

Statement of
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Emerging Threats and Capabilities Sub-Committee
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U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

Introduction

Chairman Kelly, Ranking Member Ernst, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to represent the 36,000 men and women of Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) and to update you on the posture of the United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC). I am proud to accompany my fellow Joint Force special operations component commanders here this morning.

USASOC supports the Joint Force worldwide through irregular warfare campaigning for integrated deterrence, while preparing for high-end conflict. ARSOF is vital to the Nation because of our capability to provide asymmetric options with tailorable solutions and a unique mindset to prevail in any conflict.

It is an honor to serve with the brave men and women of ARSOF who were the first in and the last out of Afghanistan – exemplifying 20 years of selfless sacrifice. The heroism and transformative leadership of those who were there at the beginning and those who sustained the fight made a difference. Our people learned the importance of strong interagency, international, and Joint Service cooperation necessary to build enduring advantage over our Nation’s adversaries – a lesson we carry into today’s and tomorrow’s challenges.

Russia’s further invasion of Ukraine demonstrated both the acute threat that Russia continues to pose as well as the unique role of SOF in this context. The strategic value of our existing partnerships – built over the past eight years particularly with our Ukrainian partners – quickly became apparent.

Success depends on strong relationships with Allies and Partners that require deliberate investment and cannot be built overnight. USASOC contributes to integrated deterrence through multi-partner, multi-domain convergence, and synchronization of transregional operations. We are applying these same lessons to our Nation’s most consequential strategic pacing challenge, the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

The strategic environment is dynamic. The US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and Assistant Secretary of Defense/Low Intensity Conflict (ASD-SO/LIC) have recently released the SOF Vision and Strategy to guide the future for our entire SOF enterprise. As we refine the SOF Future Operating Concept 2040 and assess force design considerations over the coming months, we remain convinced of the first SOF truth that, “Humans are more important than hardware.”

USASOC is operationally minded with responsibilities to man, train, and equip formations. We are organized to conduct irregular warfare across the continuum of campaigning, crisis, and conflict. USASOC’s persistent forward presence, flexibility, and relationships provide the Nation with enduring asymmetric advantages.

We are building a concept referred to as the *SOF-Space-Cyber Triad*. This is a convergence of trans-regional, multi-domain, and joint capabilities to exponentially

increase the holistic strategic effects of each capability across the spectrum of conflict now and in the future. Our increasingly complex strategic landscape requires innovative approaches that fuse and integrate all our expertise to maximize our collective impact.

We are committed to maintaining your trust and continuing our complete transparency with Congress and the American people. I look forward to sharing our recent progress, along with our assessment of the evolving challenges we face.

The USASOC Enterprise

USASOC generates special operations forces, validates, and certifies headquarters for deployment, and modernizes for the future. We serve as the Center of Excellence and proponent for three Army branches and are the force provider for all Army SOF operational requirements. Our people are uniquely assessed, organized, trained, and equipped. Our partnerships, cultural understanding, diversity of thought, and enduring relationships enable the current presence of more than 2,800 Soldiers in 77 countries.

The U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS) generates forces for USASOC. The school is responsible for assessing, selecting, and training Soldiers in special operations competencies. USAJFKSWCS consists of two Special Warfare Training Groups and a Special Operations Medical Training Group, and serves as a Center of Excellence and proponent, they represent the Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operations branches. Each year, USAJFKSWCS trains more than 13,000 Army, Joint, and foreign military personnel in basic and advanced SOF skills. The school teaches 115 courses and 12 languages at 180 training locations in 22 different states. As a standards-based organization, this is where we forge our expectations, culture, and values.

1st Special Forces Command (1st SFC) is task organized to conduct irregular warfare campaigning with a trans-regional focus on Chinese and Russian malign activity. 1st SFC provides regionally aligned, culturally attuned forces consisting of eleven subordinate headquarters: Five active-duty Special Forces Groups, two National Guard Special Forces Groups, two Psychological Operations Groups, a Civil Affairs Brigade, and a Sustainment Brigade. These forces develop deep regional understanding and maintain persistent focus on National Defense Strategy (NDS) priorities. 1st SFC provides a steady state campaigning headquarters with transregional Continental United States (CONUS)-Based Operational Support (CBOS) to the Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOC) and Geographic Combatant Commands (GCC). 1st SFC also is responsible to provide a deployable two-star Special Operations Joint Task Force – Contingency (SOJTF-C) on behalf of USSOCOM.

The U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command (USASOAC) provides precision rotary wing aviation and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) for SOF worldwide. Our aviators and crewmembers are highly trained to maintain and operate the most advanced helicopters and UAV systems. 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (160th SOAR) is the DOD's premier tactical denied area penetrating force. They fly in high-risk and

politically sensitive areas where others cannot go. They also provide advisory support to enhance the aviation capabilities of our Allies and partners.

The 75th Ranger Regiment (75th RR) is the Nation's premier light infantry force. They take great pride in their ability to deploy painfully light yet, profoundly lethal. Rangers maintain a fighting force capable of rapidly deploying, on short notice, anywhere in the world. The 75th RR remains postured for critical, over-the-horizon counterterrorism missions and Joint Forcible Entry operations.

Irregular Warfare

When Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, we were not forward postured in Ukraine. In response to this unprovoked aggression, we invested time and talent campaigning in support of Ukrainian territorial defense. In Ukraine we built enduring relationships, provided logistical support, and began training with the intent to increase societal resilience to bolster their resistance posture. As it became evident that a Russian invasion of Ukraine was imminent earlier this year, many believed that the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv would fall within 72 hours. Today is day 62, and Kyiv remains under Ukrainian control.

As Russia continued to escalate, U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) led the contingency response. ARSOF's forward presence provided a foundational understanding of the operating environment and played a role in humanitarian assistance, and information operations, while providing on-the-ground daily assessments for senior leaders.

As armed conflict broke out, our regionally aligned forces led a Coalition Planning Cell of seventeen nations to coordinate information with international SOF partners and Allies. CONUS-based forces established an irregular warfare transregional campaigning headquarters to synchronize SOF approaches. This builds on the enduring legacy of 10th Special Forces Group's 1952 activation and their subsequent employment in Europe supporting strategic competition with the Soviet Union.

Ukraine is imposing great cost on Russia in the information space and USASOC is USSOCOM's lead for military support information operations. Our teams gain and maintain contact with our Partners transregionally to maintain information advantage, but we must evolve to challenge the speed, scope, and scale of our adversaries' information operations capabilities.

The people of Ukraine deserve all the credit for fighting back the Russian aggressors. Our Partners are displaying undaunted determination as they fight for their homeland, reaping high returns on investment to their resistance movement. These irregular warfare tenets are being applied as we expand our focus to PRC activities in alignment with the NDS.

PRC influence is increasing in scope, scale, and velocity without regard for international norms or boundaries. Just as we demonstrated in Ukraine, irregular warfare investments are required now in preparation for the PRC's stated intentions to challenge the global order.

Innovation as a Mindset

There is no sanctuary at home or abroad. We must change how we think about protecting and projecting our forces. Advancements in unmanned platforms challenge our legacy systems and programs. Our digital signature exposes individual and collective patterns of life. We must understand our critical vulnerabilities and challenge all assumptions. We must consider every space and domain contested. Innovation requires us to rapidly apply lessons learned to modernization. We need industry, academia, warriors, and policy makers to come together in a Whole-of-Nation approach to innovate against future threats. Innovation must be creative, unconstrained, collaborative, and forward focused. There is no end-state to innovation.

In 2019, we established the USASOC Force Modernization Center (FMC) to accelerate our ability to change and outpace our adversaries. Comprised of a diverse group of talented thinkers and partnered with academia and industry leaders, FMC nests priorities with USSOCOM SOF Acquisition Technology & Logistics and Army Futures Command to provide world-class support to our Warfighters.

The seven modernization priorities for USASOC are: Irregular Warfare, Information Advantage, Multi-Domain Operations Interoperability, Next Generation Precision Effects, Unmanned Systems/Robotics/Artificial Intelligence, Next Generation Mobility, and Enhanced ARSOF Soldiers. We synchronize within these priorities while remaining a bottom-up driven organization. We have men and women on the ground identifying problems and providing requirements. Whether we lead or support, USASOC serves as a catalyst for innovation through our continued experimentation and operational use. We are deliberate with our selective disclosure, knowing our initiatives drive adversary decision cycles.

Last month, 44 organizations participated in a USASOC exercise focused on the intersection of *SOF-Space-Cyber Triad* capabilities leading to a series of upcoming experiments. Lessons learned allow us to test our assumptions and solutions in Service (Army Project Convergence 2022) and Joint Force exercises (Unified Pacific 2022). Hardware solutions are important, but people remain our primary focus.

People

People solve our most complex challenges and create strategic impacts through cohesive and disciplined teams. Our Human Performance and Wellness (HPW) program deliberately advances the intellect, understanding, agility, and lethality of the people who form the foundation for our success. Investments in our Soldiers, civilians, and families set conditions for programs and policies that attract, retain, and sustain our force.

The Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) program provides essential health services. We want to thank the Committee for expanding the POTFF program to the immediate family members of Soldiers who are killed in combat or combat related training accidents. With these POTFF resources we can respond to the needs of our force quickly and flexibly. We hope you will continue your sponsorship of this crucial program and recognize that the challenges outlined in the NDS increase the requirements on our force.

USASOC is an excellent place to serve the Nation. We have high expectations and standards, but we are not without flaw. We continue to battle suicide and domestic violence. Misconduct has our full attention. Engaged leaders proactively address these concerns with the full support of our mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual professionals. During last year's testimony, USASOC acknowledged that it needed to increase its inclusivity by supporting the specific needs of women in uniform.

In January 2021, my predecessor, LTG Fran Beaudette, commissioned the Women in ARSOF Study to identify barriers female Soldiers encounter in ARSOF units and establish lessons learned and best practices to recruit, integrate, and retain extraordinary Soldiers.

A total of 5,010 participants completed the Women in ARSOF Survey to help identify unique challenges women encounter throughout their service. Subsequently the research team conducted focus groups of women from fourteen subordinate commands. This was followed by numerous command team interviews at the group, battalion, and company levels. We take the results of this study seriously and are actively addressing the findings.

We are humbled by the immense sacrifices of our ARSOF families. As Americans we are indebted, and we thank this Committee for continuing to support them. We will never forget our fallen heroes and the sacrifices of our beloved Gold Star families. Please never forget the over 1,700 Gold Star Mothers, Fathers, Spouses, Grandparents, and Children we hold dear in our USASOC family of our 377 fallen since 9/11.

We are proud of the three Medal of Honor recipients that continue to serve in USASOC. It speaks volumes that they all fought to remain in operational leadership positions. I want to highlight this year's two recipients: MSG Earl D. Plumlee from 1st Special Forces Group and SFC Christopher A. Celiz, who posthumously received the Medal of Honor while serving in the 75th Ranger Regiment.

MSG Plumlee served as a weapons sergeant assigned to 1st Special Forces Group, when insurgents attacked his base. He instantly responded to an explosion. Ten insurgents wearing Afghan National Army uniforms and suicide vests poured in through the breach. MSG Plumlee and five other special operations Soldiers, mounted vehicles and raced toward the detonation site. Using his body to shield the driver from enemy fire, MSG Plumlee exited the vehicle while simultaneously drawing his pistol and engaging insurgents. He repeatedly placed himself in extreme danger to protect his team and the base, and to defeat the enemy.

SFC Christopher Celiz was the leader of a special operations unit comprised of partner forces and members of the 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment. SFC Celiz gave his life leading an operation to clear an area of enemy forces in Afghanistan. His selfless actions saved the lives of others and almost certainly prevented further casualties. Throughout the engagement, SFC Celiz significantly changed the course of the battle by repeatedly placing himself in extreme danger to protect his team and defeat the enemy.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to Members of Congress for supporting the award upgrade for SFC Jeremiah Johnson. SFC Johnson was mortally wounded during an ISIS ambush in Tongo Tongo, Niger. He was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with Valor for his conduct during the battle, but thanks to your support, SFC Johnson's award was upgraded to a Silver Star when new video footage was recovered showing his complete disregard for his own safety while charging through enemy fire to provide additional support for his fellow Soldiers. On behalf of SFC Johnson's family and the men and women of USASOC, we thank you for honoring our heroes.

Conclusion

The global threat landscape is as complex and challenging as it has been in decades. USASOC is fully committed to selecting, training, and equipping a formation of experts in the art and science of irregular warfare Without Fear.

USASOC is conducting irregular warfare across the continuum of campaigning, crisis, and conflict alongside our SOF partners, the Joint Force, and with our interagency counterparts. Partners and Allies remain critical to our success. Today's challenges are truly a team sport, and USASOC will be ready for the PRC pacing threat and acute Russian threat. They will challenge us, technology will evolve, and USASOC will continue to adapt and build an enduring advantage Without Fail.

We are ever mindful of the high expectations and trust that this Committee and the American people demand from our formation, and we assure you they will continue to protect the Nation and free the oppressed Without Equal. That is our promise to the Nation.

I want to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the Committee for continuing to support the men and women of USASOC. I look forward to answering your questions.