements for downsizing.

Mr. LANGEVIN. And what is the status of the Special Operations Oversight Council?

Ms. WHELAN. The SOPOC, the Special Operations Oversight Council, actually meets regularly. It meets at multiple levels, a working level, a mid-level, a sort of general officer, one-star, deputy assistant secretary level, and it also meets at the principals level, the assistant secretary level. It has had multiple meetings at the working level on a day-to-day basis to resolve issues that come up related to SOCOM and management, personnel, training issues, and also resourcing issues.

We have had also a number of meetings at the deputy assistant secretary, general flag officer level to take on a little bit more thornier issues, including some requirements for new authorities. We have had two meetings so far this year at the assistant secretary level in which we actually, as I mentioned in my remarks, were able to resolve some particularly thorny issues in the favor of SOCOM with the services on infrastructure and casualty evacuation requirements.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Okay. Thank you.

My time has expired, but hopefully, if we do a second round, I would want to get to General Thomas and just ask you for an update on the countering weapons of mass destruction synchronization responsibility that was transferred from STRATCOM to SOCOM. Hopefully we can do a second round.

I yield back.

Ms. STEFANIK. Ms. Cheney.

Ms. CHENEY. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

And thank you very much to both of our witnesses this morning.

General Thomas, I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about the extent to which we are seeing a changing national security environment, how quickly it's changing, and what those demands mean in terms of conflict with near-peer, peer-to-peer competitors, give us an assessment of sort of the rapidity of that change and how that is affecting your fundamental mission and what some of those changing requirements might be.

General THOMAS. Congresswoman, as you stated in the question, the evolution of change in terms of the threat environment is almost at kind of a frantic level in terms of number of threats, the transregional aspect that pertains, and the varied nature of the threats, so running the gamut from hybrid threats all the way through to high-end, arguably existential threats.

The challenge to our force, obviously, is to maintain the current effort towards combating violent extremism while we transform the force to be prepared for both current and emerging threats as I described them here. So we recognize the challenge. I think we are changing consistent with the specific campaign plans relative to each one of those threats. But it is a continuous evolution.

Ms. CHENEY. And as you look at the overall threat environment and the sort of initial mission and dealing with the counterterrorism challenge, talk a little bit about the issue of safe havens, if you would, please, in terms of specifically the separate campaign missions that we might have and particularly separate missions we might have within individual countries. But is there an effort underway to look broadly, to say what are we doing globally to deny safe haven to ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria], what are

we doing globally to deny safe haven to Al Qaeda, and how do the SOF assets fit into that?

General THOMAS. Congresswoman, I would be very happy to go into much greater detail in the closed session. But to your point, I think it is worth reminding ourselves that the reason we got involved in Afghanistan in the first place was that we were attacked from that sanctuary, where there was a symbiotic relationship between Al Qaeda and other forces there that enabled them to attack our country.

Obviously, we want to avoid that situation in the future, both in declared areas of hostility and other locations where the adversary is inclined to migrate. And they do have a tendency to migrate to ungoverned spaces, which drives the need for strategies to deal with those locations.

Again, I would be happy to go into much more detail, because we are not just observing the problem, we are addressing that tendency.

Ms. CHENEY. Thank you.

And in terms of the work that we are doing with partner nations—and this is also a question for Secretary Whelan—with partner forces, how we are working in terms of building capacity in those partnership relationships, could you talk a little bit about how that is developing and how we can be most effective in terms of working with our allied forces in partnership capacity training?

Ms. WHELAN. Thanks, Congresswoman, for the question.

Actually, I think that we have made significant advances in the area of capacity building. DOD now, thanks to the new legislation, triple three [section 333], has, I think, greater flexibility in the use of title 10 resources, which we are now also working with State Department to ensure that those resources are implemented in a complementary fashion to the title 22 FMF [foreign military financing] resources that they have.

So not only do we have the flexibility that we need, but I think that we are continuing to develop improved ways of managing the programs such that we can assess the effectiveness of those programs in terms of achieving our strategic objectives. We are continuing to iterate and work with the COCOMs [combatant commands] in terms of program design, as well as program evaluation at the back end, and then flowing that evaluation into adjustments to program design.

So this is a continual process, but fundamentally capacity building is a critical part of our strategy. It is not just something that is separate from our strategy that we do independently. It is a fundamental element of our strategy, because we need partners in many of the areas of the world that we work. And so building their capacity to make them essentially security providers as opposed to countries that absorb security or require security will enhance our security in the long run.

Ms. CHENEY. Thank you very much. I will yield back and look forward to pursuing both of these topics further in the closed session.

Ms. STEFANIK. Mrs. Murphy.

Mrs. MURPHY. Thank you.

Thank you, General Thomas and Ms. Whelan, for being here today and for your testimony.

As I shared with General Thomas at the Special Ops Caucus breakfast this morning, I had the honor of serving in OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] SO/LIC in the Special Ops/Countering Terrorism Directorate in the mid-2000s, and I am grateful to be engaging on this issue today, and I am looking forward to visiting SOCOM headquarters on Friday this week with my colleague Congresswoman Kathy Castor.

Ms. Whelan and General Thomas, as you know, this committee is very focused on finding ways that the Department can improve its acquisition processes to keep pace with rapid technology advancements. I understand that SOCOM uses alternative acquisition authorities and exemptions with great success, including the regular use of other transactional authority, which was granted to the Department as an alternative business process to quickly and flexibly fund research and prototype development. For example, I understand that SOCOM has set up a business and technology incubator called SOFWERX using OTA [other transaction authority].

Can you talk a little bit about what SOFWERX does in downtown Tampa and discuss where SOCOM's use of alternative business processes has helped field game-changing technology?

General THOMAS. Congresswoman, thanks for the question, and I look forward to your visit this Friday, and hopefully you will have a chance to visit our facility in Tampa.

First off, on exquisite acquisition authorities: our acquisition director would actually tell you that our authorities aren't that much significantly different from the services'. The advantage we do have is that he works directly for me, and so we have a very direct kind of affiliation, daily affiliation, I would offer. He has been extraordinarily creative, as has the rest of the organization, in trying to create an environment that enables and encourages innovation from our problem-solving base through to how we codify it in our organization.

SOFWERX, as you mentioned, is a relatively new endeavor, about a year and a half old, which was really established as an off-site, specifically and intentionally, off the MacDill compound to provide an environment where, as he would describe it, we have the opportunity for a collision of acquisition types, technologists, and most importantly, operators.

So as you visit that site, you will find very current operational individuals who have the problem-solving ideas and kind of ethos that is then married with academia, technologists, and acquisition types so that we can rapidly consider alternative sourcing, alternative problem-solving methods, and really get to the crux of the matter of providing enabling technology to our force.

So, again, I hope you have a chance to see it. I have probably done a disservice, but as you have the opportunity to visit, I think you will appreciate how nuanced and really effective this new process has been.

Mrs. MURPHY. Great. Thank you.

Do you have any thoughts on how we could encourage the Department to more frequently use this rapid acquisition authority



and tools that have already been provided to DOD on a larger scale?

General THOMAS. Congresswoman, there is actually a very good news story here. I would normally tell you about our interdependence on the services. While they provide us platforms that we then transition with our funding authorities to create SOF platforms, what you are seeing is a trending in the opposite direction, where based on our research and development and some of our acquisition activities, we are now enabling the services, and even more so, we are enabling some of our foreign counterparts.

So we have a number of memorandums of understanding with foreign counterparts that is enabling them to keep pace with us as they can afford it and sustain it, and then really driving towards interoperability. But that in the past has been thought of just a niche SOF approach that now has expanded to our services. So there are a few good examples where we are returning the favor back to the services for things that we have already done the trail-blazing research and development, and they are inclined to leverage us.

So I think it is a good news story.

Mrs. MURPHY. Great. And then do you think you can outline some of the more difficult advanced technology requirements that SOF needs in order to maintain an edge on the battlefield?

General THOMAS. Congresswoman, the one that we discussed very briefly today that I am fascinated and arguably stunted as a 58-year-old to get my head around, and that is leveraging machine learning, deep learning, cognitive computing, that I know it, I can see it, you know, I can see it in action in terms of corporate applications, I know the requirement in terms of how we are dealing, literally swimming in the morass of information and intelligence, a mixed bag, but how we sort through that in terms of applying business solutions is right—we are on the cusp of it. And the good news is we are starting to marry up the right people with our operators and our problem solvers to get at this wicked problem of information management and deep data, all the things that go with it that arguably corporations have already addressed.

Mrs. MURPHY. Great. Thank you.

Ms. STEFANIK. Mr. Wilson.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Chairwoman Elise Stefanik, for your leadership on Emerging Threats.

And, Madam Secretary, General, thank you for being here today. It is especially meaningful to me. My second son is a doctor in the Navy. He trained with SEAL Team 2. He has served in Baghdad with the Rangers and the SEALs. I was on a delegation one time with Congressman Mike Pence of Indiana, and while we were there my son gave you the highest backhanded compliment. He claimed that the Rangers are good too.

And so I was so proud of his service and what it means to our country. So I know firsthand how significant.

General, your organization is funded differently from other commands, but can you highlight the effects, particularly on readiness, of your organization if we do not successfully address the issue of sequestration?

General THOMAS. Congressman, first of all, thanks for the compliment on the Ranger regiment. I will take that home with us.

To your first point, we are very appreciative for the level of funding that we currently enjoy. We entail about 2 percent or less of the DOD budget for all the activities that we are endeavoring to accomplish. I would also acknowledge that we get matching funds, so to speak, from the services that amount to about double that budget, again, emphasizing our dependency on the services. But a small price, 2 percent, provides you the special operations capability that you see manifest everywhere in the world these days.

The short answer for sequestration, the impact on us is catastrophic going forward. And I cannot imagine the ripple as much, because I don't appreciate the ripple to the services on whom I am so dependent. So I can probably itemize it for us internally and then I can only speculate how even more tragic it would be in terms of our interservice dependence.

Mr. WILSON. And, General, something I would appreciate, at a later date, if you could provide to me what the catastrophic effects are so that I can distribute that to our colleagues, because they need to know. Sadly, this just hasn't been recognized.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 57.]

Mr. WILSON. Additionally, General, can you outline to the committee the role that special operations has in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, other areas of active hostilities? What authorities do you have? Are there any concerns about the authorities you have? What can we do to help?

I am particularly concerned about rules of engagement. There have been reports where the restrictive rules of engagement have actually resulted in mass deaths, particularly of SEALs, where there were restrictions that simply went beyond common sense.

I also want to thank you, with Congresswoman Cheney your referencing, truly restating Afghanistan. The American people have forgotten 9/11, that indeed, this was an attack on the American people, mass murder, from a cave in Afghanistan. And, sadly, the media doesn't ever connect the dots. And we are in a global war on terrorism, and we here support you on that.

Additionally, I am grateful. I actually had a son serve for a year in Afghanistan too. So thank you for referencing the significance of Afghanistan.

So back again to the authorities you have, and then have there been any adjustments to the rules of engagement?

General THOMAS. Congressman, I would like to give you a much more detailed response to that in closed session, if I can, for the specific roles we are playing. I just returned from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, the entire Middle East where we have forces, Lebanon, et cetera. So I can go into great detail.

I would tell you that I ask that question everywhere I go: Do you have the authorities you need to do your job? And I am very satisfied that we have affected the authorities under the current leadership of the combatant commanders who we are supporting to enable our force.

Anecdotally, I can tell you where there are still shortcomings. I just recently was in Helmand, where there was a particular nuance

to the mission set that I was able to address back to that commander. And, again, I can get in more detail there. But that is the consistent question our leadership is asking our folks every day: Do you have the authorities you need? If not, how do we fix that going forward? But, again, if I can go into more detail in the closed session, I would appreciate it.

Mr. WILSON. Well, again, I appreciate your leadership so much.

And, Secretary Whelan, as we are looking ahead to fiscal year 2018, what cuts do you see that are coming that could impact special operations capabilities?

Ms. WHELAN. Thanks for the question, Congressman.

I think the concerns that we have mostly are in readiness across the force. And we have been operating at such a high OPTEMPO [operations tempo] for the last decade-plus, and with budgets going down, what we have had to do is essentially we have had to eat our young, so to speak. I mean, we have mortgaged the future in order to facilitate current operations. That has impacted readiness and it has also impacted the development of force for the future, and as the threats grow, this is only going to get worse.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much.

Ms. STEFANIK. Ms. Gabbard.

Ms. GABBARD. Thank you.

Good morning. Thank you both for being here.

Given the unprecedented integration between special operations forces and the intelligence community, I am wondering if you can, as best you can in this unclassified forum, talk about this integration, how it has been going, particularly focused on how the Department of Defense conducts oversight over this? And at what point is the decision made when concerning title 50 activities how and where our special operators are used?

Ms. WHELAN. Congresswoman, thanks for the question. I think it would be best if we answered that in the closed session in terms of the details. It gets us into some very sensitive areas.

Ms. GABBARD. Are you able to talk about the oversight portion of this?

Ms. WHELAN. What I can say is that we have a very proactive relationship with the commands and then also our counterparts in the intelligence community, and there is an active dialogue that takes place all the way up to the Secretary of Defense, and he engages with his counterpart regularly. So I think I would say that we have very effective oversight between the two elements of the U.S. Government.

Ms. GABBARD. Okay. Thanks. Looking forward to continuing this in the closed session.

Given the unique capabilities that you both have talked about here that our special forces offer to today's environment, the high operational tempo has resulted in some of the readiness challenges that you have mentioned as well. Can you talk a little bit about how to address that? Is there a look to increase the numbers of special forces that we have to deal with and address the environment that we are facing, how much and how quickly, and how can we get to a place where this is sustainable and it is not creating such a stress on our troops and their families?

General THOMAS. Congresswoman, I will take a shot at that one. Part of the friction, I would offer, is driven by two aspects. One is the deployment tempo, in some cases unforecasted. For instance, Afghanistan, the expectation was that we were going to be finished in 2014. We are now throttling into 2017 and beyond. So that unexpected aspect of continued deployment where we would otherwise recapitalize people and capabilities elsewhere is something that has been a challenge to manage, but we are able to do so right now.

The other part is the transformation piece I mentioned earlier. Again, based on some assumptions on when we might be able to afford the opportunity to transform some of our platforms, particularly our C-130s and others, good assumptions were made. They are being challenged by current events. So it adds a little extra friction.

I mention that because I closely monitor the parts of our force that are under the most stress. And I can get into them specifically in the closed hearing probably better, but there are forces that are meeting themselves coming and going in some regards, others are in better balance. And we are trying to kind of create better balance across the force in its entirety going forward, but it is a challenge.

Ms. GABBARD. Can you talk about the rate of suicide amongst your troops and how it compares to the rates that we are seeing in other branches of the military, and what the defense health services are doing to help address that?

General THOMAS. Congresswoman, we are as, or more, challenged than the other services in the Armed Forces. That may come as a surprise to you, and I don't want to get into the morbid statistics, but we are suffering the same challenges as the rest of the services.

We have doubled and tripled our efforts in terms of awareness amongst both our leaders—and truthfully this is not—this is leadership as it permeates down to the lowest level of our force. We have doubled and tripled our efforts in terms of availing our service members to the services that otherwise might mitigate the challenges that they are facing. But nonetheless, we still suffer from this challenge and we are absolutely trying to rectify it. It is a primary focus for us.

Ms. GABBARD. Thank you. Thanks. Look forward to continuing the conversation.

I yield back.

Ms. STEFANIK. A few members have additional questions before we go to the closed classified session.

My question, General Thomas, broadly, you note that SOCOM is preparing for conflicts of the future. What are future conflicts you fear the most and how are you prioritizing preparation for those conflicts?

General THOMAS. Chairwoman, I don't fear the future conflicts as much as I am concerned about our ability to get it right, to anticipate the real—the essence of the requirement.

I think anyone who is paying attention to the news these days knows the number and type of threats that would challenge DOD

to the greatest extent possible. And we are integral to every one of those preparatory activities.

So I think you can extrapolate from that, and I would be glad to get into more details in closed session on the specifics of what we are preparing to do, but suffice to say, we are integral to all the preparatory activities that are currently undergoing.

Ms. STEFANIK. And my next question is, it is mentioned in the discussion today how heavily dependent SOF is on OCO, Overseas Contingency Operations funding, and portions of the force remain in very high demand with minimal time to reset. U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in particular fall into this category.

What readiness concerns do you have and how are you dealing with shortfalls in this area? And do you anticipate that the fiscal year 2018 budget request will help you in this area?

General THOMAS. Thanks very much for that question, Chairwoman, because it is a point of emphasis for us, and I know you are attentive to it.

Given the current trending for budgeting, SOCOM will be leveraged to OCO to the tune of about 30 percent of our total obligation authority, 30 percent relative to the services, who typically have about a 7 percent reliance on OCO. So we are three to four times more dependent on OCO.

I think you know, because it has been a topic of discussion for the last 5 years among my predecessors, that OCO has purchased, has acquired us enduring capabilities that we think are applicable to future threats, but it is not in the base.

So therein lies the rub, that if for whatever reason OCO was to dissipate without a transition to baseline, SOCOM as it is right now is a large facade, and it is mostly manifested in one of our most prominent forces. And I can get in more detail in the closed session, but it would absolutely undercut their ability to continue performing to the level I think the Nation requires.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you.

I recognize Mr. Langevin for 5 minutes.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, Madam Chair.

General Thomas, if I could go back to the question I wanted to talk about. If you would provide an update on the countering weapons of mass destruction synchronization responsibility that was transferred from STRATCOM to SOCOM, and in particular, have all the necessary resources been transferred from STRATCOM to SOCOM to carry out this role?

General THOMAS. Congressman, as you know, we picked up that mission in January based on a Presidential decision last year. The actual effective transfer was in January. So we have had the mission for about 5 months now.

We held our first semiannual synchronization conference with an extraordinary turnout of both interagency and international partners, and kind of the enthusiasm was palpable in the room in terms of a real community of action vice a community of interest.

We are very enthusiastic about pushing this mission set forward. We are in the throes of rewriting the campaign plan as well as conducting an assessment that I hope to provide our Secretary in about the August timeframe.

On your very practical question about resourcing, I appreciate your attention there. We are in the midst of some pretty substantive discussions in terms of the resources required. We have already done some internal task organization to get at the problem so we didn't sit idly by while we waited on resources.

We did receive some very extraordinary capabilities resident in DTRA, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, that were transferred with the mission set to us, so about 50-some folks there. And so we are in the process of kind of cobbling together our new task organization for this problem. So I am confident, I am somewhat confident, that we will get the resourcing required to enhance our capability in this critical mission set.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Okay. We look forward to have you keep us posted on that.

And what organization changes at DTRA and SOCOM have occurred?

General THOMAS. Congressman, not so much organizational. We actually morphed in terms of SOCOM structure. So I put a flag officer against this mission to kind of emphasize the criticality of it. I was lucky to have a plans officer that I could dual hat there. We applied some of our contractor focus. More importantly, we immediately adopted part of our infrastructure into a fusion cell for our common operating picture for this mission set.

The interaction with DTRA really has been more of the nature of exchanged liaison officers and then really a process, kind of a binding process in terms of our interoperability with our existing SOCOM staff with the DTRA component. So we just tightened the lash-up there. We had a preexisting relationship, but it is much tighter and more process focused now.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Are there any priorities and challenges that you have identified so far or is it still a work in progress?

General THOMAS. Still a work in progress, Congressman. Obviously, quite a few challenges on the WMD front. Again, going back to one of the earlier questions, I am concerned about how we see this problem in the morass of information that is out there, especially in terms of dual-use technology, how do we see the flow of innocuous dual-use technology and otherwise nefarious technology, and then how it is integrated into our whole-of-government and our international approach to the problem set.

So I am concerned going in only because I am not as attuned to the set as I probably want to be, but we are endeavoring to get there.

Ms. STEFANIK. Mrs. Murphy.

Mrs. MURPHY. This is a follow-up to the last question I had for you. You had identified some of the areas that are important for you to have to maintain a competitive advantage on the battlefield, including what you just discussed, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and such.

How are you staying ahead in the research and development in these areas when your budget has been steadily declining over the last few fiscal years?

General THOMAS. Congresswoman, I think we have the advantage of having an attractive mission set that regardless of our—and I don't—I wouldn't say our budget has declined. We have flatlined

a little bit. But nonetheless we are able to track the right kind of innovative business leads, who essentially invest in our problem without a great resourcing expense at the moment. Again, it depends on where we take it.

But I am somewhat satisfied that we have the attractiveness of our mission set and really the ability to cross-cue what they are doing from a business standpoint to where we are trying to apply it to military challenges, that there is enough of a nexus there to drive a less resource-intensive problem-solving approach.

Mrs. MURPHY. And then can you talk a little bit about your cyber warfare and cyber operations requirements? And also, how is SOCOM working with USCYBERCOM [United States Cyber Command]? And are there any policy or authority concerns?

General THOMAS. Congresswoman, the bottom line is we have an extraordinary level of coordination and collaboration with CYBERCOM, so I am very comfortable there. Probably, if I could wait to the closed session to get into the details of what we are endeavoring to do from a SOCOM standpoint. But clearly we have the same challenge that CYBERCOM has in terms of both defending a network and then seeking offensive capabilities as required for the respective problem sets. And, again, I would be glad to talk in the closed session in more detail.

Mrs. MURPHY. Great. And I look forward to the closed session. I will yield back my time.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you to the witnesses for your testimony. We will now adjourn and reconvene in about 5 minutes in Rayburn 2337.

[Whereupon, at 11:01 a.m., the subcommittee proceeded in closed session.]





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# **A P P E N D I X**

MAY 2, 2017

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**PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD**

MAY 2, 2017

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**Opening Statement  
Chairwoman Elise M. Stefanik  
Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee  
Three Decades Later: A Review and Assessment of Our Special  
Operations Forces 30 Years After the Creation of U.S. Special  
Operations Command**

**May 2, 2017**

I call this hearing of the Emerging Threats and Capabilities subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee to order.

I am pleased to welcome everyone this morning to a very important hearing entitled, “Three Decades Later: A Review and Assessment of U.S. Special Operations Forces 30 Years After the Creation of U.S. Special Operations Command.”

This year marks a 30-year historical point for our Special Operations Forces, when Congress added an amendment to the Goldwater-Nichols reform legislation that created the United States Special Operations Command. Since that time, this force has been preserving strategic options for our Nation, and their track record is second to none.

During my time in Congress, and as Chair of this subcommittee, I have travelled to many war-zones and embassies, and seen this force in action. I can say from first hand-experience that I am continually impressed and humbled by the men and women conducting these important missions, and our Nation can truly be proud of their accomplishments.

And although this hearing offers an opportunity for reflection, in some ways the threats that Special Operations Forces respond to are as timeless as warfare itself, and have existed in the form of irregular and asymmetric challenges, from state and non-state actors alike.

These challenges – and indeed those of the past 16 years since 9/11 – have demanded a heavy focus on counterterrorism and direct action skills for this Force. But how much that experience will shape our thinking about future conflicts remains to be seen.

And despite this constant theme, the world at large continues to change, and we must not let today’s war overshadow the need to prepare for the wars of tomorrow.

While the global CT fight continues, adversarial advances in synthetic biology, quantum computing, information warfare, and indeed the proliferation of more than 10 trillion sensors and devices connected to the Internet – present risks for tomorrow. However, if managed right, these risks become great opportunities for this highly capable force.

In thinking about the years ahead, we must ask hard questions after nearly 16 years of constant war, including: what parts of this force are broken,

and what needs to be repaired quickly; what adversarial nation-states are advancing faster, and achieving a qualitative edge over our Forces; and what must we do to ensure that our Special Operations Forces are postured for the next 30-years to mitigate our most pressing national security concerns, and to continue to preserve strategic options for our Nation?

As in the past, Congress will play a major role, by aligning resources and policy to keep Special Operations effective, silent, globally postured, and when necessary, absolutely lethal. To do that, we will need the help of our witnesses before us this morning:

- Ms. Theresa Whelan, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict; and,
- General Raymond “Tony” Thomas, Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command

It is worth noting that Ms. Whelan – although also performing the duties of Under Secretary of Defense for Policy – is appearing today before the committee in her capacity as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense.

I’d like to turn now to my friend and Ranking Member, Mr. Jim Langevin from Rhode Island, for any comments he’d like to make.

STATEMENT OF THERESA WHELAN

PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT  
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT

BEFORE THE HOUSE  
ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
115<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES

May 2, 2017

## Introduction

Chairman Stefanik, Congressman Langevin, and other distinguished members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today in my capacity as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict (SOLIC). I am pleased to share this table with General Tony Thomas, who has served the special operations force (SOF) community at all levels of command. Our entire SOLIC team is proud to partner with his command in forging the future of special operations on behalf of the Department of Defense and the American people.

We are grateful for this committee's strong support of special operations, as evidenced by the resources, authorities, and depth of understanding you provide in your oversight. We pledge to make the best use of these resources to accomplish all special operations mission sets – including defeating the threat networks of terrorists, illicit traffickers, and transnational criminals; denying the acquisition, proliferation and use of weapons of mass destruction; and countering unconventional threats. At the same time, we appreciate your support in advancing SOF warrior care and force resiliency through the Preservation of the Force and Family - which places psychologists, counselors, and exercise physiologists into the daily routines of SOF to perform 'preventative maintenance,' catching and resolving problems before they become chronic - and SOF-for-Life initiatives.

As part of its roles and responsibilities, the OASD(SO/LIC) provides oversight and advocacy for the special operations budget, which is approximately 1.8% of our defense budget in 2017. Additionally, we directly manage over \$2 billion in various budgets that support our counterterrorism and counternarcotics efforts, such as the Counterterrorism Fellowship Program, the Combating Terrorism Technical Support Office, and the counternarcotics budget. We ensure that these investments are leveraged to provide return on investment across the strategic landscape, the interagency, and across the joint force.

I am here to report to you on the current and anticipated strategic environment that our Nation's special operations enterprise will face during this time of transformation. As global events shape our environment, our special operations mission continues finding, fixing, and finishing an innovative enemy while harnessing these trends and technologies for our own advantage. Let me begin by discussing that rapidly evolving environment and its effect on combating terrorists, state-sponsored unconventional warfare, and illicit networks that include, but are not limited to, transnational organized crime. I will then describe three SO/LIC focus areas that will allow us to: 1) win the current fight and defeat emerging threats, 2) build on the foundation of the Section 922 authorities, and 3) hone the edge of SOF personnel and capabilities.

## **Strategic Environment: The Megatrends of Individual Empowerment, Diffusion of Power, and Demographic Instability**

When John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt wrote their seminal work *Networks and Netwars* in 1991, they introduced the now-ubiquitous phrase: "it takes a network to defeat a network." Their work foresaw changes in the nature of warfare, which shaped how both we and our enemies encounter each other. Previously, Al-Qaeda leveraged the advantage of flat networks to strike



fielded forces and vulnerable targets around the world. In response, we built our own global network to harness these trends and seize the initiative.

Where Al-Qaeda leverages globalization and franchised network structures to threaten our interests, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) evolves its threat networks further, presenting new analytical and operational challenges by harnessing emerging megatrends. ISIS thrives in the volatile space carved out by these trends. This generation of VEOs adopts the latest technology to communicate on the battlefield and to influence new individuals and groups on behalf of the organization. They also use existing tools in novel ways – the non-state equivalent of the “gig economy” – and adapt so quickly that they overcome most governmental decision cycles. This generation of threats is challenging U.S. national security interests in ways we have not seen before. Social media allows ISIS to connect with individuals who share alienation and grievances, or agree with ISIS’ distortion of Islam. Digital innovation, both in warfighting and communications technologies, is a key to their success. Technologies such as mobile applications and the dark web help enable illicit trade on an exponentially increasing scale and have contributed to the growth in the number and power of illicit groups. As these groups leverage the darker side of these megatrends, SOF must adapt and innovate in order to disrupt threat networks and deter unconventional adversaries.

### **30 Years of USSOCOM and ASD (SO/LIC): SOF at the Intersection of Global Megatrends**

This year, we celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of both USSOCOM and ASD(SO/LIC). It is appropriate for us to reflect and build upon the past as we look to the future. For the latter half of the past 30 years, war has transformed our nation’s special operations community from a unique, specialized force that occupied a crucial niche in our security posture into a vanguard force that is reshaping our world. In combatting terrorists, special operations forces have built flat networks that bridge interagency divides down to the tactical level. Inherently joint, our special operations warfighters have continued to support global U.S. Government objectives by leveraging critical interagency and international partnerships. These boundary-spanning networks minimize our tactical response time while radically accelerating innovation. They also counter illicit threat networks, such as drug, weapons, and human trafficking, that fuel terrorist organizations and organized criminal enterprises. SOF support in Afghanistan for counter illicit drug trafficking has resulted in increased interdiction of opiates in various forms, reducing this funding resource for the Taliban and other insurgent and criminal groups.

Transregional threats like ISIS and transnational organized crime like drug cartels are demanding greater levels of coordination and collaboration from their – including operational planning, resource requirements, and information sharing. Effectively disrupting ISIS and other threat forces, requires all tools of U.S. national power, including diplomatic, intelligence, military, economic, financial, information, and law enforcement capabilities. The innovations the special operations enterprise has built to defeat adaptive threat networks are informing emerging concepts of unconventional and conventional warfare alike. In this way, SOF leads in Department-wide innovation, fielding, and optimizing emerging technologies and theories of warfighting.

### **Win the Current Fight and Defeat Emerging Threats**

We must win the protracted fight against terrorist organizations and their enabling networks in order to protect our homeland, our citizens, and support our allies and partners. This will require a long-term strategic approach to support the U.S. government and international partnerships. Within this DoD strategy, SOF contributes its unique capabilities to combat terrorists, disrupt adversary networks, discredit extremist ideologies, and diminish those factors that contribute to recruitment and radicalization. Sustained funding and flexible legislative authorities will continue to be instrumental in the defeat of priority terrorist organizations like ISIS and Al-Qaeda.

In light of U.S. conventional dominance, adversary powers are increasingly turning toward unconventional warfare to pursue their objectives. Countries demonstrating a willingness to use unconventional warfare, such as Russia, China, and Iran, have doctrinally linked conventional, warfare, and cyber warfare, information operations, clandestine, criminal, and other activities to undermine U.S. and allied national security objectives, particularly in ways and places that fall below thresholds conventional U.S. Government or international response. Our special operations forces are exploring the capabilities and authorities required to defeat these challenges to our influence and our interests.

At the same time, I want to thank the committee for establishing Section 127e – formerly known as Section 1208 – as a permanent authority. The maturation of this program has provided our warfighters a powerful tool to employ to support our allies and confront our enemies and is a great example of strong congressional support and oversight.

Congressional support for countering threat finance (CTF) and transnational organized crime is crucial to both of these efforts. Terrorist, insurgents, and other threat networks depend upon illicit revenue streams and criminal facilitators for logistical support, money laundering, or the procurement of weapons and fraudulent documents. These activities often involve both state and non-state actors in spaces between traditional war and peace. As the global synchronizer for DoD counter-threat finance, USSOCOM is uniquely positioned to synchronize efforts across the geographic combatant commands to disrupt the threat finance systems of ISIS, as well as other illicit networks. USSOCOM works alongside the National Guard Bureau and USG components in CTF teams in each GCC. Together, they provide essential support to military operations and to interagency law enforcement partners. The CTF teams analyze financial intelligence, integrate intelligence and operations, and coordinate and execute CTF activities. Countering threat finances disrupts and weakens terrorist and criminal adversaries in ways and places that traditional military weapons typically cannot reach. This capability is valuable across the full spectrum of conflict, including irregular and unconventional warfare. These efforts have enabled action against drug trafficking and other illicit networks, as emerging counter-network doctrine and technologies help unmask dark networks that threaten our national security. CTF efforts have proven to be a cost-effective tool to impact threatening forces and transnational criminal organizations, whether through law enforcement actions, designations, sanctions, or – as in the case of ISIS – through military actions against economic and financial targets.

The unique skills, culture, and capabilities underpinning SOF's success against these dark networks enable the command to serve as synchronizer against complex problem sets. As with CTF, this

expertise underwrites the recent transfer of the counter-WMD mission set, which USSOCOM recently inherited as a result of changes in the Unified Command Plan.

#### **Transform the Enterprise: Building on the Foundations of Section 922 Authorities**

We appreciate the committee's support in codifying the responsibilities of the ASD(SO/LIC) to provide oversight and advocacy for SOF. As our force continues to adapt to meet the enduring challenge of global campaigns against global threats, we find ourselves at an institutional crossroads. SOF has made dramatic advances during wartime in response to urgent battlefield demands, gains that require an institutional foundation to endure. SOLIC has completed a preliminary analysis of previous and newly assigned functions and activities to determine where there are gaps and associated risk. Currently SOLIC is reviewing whether these functions are directed by law or directed by Department guidance in order to make recommendations to our senior leaders on the divestiture of non-legally binding responsibilities. In overseeing SOF acquisitions, technology, logistics, personnel, readiness, and talent management functions, SOLIC will be positioned to institutionalize these hard-learned lessons of contemporary conflicts. The 'Service-secretary-like' authorities in Section 922 serve as a strategic linchpin, ensuring that we lock in these hard-won gains.

The FY17 NDAA codified the Special Operations Policy Oversight Council, which we have used over the past year to resolve Department-wide SOF-related issues, such as base infrastructure. We are already serving in a 'Service-secretary-like' role in approving waivers for mission-essential positions under the current civilian hiring freeze. We now sit alongside our colleagues from USSOCOM at budgeting and programming Deputy Management Action Group meetings. Our office is currently implementing the full scope of these far-reaching authorities, even as we benchmark concepts from these initial gains. By leveraging existing Service processes and relationships, we aim to minimize administrative burden and focus on architecture building and strategic awareness. Ultimately, we intend to leverage these gains for implementation across the entire force.

#### **Honing the Edge of SOF Personnel and Capabilities**

A key part of ASD(SO/LIC)'s role is to leverage our elite force to advance state of the art concepts, technologies, and strategies for both humans and hardware. For our operators, we strive to improve mental and physical performance on the battlefield and to take care of them and their families at home. For hardware, our investments in technologies and our policy advocacy for special operations capabilities give our SOF the tools they need to get the mission done.

The Countering Terrorism Technical Support Office (CTTSO) develops cutting edge technologies for SOF, the interagency, and law enforcement. For instance, we are exploring deep learning and big data analytics to sharpen strategies for outcompeting our adversaries. We are also investing in better technologies to analyze and present fused information to the warfighter. CTTSO's ability to leverage crowdsourcing pathways has helped field data tools that support operational preparation of the environment in ways we never thought possible. The versatility of these tools allows small tactical units to conduct a broad spectrum of military, special warfare, and cyber operations. Because the CTTSO model is inherently collaborative,

these gains are leveraged across the interagency, as well as with international, state, and local governmental partners.

The first SOF Truth states that “humans are more important than hardware.” Therefore, as we provide agile and innovative capabilities in support of high-priority U.S. national objectives, we must also continue to build and sustain an elite workforce suited to the unique and diverse demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare. SOF has borne the weight of grueling deployments and protracted overseas contingency operations over the course of the last decade, and we have accordingly turned our culture of innovation toward fostering and protecting our people.

### **Conclusion**

As we look back at the last thirty years, we note that SOF has consistently remained at the leading edge of global megatrends. This past year has been no exception. We have diligently leveraged your investment by deriving key concepts for the larger force from that experience. The small portion of the budget that supports our nation’s SOF provides a tremendous return on investment. We are applying your support and oversight to institutionalize a decade and a half of hard-earned warfighting lessons and advances the goal of a joint SOF enterprise. With these authorities, we will continue to evolve how we man, train, and equip our force in order to: win the current fight and defeat emerging threats; transform the special operations enterprise; and hone the edge of SOF. We will continue to work closely with Congress to ensure we have the right policies, agile authorities, and enhanced oversight structure in place to employ SOF effectively.

I thank Congress for its continuing support of our men and women in uniform and their families, and look forward to your questions.

**Theresa Whelan****Performing the Duties of Under Secretary of Defense for Policy****Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD/SOLIC)**

Theresa Whelan, a career member of the Senior Executive Service, is performing the duties of Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. She is also serving as the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD/SOLIC). In her capacity as USD for Policy, she is responsible for advising the Secretary of Defense on all matters pertaining to the development and execution of U.S. national defense policy and strategy. Ms. Whelan brings over twenty-nine years of experience in the defense intelligence, defense policy and national intelligence communities.

Prior to assuming her current position, Ms. Whelan served as the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict from March 2016 through January 2017.

From July 2015 through March 2016, Ms. Whelan served as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict.

Before returning to the Department of Defense, Ms. Whelan served as the national intelligence officer for Africa on the Director for National Intelligence's National Intelligence Council. Between 2003-2011, she held three separate deputy assistant secretary of defense (DASD) positions within the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy: DASD, Homeland Defense Domains and Defense Support to Civil Authorities; DASD, Defense Continuity and Crisis Management; and DASD, African Affairs.

In addition to the deputy assistant secretary positions, her other assignments in the Department include Under Secretary of Defense for Policy's Balkans Task Force, Senior Program Director for the US/South Africa Joint Defense Committee, Countries Director for Southern Africa and West Africa, and African military capabilities analyst for the Defense Intelligence Agency covering West, Central and East African countries.

Ms. Whelan has a Master of Arts in national security studies from Georgetown University, a Master of Science in national security strategy from the National War College, and a Bachelor of Arts in international relations with a minor in Russian studies from the College of William and Mary.

Her awards include two Presidential Rank Executive Awards, at the Distinguished and Meritorious levels; two Department of Defense Medals for Distinguished Civilian Service; the National Intelligence Superior Service Medal; the American University Roger W. Jones Award for Executive Leadership; the Paul H. Nitze Award for Excellence in International Security Affairs, and the French National Order of Merit.

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STATEMENT OF

GENERAL RAYMOND A. THOMAS, III, U.S. ARMY  
COMMANDER  
UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

BEFORE THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES  
MAY 2, 2017

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**Opening Remarks**

Chairwoman Stefanik and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today as the 11<sup>th</sup> Commander of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). This is my first address on the posture of US Special Operations Forces (SOF). Even in the short span of my first year in command we've seen the world evolve in complexity and the desire for SOF continue to increase. While challenges endure, and new ones emerge our force continues to evolve in the attempt to present options and decision space for our national leadership. During my remarks, I would like to highlight the breadth of missions where SOF is integral to the support of the current National Military Strategy (NMS), as well as how we are adapting to future challenges and transforming our capabilities. It goes without saying that NONE of this is possible without the professionalism, talent, and innovative problem solving capabilities of our most precious asset, our people, the decisive edge, who constitute the greatest Special Operations Force in history.

**The Formative Evolution of SOF**

Last month we celebrated the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the creation of USSOCOM as a result of The Goldwater-Nichols Act and the Nunn-Cohen Amendment -- prescient pieces of legislation that created US Special Operations Command from an ad hoc, individual service-based confederation of capability to become both a highly effective Service-like entity and an extraordinarily collaborative and effectively networked global functional Combatant Command. USSOCOM's service-like responsibilities continue to be the command's primary focus providing the world's best SOF to the Geographic Combatant Commanders. We look forward to working closely with the Assistant Secretary of Defense/Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict's (ASD/SOLIC) assigned role in our chain of command in the Title 10 role of manning, training, and equipping the force.

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USSOCOM has evolved enormously since its inception. Rather than a mere “break-glass-in-case-of-war” force, we are now proactively engaged across the “battle space” of the Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs), providing key integrating and enabling capabilities to support their campaigns and operations. We operate and fight in every corner of the world as an integrated joint, combined and interagency force. Today, there are approximately 56,000 active duty, 7,400 reserve, guard, and 6,600 civilian personnel across the SOF enterprise. On a daily basis, we sustain a deployed or forward stationed force of approximately 8,000 across 80-plus countries. They are conducting the entire range of SOF missions in both combat and non-combat situations with a wide variety of Joint, Interagency, International, and Multi-national partners.

We have recently taken on a number of new roles intended to leverage our global perspective on problems, and focus our unique capabilities in support of not only the GCCs, but also the Department of Defense (the Department) as a whole. First, we are the designated coordinating authority for trans-regional terrorist organizations and other threat networks. Acting in support of the Chairman and the Secretary of Defense, our responsibility in this role is to provide a coherent global framework for action and synthesize the perspectives and inputs of the Geographic Combatant Commanders into a single comprehensive military assessment of DoD’s global counter-terrorism efforts. This assists the combatant commands, the Chairman, and the Secretary in understanding and prioritizing efforts to counter violent extremist networks that operate across GCC boundaries in pursuit of a coherent and effective campaign.

To date, our team’s combined quarterly assessments, supported by productive dialogue with our mission partners and the integration of dozens of other assessments conducted by combatant commands, combat support agencies, and specialized task forces, have led to specific



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recommendations for the conduct of the Counter-Violent Extremist Organization effort. Specifically, we have identified the necessity to understand and address the underlying infrastructure that terrorist organizations use to generate and sustain their “combat power,” especially their enablers which include foreign fighters, financing and strategic communications. We have galvanized international and interagency focus on the effort in the form of Operation GALLANT PHOENIX, a SOF-led activity, designed to empower, support and integrate the efforts of our international (currently 19 foreign members with several others in the queue), interagency, and Joint Force partners to disrupt trans-regional terrorist networks and their ability to develop and field foreign fighters. Through information sharing, our partners support security and law enforcement actions against these networks, and inform decision makers on border security, identification of legal remedies and tools, and the structuring of counter-messaging campaigns.

Our second new responsibility is the assumption of the Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD) synchronization mission for the Department of Defense, recently transferred from USSTRATCOM. In this role, we are responsible for maintaining the DoD CWMD Campaign, establishing intelligence priorities, monitoring global operations and conducting assessments. We are publishing a new Global Campaign Plan to provide a comprehensive, trans-regional approach which integrates ongoing regional and interagency efforts. We have also established a CWMD Coordination Center to design, execute and assess this new trans-regional approach and connect to other USG Departments and Agencies, as well as international partners. The Center leverages the resources and skills of multiple agencies that will result in a multi-layered comprehensive approach to address the CWMD problem set. In coordination with the Geographic Combatant Commands, we will conduct this campaign

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attempting to focus more intently on the transregional nature of identified portions of the CWMD challenge and assess effectiveness towards national objectives, while providing resourcing and strategic recommendations to the Chairman and Secretary.

While the Department is addressing our stated requirements, USSOCOM has already implemented temporary manning strategies to mitigate risk as we transfer funding and manpower, hire new personnel, and build a network of partners. We have an established counter-terrorism (CT) network and a committed partner in the Defense Threat Reduction Agency to assist us as we move into this mission space. We are no stranger to adapting and building our network, and we have embraced this mission as we do all others – bringing focus and energy to some of the nation’s most complex challenges.

While we have evolved and now field an unmatched capability to conduct counter-terrorism operations with our partners and execute a select set of niche missions in support of the Joint Force, this expertise is not necessarily tailored to compete with near-peer competitors. We are focused on transformation as rapidly as possible across a broad range of mission capabilities.

**SOF in Today’s Competitions and Conflicts.**

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff identified five current and enduring threats in the new National Military Strategy (NMS): Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs), Russia, Iran, North Korea, and China. Although constituting only 2% of the Department’s budget and about 2% of its manpower, as a Combatant Command with global responsibilities, USSOCOM plays a critical role in the campaigns against each of these. While not a panacea nor a stand-alone solution, SOF produces substantive results at low cost, and with a potentially low profile / signature. However, none of the challenges can be effectively dealt with in isolation as they are

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interrelated and cut across GCC boundaries. USSOCOM is striving to be part of our whole of government efforts to face these threats.

*Violent Extremist Organizations.* The threat posed by VEOs remains the highest priority for USSOCOM in both focus and effort. Special Operations Forces are the main effort, or major supporting effort for US VEO-focused operations in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, across the Sahel of Africa, the Philippines, and Central/South America – essentially, everywhere Al Qaeda (AQ) and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) are to be found. Our priorities are disrupting external attack capability, destroying/neutralizing AQ and ISIS, developing a long-term approach to defeat and/or counter VEOs, and building partner capacity – helping our partners stabilize their environment and secure gains. SOF are also engaged in countering aggressive Iranian behavior that not only destabilizes the Middle East, but also, stokes sectarianism. SOF activities are in support of the GCCs’ efforts toward a strengthened deterrence posture, targeted counter-messaging activities, and building partner nations’ capacity.

This methodology is more comprehensive than simple counter-terrorism, and is an important part of an overarching whole-of-government approach to advance broader national security objectives. Organizations such as ISIS and AQ are trans-regional threats that require the Joint Force to work with partners across the US government as well as coalition partners. It requires focused effort to secure and hold our gains by empowering local entities within and among the populations that terrorists exploit. As we move forward in our coordinating authority role within DoD, we are committed to further developing this comprehensive approach to support the US military’s integration across the range of activities that like-minded organizations are pursuing. In this vein, we appreciate the NDAA mandate to expand the role of the State

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Department's Global Engagement Center, with whom we work, which provides critical counter messaging against state and non-state actors – a key to ultimately defeating organizations such as ISIS.

*Russia.* Our second priority in terms of resources and impact is supporting United States European Command (USEUCOM) in countering Russian aggression in Europe. As Secretary Mattis pointed out, Russia is seeking control over the economic, diplomatic, and security decisions of its neighbors. Further, Russia has reemerged as a strategic competitor of the US around the globe. This trend is most pronounced in the post-Soviet space, where Russia has shown itself as willing to act aggressively to limit US and Western institutions there. They are particularly adept at leveraging unconventional approaches to advancing their interests and it is clear they are pursuing a wide range of audacious approaches to competition – SOF often present a very natural unconventional response. USEUCOM is responding by using European Reassurance Initiative funding to deter Russia and reassure Allies, including by working with NATO to build more effective defense institutions in partner nations. In support of this, we have had persistent SOF presence for over 2 years in nearly every European country on Russia's western border (Baltics, Poland, Romania, Ukraine, Georgia) – assuring our allies and partners while building host nation and NATO capabilities to compete short of conflict in a hybrid environment. Our current focus consists of assuring our allies through building partner capacity efforts to counter and resist various types of Russian aggression, as well as enhance their resilience. We are working relentlessly with our partners and the Department of State to build potency in eastern and northern Europe to counter Russia's approach to unconventional warfare, including developing mature and sustainable Special Operations capabilities across the region.

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In support of GEN Scaparrotti, we will continue to refine our SOF posture to strengthen these partnerships in order to deter or respond to aggression in the region, as well as reassure our allies and contribute to a broader deterrent effect.

*North Korea.* USSOCOM has recently focused more intently on the emerging threat that is of growing concern to us as well as most of our DoD teammates – the nuclear threat of an increasingly rogue North Korea. Although previously viewed as a regional threat, North Korea's relentless pursuit of nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles, facilitated by a trans-regional network of commercial, military, and political connections, make it a threat with global implications. In response, United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) and United States Forces-Korea (USFK) are focused on sustaining credible combat power in the region, maintaining unrelenting resolve in the face of multiple provocations, and sustaining partnerships with our closest allies. We maintain a persistent and rotational presence on the peninsula, working with our increasingly capable South Korean partners to prepare for future crises. In the meantime, we are actively pursuing a training path to ensure readiness for the entire range of contingency operations in which SOF, to include our exquisite CWMD capabilities, may play a critical role. As previously noted, we are looking comprehensively at our force structure and capabilities on the peninsula and across the region to maximize our support to USPACOM and USFK. This is my warfighting priority for planning and support.

*Iran.* Iran uses both traditional state-based military capabilities and a network of terrorist, sub-state, and non-state partners to conduct operations, actions, and activities that incite violence and threaten US security interests. It relies on militias and a range of partner organizations to expand

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its influence and develop access to key areas. SOF activities are in support of CENTCOM's efforts toward a strengthened deterrence posture, targeted counter-messaging activities, and building partner nations' capacity. Our priority remains illuminating this Iranian network in order to understand its capabilities as it seeks to expand its influence. We also support and assure Israel and regional Gulf partners with foreign internal defense and security force assistance, aiding their efforts to counter Iranian threats.

*China.* China is pursuing a long-term, comprehensive military modernization program designed to improve its armed forces' capability to fight short duration, high intensity regional conflicts. China is intent upon expanding its regional and global influence, while developing capabilities to limit our ability to project power in the Pacific. SOF actions support USPACOM's efforts to focus on building military-to-military relations with China, focused on risk reduction. At the same time, we maintain persistent SOF presence in over a dozen countries in the USPACOM AOR – assuring our allies and building partner capabilities to address complex threats. The SOF community has worked to connect experts across the region, and between regions, to share lessons learned that provide opportunities to help our partners grow more effectively.

*Other Challenges.* Although the five NMS threats are the priority challenges for DoD, we remain focused on other parts of the world in terms of presence and engagement. The USSOUTHCOM Commander recently testified that aspects of the NMS-specified threats in the Southern Hemisphere are likely to become security challenges to the US homeland itself. Four out of the five named challenges are active in this region. To help mitigate these challenges, USSOUTHCOM's lines of effort are focused on countering threat networks, preparing for and

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responding to disasters and crises, and building relationships to meet global challenges. SOF are actively supporting Interagency efforts that range from counter-threat financing, for which USSOCOM is the DoD lead, to counter-terrorism. We will continue to assure allies and support efforts to counter malign activities in Latin America while working to undermine transnational criminal networks. We have learned that the best way to deal with competition short of conflict is to match the range of tools we have at our disposal to the needs of the Ambassadors and GCCs. We recently hosted a Senior Leader Seminar focused on special interest aliens that involved representatives from USNORTHCOM, USSOUTHCOM, Secretary Kelly from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), other members of the IA, and various South and Central American Country Teams. We enjoy tremendous collaborative efforts as part of the team that provides layered security relative to our southern border and beyond.

**The SOF Advantage**

USSOCOM provides a focused set of unique capabilities to deal with the challenges facing our Department and Nation today. Maintaining a forward presence in strategically important areas, leveraging established relationships, and identifying and addressing problems before they become full blown crises. Our ability to see, understand, and act across geographic boundaries is what allows SOF to operate globally at the speed of war, provide value to the GCCs, and provide options and decision space to national leadership. Additionally, we have increased the lethality, precision and mobility of our forces over time, which assists us in rapidly repositioning and focusing—providing enhanced options and effects.

Although SOF are effective across the spectrum of conflict, we are most optimally employed “left of bang” – pre-crisis. We believe that specialized application of SOF alongside

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partner nations, the Joint Force, and the Interagency conducting activities across the spectrum of conflict allows us to present options that best serve our national interests. In fact, a critical component of our effectiveness in the field is the ability to work with the Services, defense agencies, and interagency partners to support forward deployed forces. We have approximately 30,000 personnel actively engaged in providing support to deployed units in the areas of intelligence collection and analysis; Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) operations; cyber operations; exploitation activities; and communications and logistics support.

**Transformation: The Next Evolution of SOF**

While we are fully committed to winning the current fight, we are simultaneously working to prepare for the conflicts of tomorrow. We are always searching for improvements and relentlessly pursuing our next advantage. Key to this effort is USSOCOM's approach to requirements validation and acquisition, which allows us to rapidly field resources to those forces actively engaged in the fight. We appreciate Congress' continued resourcing of these efforts – I assure you we will continue to maximize the return on that investment.

Our current budget supports recapitalizing our platforms as well as developing our technological capabilities for dealing with near-peer competitors and competition short of armed conflict. Programmatically, we remain focused on enhancing Service-provided platforms with Major Force Program-11 funds to provide for the unique needs of our force. As always, the effectiveness of our investments is highly dependent upon the investment decisions of the Services.

A good example is seen in the success of our critical AC/MC-130J aircraft re-capitalization efforts, which include Radio Frequency Countermeasures, Terrain Following



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Radar, Airborne Mission Networking and Precision Strike Packages. We have taken delivery of 10 new AC-130J Ghostriders and remain on track to declare Initial Operational Capability by the end of 2017. In our legacy Gunship fleet, we fielded eight up-gunned AC-130W Stinger IIs with 105mm large caliber guns and immediately deployed this enhanced capability to the fight in Syria and Iraq.

To improve our intelligence and analysis capabilities, we have distributed acquisition efforts across the air, ground and maritime domains – particularly for those systems and platforms that support operations in remote locations. We are developing and fielding interoperable, networked sensors built to enable common operational and intelligence pictures as well as feed data into all-source analysis tools. This further assists us in leveraging interagency partnerships.

As previously noted, our effectiveness over the last 15 years does not necessarily equate to success against near-peer competitors. We also require urgent investments in capabilities necessary for denied battlefields of the future. This includes submersibles, terrain following / avoidance and all-weather radar, advanced electronic attack capabilities, countermeasures, and precision munitions. We must enhance our effectiveness in partnership with the services. For example, we look forward to continuing work with the Department of the Navy to develop and enhance new options to support undersea operations – a key SOF capability. This is not a one way relationship. Recently the Army leveraged the efforts of our AT&L directorate to determine their future ground mobility vehicle. We continue to refine both our tactics and technological developments to enhance our man hunting and network defeat capabilities.

To integrate the advantages of rapidly evolving technology, we are making investments that will pay dividends for future mission sets. For example, “deep / machine learning” will help

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us mitigate thousands of man-hours spent on sorting through vast sums of data. The analysis of publically available information; the processing, exploitation, and dissemination of information, specifically, ISR data; and sensitive site exploitation, are all wide-open areas for the application of this technology. We are pursuing technology which can be applied to open architectures, enabling rapid upgrades and integration of commercial off-the-shelf capability to leverage the latest advancements in data analytics and machine learning.

USSOCOM continues to build networks and venues that support innovation in our research, development, and acquisition programs. These networks include industry, academia, and other government organizations. The command also continues to support agile acquisition with appropriate venues, including SOWERX – our open collaboration facility that has now been in operation for over a year and has successfully brought hundreds of non-traditional partners together to work on our most challenging problems.

A key part of the unique capabilities that SOF bring to the fight is the ability to fight in contested areas, often leveraging and enhancing the capabilities of indigenous partner forces. Accordingly, we continue to invest in ways that allow SOF to assist our partners better: command and control; ISR; Building Partner Capacity (BPC); and Aviation Foreign Internal Defense. The emphasis for all partner capabilities is on systems and infrastructure which is organically sustainable. An enhanced ability to leverage local relationships will ultimately help us better influence regional outcomes.

We also continue to invest in safeguarding our networks and communication infrastructure. USSOCOM has a unique service-like responsibility to provide all of SOF with networks and communications capability through the SOF Information Environment (SIE). The Global Enterprise Operations Center (GEOC) located at USSOCOM HQ manages network

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operations for over 70,000 SOFNET users around the world, to include over 1,200 deployed nodes. The ability to share information across our network – from the unit deployed forward to the USSOCOM Headquarters – provides us with a key advantage in dealing with the information-rich environment we find ourselves in today. Defending the SIE requires sustained investment for cyber defense sensors and tools.

A continuing key area of concern for SOCOM (cited over our last 5 years of testimony) is our reliance on Overseas Contingency Operations funding, or OCO. Since 9/11, we expanded the size of our force by almost 75% in order to take on mission-sets that are likely to endure. OCO underwrites much of that growth, which remains critical to ensuring SOF readiness. OCO represents about 28% of our FY17 budget –triple the rate of OCO reliance among the Services. Approximately 90% of USSOCOM's OCO funds enduring capabilities, which are applicable to the threats beyond the current combat environment. Ultimately, we must reconcile the nature of SOF's work, which requires enduring structure and capabilities, with the relatively temporary funding achieved through OCO. Migrating this funding to the base budget over time will provide SOF a degree of certainty in tomorrow's turbulent security environment that enables us to better program for, train, and equip our joint force.

#### **The Sustainment of SOF**

Our people are our single greatest resource. The goal continues to be to recruit, assess, and select the very best, providing them the requisite training and experience, empowering them to exercise their initiative and problem solving abilities, while managing them over a potential career in SOF. This is underpinned by an ethos and process to build in resiliency and provide the best possible care system for service members and their families.

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It is critical that SOF preserves its high state of full-spectrum readiness in order to support enduring, priority tasks while maintaining the ability to surge in support of major contingencies. Healthy dwell rates and Personnel Tempo are essential here. Most SOF units are employed to their sustainable limit, while some are consistently under that goal. Despite growing demand for SOF, we must prioritize the sourcing of these demands as we face a rapidly changing security environment. As we work to support the GCCs in addressing the challenges they face, we are constantly on guard against overcommitting this relatively small force.

Another key aspect of sustainment is our dependence on our Service and interagency partners. The Services provide the foundation upon which we build our force. This includes recruitment, acquisitions, intelligence, mobility, and logistics support – to name just a few. Many of the programs we have are based on Service investments and we often point out that a major shift in Service priorities will require a reassessment of our own. Our purchasing power and our readiness are inextricably linked. We will continue to work with all of the Services as well as Congress to ensure we preserve these foundations. In support of these efforts, we have scheduled annual war fighter talks with all of the Services, as well as key interagency partners (DIA, NSA, NGA, CIA), to integrate our approach to developing and resourcing the force.

Our interoperability with the Services also extends to the operations we conduct. Today we support the Joint Force in countering ISIS in Syria and Iraq, in Afghanistan, and elsewhere around the world. Examples of our interoperability occur every day, most recently in Sirte, Libya, where Special Operators assisted Libyan forces in re-taking the city relying heavily on over 450 airstrikes conducted by our Joint Force partners. Similar relationships are routine throughout all areas of active hostility, such as with the 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet in the CENTCOM AOR and multiple service and IA partners in the Philippines, where our SOF Headquarters ensure we

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remain closely nested with theater service components as an integral component of the Joint Force. Today we are more than simply interoperable with the Services...we are truly interdependent.

We are also highly dependent on the capabilities that reside within the defense agencies, such as the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), the Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA) and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA). With improvised threats, we continue to see examples of our adversaries taking commercial off-the-shelf technologies and manipulating and employing them as weapons as well as surveillance systems, such as small Unmanned Aerial Systems (sUAS). The recent integration of Joint Improvised-Threat Defeat Organization (JIDO) with DTRA provides us with an expanded ability to counter the improvised threats confronting our force today.

We invest heavily in developing relationships with our interagency partners, as well, such as the Department of State, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Counter Terrorism Center, and others. In total, we have 36 Special Operations liaison officers working across 16 agencies. This is indicative of the importance we place on whole-of-government solutions to the problems we all share – integrated efforts being the objective.

Operational requirements demand that we recruit, assess and select mentally and physically resilient SOF who can anticipate, respond, and adapt to any operating environment; excel in ambiguous situations; and are skilled at operating in the human domain in order to deal with population-centric conflicts. In addition to rigorous training, SOF require specialized education in areas related to our unique mission sets. SOF-specific education opportunities are an investment in our people and we will continue to augment Service-provided career development programs. A critical component to how we accomplish this is through the efforts of

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our Joint Special Operations University, or JSOU, which shapes the future strategic environment by not only providing specialized joint professional military education through specific undergraduate and graduate curriculum, but also through engagement with partner nations militaries. It is imperative we continue to provide the most highly trained and educated force to support persistent, networked, and distributed GCC operations to advance our nation's interests. Furthermore, it is critical that we continuously develop their talent by providing demanding, realistic training and placing people in the right jobs at the right times to gain valuable experience. In doing so, we empower our people while challenging them to exercise their initiative and make difficult decisions. Maintaining this highly trained and experienced force is the critical objective – it enables everything we do.

Because USSOCOM is significantly engaged in current operations, we continue to incur casualties, along with training injuries and illnesses. Caring for over 6,000 active-duty wounded and ill SOF Service Members, our Warrior Care program – a peer program to the Service Warrior Care programs – remains the gold standard for SOF Service Members and families whose resiliency has been challenged by a life-altering wound, injury, or illness. Recognized by Congress as one of USSOCOM's Service-like responsibilities, the USSOCOM Warrior Care Program (also known as the Care Coalition) executes our mission of returning wounded, ill, and injured SOF personnel to their units, maintaining their experience within the force and capitalizing on the immense investment of time and resources invested in them. The USSOCOM Warrior Care Program conserves its Service Members at rates higher than the conventional Service programs due to our focus on retention.

The Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) initiative remains a command priority, and we are deeply grateful for Congress' support for the resources required to execute

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this effort. The POTFF program enables us to build in physical, psychological, spiritual, and social resilience in our service members and their families to cope with the unique challenges of this demanding profession. The unique demands placed on SOF requires specialized attention to reduce injuries, speed recovery, and assure the overall well-being of our force. With your support, we've been able to place professional staff and equipment at our operational units where they have paid huge dividends in sustaining our warriors and their families. In partnership with academia, we are studying how we can continue to enhance the application of the POTFF's holistic approach to improve the effectiveness and sustainment of our force.

Although the command has made progress in reducing suicides, we still have a great deal of work to do. Through our partnerships with the Services and academia, we are analyzing how to better predict and prevent suicidal behaviors. We recently completed an analysis of SOF suicides over the past four years and are using what we learned to inform our suicide prevention strategy going forward. We will improve suicide prevention training for our military members and their families by addressing the underlying cognitive processes that lead to suicides and providing enhanced screening of our military members.

One consequence of our high PERSTEMPO is the challenge it creates for our families (over two-thirds of our force are married). Ensuring our families are cared for is a necessary component of our readiness posture. The Department of Defense as well as the Military Services have provided outstanding resources and support for USSOCOM families. I am also deeply appreciative of Congress's support in allowing the command to tailor family programs that are geared toward meeting the specific needs of our community. This support enabled the command to conduct pre and post-deployment programs, SOF unit orientations, and programs that enrich marital and parental relationships. This year we are using the pilot family program authority to

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develop suicide prevention training for families, given we have found that spouses are often the first to notice when their partners are struggling.

**Conclusion**

In closing, I would like to emphasize my three priorities for SOCOM now and into the future. First, SOCOM is fully committed to winning the current and future fights. Second, we must transform our force to be prepared to deal with all future adversaries. Finally, we must continue to place the greatest emphasis on selecting, retaining, and empowering our people, and sustaining them and their families.

I would like to thank you for your continued support of USSOCOM and our people. As we adapt to new roles and challenges, I look forward to sustaining an open dialogue with Congress on how we can work together to safeguard America's security interests.



**General Raymond A. Thomas III**  
**Commander**  
**U.S. Special Operations Command**

General Raymond A. Thomas III currently serves as the 11<sup>th</sup> Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla.

Prior to assuming command of USSOCOM, Gen. Thomas served as Commander, Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), Fort Bragg, N.C.

GEN Thomas' other assignments as a general officer include: Associate Director for Military Affairs at the Central Intelligence Agency; Commanding General, NATO Special Operations Component Command – Afghanistan; Deputy Commanding General, JSOC; Deputy Director for Special Operations, The Joint Staff in the Pentagon; Assistant Division Commander, 1st Armor Division in Iraq; an Assistant Commanding General, JSOC.

Prior to being promoted to brigadier general, Gen. Thomas also served as the JSOC Chief of Staff and Director of Operations. His other formative and key, joint and special operations assignments include: Commander, Joint Task Force – Bravo, Soto Cano, Honduras; Commander, 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Savannah, Ga.; and Commander, B Squadron, 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment – Delta, Fort Bragg, N.C.

He is a graduate of the US Army War College, Carlisle, Penn., and the Naval Command and Staff College, Newport, R.I.

Gen. Thomas is a native of Philadelphia, Pa. He attended the United States Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., and was commissioned an infantry second lieutenant upon graduation in 1980. Gen. Thomas and his wife Barbara have two sons – Tony and Michael.

(Current as of March 2016)



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**WITNESS RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED DURING  
THE HEARING**

MAY 2, 2017

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#### RESPONSE TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MR. WILSON

General THOMAS. (U) Over the Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP), the combination of Budget Control Act (BCA) caps, our heavy reliance on Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding and an extremely high OPTEMPO rate bring USSOCOM dangerously close to sinking below a reasonable degree of readiness risk. Impacts across USSOCOM can be best summarized as 1) reducing and/or eliminating training and exercises which result in degraded proficiency and operational readiness, and 2) degrading C5ISR support which will negatively impact USSOCOM's ability to provide timely and essential mission support to deployed operators and sustainers.

(U) DETAILS: USSOCOM has only examined potential sequester impacts at strategic levels. The following list is intended to capture probable impacts related to readiness reductions, reduced or eliminated growth in selected procurement programs and RDT&E and deferred critical facilities recapitalization on USSOCOM Headquarters entities, Components, and Sub-Unified Commands:

(U) AFSOC: Severe cuts to Flying Hour Program (FHP) will degrade aircrew proficiency and qualifications—impacting safety, as well as slowed growth in Remotely-Piloted Aircraft (RPA), intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), and full motion video (FMV) processing, exploitation & dissemination (PED).

(U) MARSOC: Unable to fully resource Military Intelligence Program (MIP) in support of intelligence collection (e.g., Joint Threat Warning System (JTWS), ATLAS STEALTH, Palantir and Hostile Forces Tagging, Tracking and Locating (HFTTL) operations).

(U) NAVSPECWARCOM and USASOC: Reduced or eliminated training and ISR support drives high risk and safety/vulnerability issues to current and future deployed operations; results in units requiring additional time and resources above what is currently programmed to improve current readiness levels.

(U) CLASSIFIED Operations: Will adversely impact classified activities. Details can be provided upon request.

(U) HQ, USSOCOM and AT&L: Reduced or eliminated exercises and training on various platforms and simulators results in shutdown of both CONUS and OCONUS sites drives future redeployment and re-fielding costs upward. Reduced civilian labor and program management office personnel in various headquarters activities that directly support classified USSOCOM missions.

(U) SUB-UNIFIED Commands: Reduced operating supplies/equipment for deployed operators and possible delays in establishing new teams at deployed locations impede relationships and preparation of the environment efforts within the GCC/USSOCOM footprint. A loss in sustained field support capabilities elevates risk levels to the force and diminishes force protection benefits derived from better situational awareness. Reduced, delayed, or deferred critical C4I equipment maintenance and lifecycle replacements/upgrades directly impact network operations which increase network latency, degrade communication capabilities and constrain the ability to successfully perform mission essential tasks. Degraded intelligence support impacts the ability to provide timely and essential intelligence in support of missions, named operations and objectives.

(U) In addition to the above impacts to USSOCOM equities, SOF readiness is directly linked to and dependent upon Service funding levels. While an MFP-11 sequester would present challenges, USSOCOM remains more concerned with the sequester impact on the Services' ability to support SOF. The Services have not yet fully identified where they would absorb future budget reductions; therefore, impacts on support to SOF cannot be itemized or assessed. Given the historical impacts and lack of the Services' ability to absorb reductions, it is highly likely that their ability to optimally support SOF will be diminished, further straining an already challenged support structure and eventually affecting SOF operations and training in an adverse manner. [See page 14.]



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**QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING**

MAY 2, 2017

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#### QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. STEFANIK

Ms. STEFANIK. What recommendations would you make to improve how we conduct building partnership capacity and security force assistance missions, especially when trying to train and equip partner forces? Are we investing in developing or acquiring tools and technical capabilities that we can share with our partners and allies that are both releasable and sustainable from a maintenance and support perspective.

Ms. WHELAN. The Department greatly appreciates the expanded and consolidated security cooperation (SC) authorities in the new chapter 16 of title 10, as enacted by the FY17 National Defense Authorization Act. The Department shares the committee's strong interest in providing capabilities to partners that they can absorb, apply, and sustain to support U.S. defense objectives. As we work to implement these new authorities, we are implementing a new assessment, monitoring, and evaluation (AM&E) policy. This new AM&E effort, along with the new requirements for all train and equip programs and activities to include a defense institution building focus, human rights training, and quarterly reporting requirements, will require the Department to work with your committee on future resourcing requests. These new AM&E efforts will inform additional Department recommendations for further improving our SC missions, which we will share with the committee.

Ms. STEFANIK. What recommendations would you make to improve how we conduct building partnership capacity and security force assistance missions, especially when trying to train and equip partner forces? Are we investing in developing or acquiring tools and technical capabilities that we can share with our partners and allies that are both releasable and sustainable from a maintenance and support perspective.

General THOMAS. (U) 4. USSOCOM recommends a holistic planning methodology to building partner capacity (BPC) that is consistent with a whole-of-government approach and can be executed in the context of other strategic security challenges.

(U) 4a. Include the Interagency and the country-in-question's U.S. Embassy Country Team (Office of Defense Cooperation, Defense Attaché Office, U.S. Agency for International Development, Political Counselor Office, etc.) in the early stages of planning to enhance the Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) and Theater Special Operations Command's (TSOC) country engagement plans. The Interagency and, particularly, the Country Team can provide insights into suitable goals and objectives given a particular partner nation's capability, capacity, and interests that will inform and influence the direction of long range planning. For the long-term success of an activity, we must understand our partners' priorities, capabilities, and constraints from the outset. If U.S. planners assume our partners' needs and desires are the same as our own, our expectations will be mismatched and the outcomes are unlikely to support U.S. national objectives in the long term. Early inclusion of the Country Team and Interagency not only provides key insights to direct planning, but it also permits the TSOC to better nest within the GCC's theater campaign plan (TCP). At a transregional level, USSOCOM is able to advocate for BPC opportunities and benefits that are either unique to development of SOF-peculiar capabilities to support our objectives, or capacity that ultimately benefits the U.S. in areas of responsibility outside of the partner's specific GCC-affiliation.

(U) 4b. Invest more in the development of foreign defense institutions. A key element of DOD's 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance is building the capacity of partner nations to share the costs and responsibilities of global leadership. To implement this goal, the Under Secretary for Policy uses several security cooperation (SC) and security assistance (SA) programs to help partner countries build the capacity of their defense ministries. In addition and crucially important is that GCCs and services engage in defense institution building (DIB) in response to the SC focus areas in the Guidance for Employment of the Force. DIB includes activities that develop accountable, effective, and efficient defense institutions. Since these institutions will ultimately manage and sustain the capabilities we are helping to build, it is important to the success of our efforts that the foreign defense institutions with which we engage be accountable, effective, and efficient. USSOCOM relies on OSD, DSCA,

the Services and GCCs to provide defense institution building measures to complement operational level SOF BPC activities.

(U) 4c. Utilize prior and routine assessments of ongoing SC activities to ensure progress toward goals and objectives is being realized. While SC remains an important instrument of the U.S. government and DOD, one key challenge for policy-makers and GCCs is gaining a more complex understanding of the real value of those activities geared toward BPC. Assessments of BPC activities have become increasingly important, especially given the current fiscal climate and budgetary limitations, to ensure these activities are meeting their objectives. USSOF assessments have informed our decision making for the types of authorities and funding we have requested from Congress.

Ms. STEFANIK. SOCOM has a lot of missions it is responsible for, and has had several new ones added to it. Are there any of those missions that should go away or be reassigned?

General THOMAS. (U) 5. There are no missions that should go away or be reassigned. Missions assigned to USSOCOM are appropriate and commensurate with our skill set. The only new mission assigned to USSOCOM is the CWMD mission, which was directed by the President and Secretary of Defense and the mission transfer has been comprehensively coordinated with stakeholders from U.S. Strategic Command, the Joint Staff, Office of Secretary of Defense and our interagency partners, to include required transfer of resources. We have a process that prioritizes the many requirements that we receive for SOF capabilities in support of GCC requirements. I provide my best military advice to the SECDEF on which requirements I can meet, based on capacity, through the Global Force Management and Global Synchronization of SOF processes.

#### QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. FRANKS

Mr. FRANKS. Are there policy concerns with adding responsibility of Global synchronization of all DOD activities to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (CWMD) to a force that already bears unprecedented global demand of its resources?

With this added responsibility, are you aware if there are moves at DOD to provide additional authorities to SOCOM to counter the five current and enduring threats of violent extremist organizations (VEOs), Russia, Iran, North Korea and China?

Ms. WHELAN. There are no policy concerns with adding CWMD responsibilities to USSOCOM. The Department continually reviews our authorities to determine if there are gaps. We recently completed an authority review based on the President's request to update the defeat ISIS strategy. We are working with the Office of Management and Budget to ensure the Department's authorities are matched to current strategies.

Mr. FRANKS. Considering Russia's investment and continued increase in their own special forces totaling approximately 62,000 and likely growing, can we sustain our continued dependency on our SOF without further investment in personnel?

General THOMAS. (U) 1. Under current mission prioritization, U.S. special operations forces (SOF) personnel growth is not required to off-set perceived numerical superiority by Russian Special Forces. Further, countering Russian SOF activities is not a U.S. unilateral action. USSOF, combined and synchronized with NATO allied and other partner nation SOF, with the global reach and complementary capabilities these alliances and partnerships provide, far outweigh any perceived numerical advantage. Any increase in investment in USSOF should focus upon force modernization and enabler support growth and technical evolution. Steady-state activities below the level of conflict represent the greatest SOF challenge against peer competitors and continuing to invest in advancing those capabilities is the best way to continue to outpace competitors.

Mr. FRANKS. How should we counter the degradation of skill sets and training which ensure the dominance of our SOF community with their current OPTEMPO without decreasing deployments and allowing for necessary time to maintain critical proficiency in language skills, cultural training, and professional development?

Typically Special Forces are inserted in order to minimize the U.S. footprint in a given area—only to end up increasing U.S. military presence in that area; would it make sense to reassess the conditions which dictate SOF requirements and the value of adding a larger more broadly specialized element, as opposed to inserting SOF?

General THOMAS. (U) 2a. Although current demand for SOF is high and sustained OPTEMPO creates significant challenges to our force, USSOCOM has not observed

a degradation of skill sets or training that puts our dominance on the current battlefield at risk. Attaining and maintaining proficiency across the SOF enterprise in language, regional expertise and culture (LREC), professional development, and advanced SOF skills takes dedicated dwell time focused on training and remains a priority for USSOCOM. We continue to deliver highly skilled, proficient, and capable SOF ready to meet the demands of Geographic Combatant Commands (GCC). USSOCOM continuously explores and expands ways of reducing personnel tempo (PERSTEMPO) while maximizing training and professional development opportunities. Use and expansion of modeling and simulation and live, virtual, and constructive environments (LVC) ensures we continue to provide trained, educated, and combat ready SOF while reducing the impacts of high OPTEMPO. [J7-T&E]

(U) 2b. USSOCOM and its Service Components manage OPTEMPO impacts through adherence to established force generation models and force element sustainable capacities. Limiting deployments in this manner provides units, generally speaking, between 12 and 18 months to reset and train to full spectrum readiness. This has not always been the case, but has received renewed emphasis and is closely monitored. [J32]

(U) 2c. Combatant Command requirements for SOF are scrutinized at the Theater Special Operations Commands prior to submission to the Combatant Commands and at USSOCOM against Special Operations Forces Mission Criteria, the first being: Is it an appropriate mission or activity for Special Operations. While USSOCOM cannot dictate what requirements are submitted, we have emphasized that the Theater Special Operations Commands should request conventional forces and consider the potential for partner nation sourcing. On multiple occasions, USSOCOM has requested that the Joint Staff consider conventional force sourcing of requests for SOF. [J32]

