

POSTURE STATEMENT OF
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COMMANDER, NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND
BEFORE THE
117TH CONGRESS
SENATE ARMED SERVICE COMMITTEE

Chairman Kelly, Ranking Member Ernst, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to report on the mission readiness of Naval Special Warfare. I am honored to update you and the American people and humbled to do so alongside my fellow Special Operations service component commanders.

Over 10,000 strong, Naval Special Warfare includes 3,034 Sea, Air, Land operators, our SEALs; 784 Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewmen, commonly referred to as SWCCs; 4,602 combat support and combat service support personnel; 727 reservists and 1,245 civilians. Our active-duty force accounts for 2.4% of the Navy's overall personnel and 14.3% of U.S. Special Operations Command's (USSOCOM) personnel. With the decisions before you in the President's FY 23 Department of Defense (DoD) budget, we can accelerate distinctive maritime special operations capabilities to expand United States irregular deterrence options that create decisive opportunities for the Joint Force and extend the reach of the Nation's intelligence enterprise to inform policymakers of emerging threats.

Our Nation faces unparalleled security challenges and increasing geopolitical risk that include the rise of near-peer powers that aspire to undermine global stability, increased economic and social disruption, and lower technological barriers for non-state actors to access new informational, biological, chemical, and improvised nuclear weapons. The threats to the homeland and those of our allies and partners are evolving in scope, scale and existential potential. Authoritarian states conduct irregular statecraft and warfare in the gray-zone to coerce nation-states, normalize corruption of democratic societies and open markets, and subvert the international system of norms and laws that have made possible an unprecedented era of global stability and human advancement. They challenge individual freedoms, fundamental human rights, and threaten freedom in the global commons that provide for trade and the exchange of ideas. They leverage technology to erode the United States' margin of advantage that underwrites deterrence and geopolitical stability. We are seeing this today in the destabilizing and unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine and tensions in the Indo-Pacific. These new strategic threats demand we urgently evolve Naval Special Warfare in substantive and creative ways.

As the Nation's Naval Commando force that solves hard problems, Naval Special Warfare initiated a deliberate, comprehensive, and urgent transformation in 2020 to meet these new threats and create irregular warfare options that strengthen and complement deterrence. We are working to bring together the right mix of technology, operational concepts and capabilities for a force that is enrolled, assessed, selected, trained, developed, led, and networked together to deliver strategic effects along the maritime flanks of the Nation's adversaries. As we do this, the uncertain and complex operating environment ahead requires that we continuously reinforce the

bedrock principles and values that make our team timeless and authentic – a humble and fully accountable team.

Naval Special Warfare’s standard remains – the relentless pursuit of excellence in the defense of the Nation and to be trustworthy stewards of the incredible trust that the Nation places in our force. This posture statement is an update on our people, our activities, and our distinctive capabilities in support of the Nation’s defense. I present the report to the committee and the American people with confidence that we are implementing the substantive changes to be ready for a higher complexity and higher risk operating environment. This statement incorporates guidance from the Department of Defense, Special Operations Command, the Chief of Naval Operations’ Navigation Plan, the USSOCOM Comprehensive Review findings, and a continuous environmental scan of global threats to core United States interests.

Strengthening Our Force and Family

Naval Special Warfare’s competitive advantage is our people – our SEAL operators, Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewmen, combat support personnel, civilian teammates, reserve force, and our families and Gold Star families: a highly reliable team fused together and enrolled with a common purpose; trust and candor; creativity and resilience. While our fighting formations embody unparalleled warfighting grit and determination, our families represent the highest levels of self-sacrifice and commitment, with none more representative of this selfless behavior than our Gold Star families. Above all, we continue to acknowledge their sacrifice, express gratitude for their continued support, and underscore our commitment to always stand with them. We especially honor the Gold Star family sacrifices with our mission focus and stewardship – they will never be forgotten.

Building a Culture of Continuous Assessment and Development

The critical findings of USSOCOM’s 2019 Comprehensive Review inform our innovative approaches to evolve recruitment, assessment, selection, and training that underpin Naval Special Warfare’s transformation. We continue to engage at every level across our formation to identify and proactively address corrosive behaviors – from intolerance and extremism to sexual assault and harassment. These behaviors are inconsistent with our service oath and the core values of the Naval Special Warfare Ethos and Creed and undermine the unity and strength of the Nation.

We are undertaking rapid and comprehensive institutional changes to create a sustainable culture of continuous assessment and development focused on character, cognitive and leadership attributes. We are learning from Service-unique career courses and becoming more deeply involved in Navy and Joint education opportunities.

Foundational to continuous assessment and development, the Continuum of Leader Development (CLD) Program initiative serves as a platform for candid individual assessments that integrate peer, subordinate, leader, and training cadre evaluations of leadership, character, and tactical competence. These assessments begin during Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) and Basic Crewman Selection (BCS) Assessment and Selection pathways throughout every phase of a Naval Special Warfare operator’s career progression. In its second year of Force-wide use, the CLD effort is two-fold: 1) provide the individual with objective data and

analysis to facilitate self-improvement through reflection, and 2) inform leadership of high performers and latent risk through consistent rubric-based performance assessments, peer and subordinate evaluations, and leadership observations.

We adopted cutting-edge assessment best practices from across DoD and industry to create an enterprise leader selection initiative – the Naval Special Warfare Leader Assessment Program (NLAP). Through a double-blind interview process, SEAL leaders are assessed by a panel that leverages data science, counter-bias training, and operational psychology assessments to increase precision, objectivity, and fairness of selection decisions before every milestone level. The added data from psychometric testing, writing and physical evaluations, and directed peer and subordinate assessments give us greater selectivity and assignment precision for critical leadership roles – in ways that substantively mitigate risks to mission and force. Officer and senior enlisted leaders that complete NLAP receive executive coaching and counseling from the panel for development. We expect to see the biggest returns from NLAP at the front-line Platoon Commander and Platoon Chief level where we will focus on developmental opportunities to institutionally engineer processes that mitigate risk of leadership failure.

Since my last report to you, we significantly reengineered our recruitment and assessment model to proactively identify candidates and conduct more rigorous candidate pre-assessments through the creation of the Naval Special Warfare Assessment Command – a sequential O-5 command where experienced active-duty SEAL and SWCC operators conduct targeted external outreach and candidate assessments that allows for greater precision and insight for candidate identification. With the support and reinforcement of Navy Recruiting Command, we are transforming candidate outreach to contact diverse candidates across America to deepen and broaden the future force. These are two examples of how we are following through with our commitment to identify and enroll candidates in the opportunity to serve with the Naval Special Warfare team. Our outreach model is scalable and repeatable, and as we pioneer increased use of data and technology, we expect promising results in growing diversity within Naval Special Warfare.

We also recently established a new Naval Special Warfare Enlisted Assessment and Selection (NEAS) process to ensure our candidates – from their first contact until they start assessment and selection at BUD/S and BCS – meet our high standards. Modeled after the pre-assessment rigor we already apply to all SEAL officer candidates to select for an opportunity at BUD/S, we intend to evolve NEAS to mirror this same level of rigor for enlisted candidates before they receive final approval to begin formal assessment, selection and training at BUD/S and BCS.

Building Strength through Diversity

We recognize diversity as one of our greatest sources of strength, and we are making significant investments in initiatives that create a foundation for cultural understanding, empathy and respect for diverse perspectives and experiences, which ultimately strengthen the force's problem-solving capabilities.

Naval Special Warfare is constantly learning and evolving across the spectrum of recruitment, assessment, selection, training, and inclusion. We have increased outreach efforts to 24 new geographic locations across the Nation where diverse and underserved candidates live. With our Assessment Command team, I recently conducted an outreach event at the NROTC unit of Morehouse College, Spelman College, and Clark Atlanta University – three Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the Atlanta region. We also engaged with over 100 female Midshipmen at the U.S. Naval Academy earlier this year where we made it clear our standard is an achievable standard and we are investing in the foundation for future female candidates. We are collecting and assessing real time analytics for refinement of outreach efforts alongside the Navy Recruiting Command team. In expanding Naval Special Warfare efforts to increase candidate diversity, our Outreach and Assessment Detachment and Navy Parachute Team executed the first iteration of the Naval Special Warfare Insert Challenge, an event combining a tandem freefall insert of diverse “athlete influencers” into a physical evolution highlighting Naval Special Warfare’s core character, cognitive and leadership attributes.

Our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives are framed by three lines of effort: climate and culture, talent management, and education and training. Our focus on climate & culture aims to decrease bias through DEI representative and leader engagement at all levels. Our talent management efforts aim to increase equitable opportunities that strengthen operational effectiveness through the enrollment, assessment, selection and retention of diverse talent, while maintaining standards, accountability and mission-readiness requirements. Finally, our focus on education and training aims to increase understanding of DEI as an operational imperative by developing increased capacity, character, competence and connectedness through enterprise engagement and education. Training environments must reflect and reinforce DEI outcomes. To ensure these efforts have proper visibility, leadership and resourcing, we launched a Naval Special Warfare DEI Task Force that is aligned with CNO and SOCOM DEI initiatives.

Over the past year, and in close coordination with the Navy, we disestablished the separate and isolated Warrior Challenge Rate recruit rifle division at the Navy’s Boot Camp to fully integrate SEAL and SWCC Sailor Recruit candidates within the diverse Navy accession cohort. SEAL and SWCC candidates now begin their careers by completing the standard Navy Boot Camp program, solve their first problems in the Navy with teammates that reflect the diversity of the Republic we serve, and establish closer connections to the Navy we serve in. In parallel, we transferred the Naval Special Warfare Preparatory School from Great Lakes, Illinois to Coronado, California and have significantly increased the degree of coaching and mentorship that Naval Special Warfare candidates now receive directly from active-duty SEAL and SWCC cadre.

Naval Special Warfare continues to make progress transforming our outreach efforts for Women in SOF (WISOF) as well. We achieved a significant milestone this year as the first female SWCC graduated Basic Crewman Selection and joined a Special Boat Team, setting the example for future women to serve as operators in Naval Special Warfare. To build on this positive momentum, I also directed an increase in WISOF cadre billets from four to eleven and distributed them across each phase of the SEAL/SWCC assessment, selection, and training pathway to increase female leadership to assess candidates with Naval Special Warfare’s gender-

neutral character, leadership, cognitive, and physical attributes; foundational and distinctive attributes that combine to make possible the complex and high-risk missions the Nation asks of our force. We also launched an enterprise-wide Women's Professional Network, with the mission of supporting personal and professional development through networking, presentations, and mentoring.

Building a Resilient Team

Operator Health and Resiliency remains a primary focus for our formation. While Naval Special Warfare suicide rates remain low compared to other force and national averages, we recognize any suicide in our formation is one too many, and we continue to use Human Factors Councils to identify and proactively treat personnel with elevated risk factors of suicide or suicide related behaviors. Over the past year we accelerated investment in our Human Performance Task Force. This Task Force works with mental and physical health experts to move beyond the treatment paradigm of performance enhancement and issue prevention, collecting measures of performance and effectiveness to continually refine our efforts. This holistic approach has become a regular battle rhythm penetrating the Naval Special Warfare formation and reaching across assessment, selection, human factors, strength, conditioning & rehabilitation, and cognitive, non-cognitive & spiritual health. Ultimately, these efforts ensure a successful transition beyond service in the Navy.

An exemplar of these efforts is our Warrior Transition Program, focused on ensuring a positive return home after deployment. Every service member deploying has an in-person meeting with a psychologist who tailors a family plan and facilitates transition from deployment to garrison, screens for psychological risk and provides support resources. Following austere deployments, Warrior Transition takes place in a third country location that allows for additional "decompression" time. Transition meetings and resources are offered to significant others and family members to facilitate an optimal reunion. Since inception, this program has identified 10-15% of our operators for follow-up treatment including health and adjustment issues that would have otherwise gone unidentified.

Our holistic performance model makes special efforts to address the brain health of our operators. In 2021, the Naval Special Warfare cognitive program completed more than 10,000 encounters with service members to preserve brain health, including novel equipment and procedures to limit blast exposure during training as well as teaching strategies to manage attentional control. More than just preserving brain health, the team also leads special operations efforts in optimizing cognitive performance. Naval Special Warfare intends to continue breaking new ground in protecting and optimizing the mental performance of our warfighters.

Innovate for Relevance

We continue to aggressively innovate for military advantage, decision dominance, and expand edge in all aspects of our enterprise. Naval Special Warfare's modernization strategy intends to deliver step changes in capabilities through advanced technologies including artificial intelligence, autonomy and interoperable multi-domain unmanned systems, and next-generation

communications. These technologies combine to increases in access, mass and precision, and effects.

We are accelerating innovation through hard target mission imperatives that create opportunity for high strategic leverage options. We are prioritizing innovation in defining missions that only we can do for the Nation in the maritime domain – on and under the sea – and into the littorals. Naval Special Warfare’s distinctive maritime access and placement and ability to deliver effects in denied areas depends on continuous innovation in maritime platforms and technologies, such as the next generation Combatant Craft Heavy and next generation Dry Combat Submersible. This focus on innovation is critical as we drive to outpace and outmatch our adversaries’ rapidly improving capabilities. These planned investments will enable maritime SOF to close on some of the Joint Force’s highest priority targets and reduce the cost per effect, risk to mission, and risk to forces.

Capability Development

Over the past year, we continued to invest in exquisite, cross-domain capabilities to increase advantages in the gray zone where SOF’s forward footprint provides effective access for holding adversaries’ critical targets at risk. Through kinetic strike and non-kinetic effects against littoral targets, our objective is to invest in capabilities that can provide all domain effects from maritime access vectors to solve the Joint Force’s hardest problems.

Every investment we make is anchored on expanding distinctive competitive advantage – accessing contested and denied areas. These investments cover an array of capabilities from enhancing undersea range to delivering strategic effects to extending long-range targeting and strike for the Joint Force. We are in deep collaboration with national, joint, and Navy Warfare Centers to develop technology advancements in unmanned platforms launched from maritime craft. These capabilities will extend Joint Force AI-infused reconnaissance reach and act as a force multiplier in contested spaces, reducing risk to our personnel, providing real time battlespace awareness and decision dominance, and increasing the number of targets we can hold at risk.

Digital Modernization

Delivering a more lethal force requires the ability to evolve faster and be more adaptable than our adversaries. We are committed to artificial intelligence and machine learning capability development. From recruitment to training and operations, we continue to evolve how we work, optimizing for efficiencies that bring capability to the battlefield faster.

Led by our Chief Technology Officer we are investing our brightest talent and resources together with DoD and industry leaders to aggressively implement a “build a little, test a little, learn a lot” model that accelerates our adoption of artificial intelligence for warfighter advantage. Bringing together advanced national efforts in AI with pragmatic experimentation by well-trained, combat-experienced operators will help ensure that the highest-impact innovations are rapidly selected and accelerated to transition and fielding.

Our NAVSOF AI Task Force – partnered within the Navy, USSOCOM and DoD AI initiatives – is developing and infusing data advantage across our formation, from personnel to workforce and warfare systems. In collaboration with the Navy, we recently launched the Unmanned Task Force Sprint focusing on Naval Special Warfare’s multi-domain Manned Unmanned Team concept for scalable effects via resilient, autonomous, and interoperable unmanned platforms that close the kill chain, hold adversary targets at risk, and reduce risk to our own force.

Campaigning for Irregular Deterrence

As the U.S. Navy’s Commandos, we are tightly linked with Fleet Commanders, allies, partners and U.S. Government agencies to create warfighting advantage for the Joint Force. We are energetically innovating to create asymmetric advantages across the spectrum of conflict. We are postured to respond rapidly in support of crisis and to apply an unconventional maritime approach that enables the Joint Force and our allies and partners to compete and win. We are executing a deliberate and urgent transformation to expand irregular deterrence options, which we view as complementary to traditional nuclear deterrence as an integrated approach to deterrence, with a team capable of solving problems of the highest complexity and military, strategic and political risk.

Optimizing Warfighting Capabilities for What’s Next

Over the last twelve months, Naval Special Warfare Command established a flag-level task force that is a forward-looking and operational level command and control (C2) deployable headquarters for Combatant Commanders for the highest complexity and highest risk maritime access missions that require integration of component resource authorities and operational level C2 accountability to identify and mitigate risk. Recognizing the critical nature of this level of C2 capability in support of the evolving nature of Naval Special Warfare’s role, we invested in the people, billets and C5ISR infrastructure and facilities that enable preparation for and execution of the Joint Force’s hardest targets.

Naval Special Warfare continues to increase its asymmetrical advantages and orient distinctive and irregular capabilities on strategic targets and hard operational problems with the Fleets and Joint Force. A renewed emphasis on the maritime environment and the undersea focuses Naval Special Warfare’s transformative initiatives and ensures the United States can rapidly gain, maintain, and extend access in conflict to win if deterrence fails. Over the last year, I have continued an aggressive and comprehensive strategic engagement program, meeting with Joint and Interagency leaders to develop the most integrated, capable, and credible Naval Special Warfare force in our history. As an ‘inside force’ looking to create dilemmas for the adversary and advantage where the enemy perceives superiority across all domains, I am concentrated on maritime access vectors to solve hard problems. To present the Secretary of Defense and the President with scalable options, we have a trans-regional focus, campaigning on the edge that is lower cost and lower risk for escalation.

In leveraging U.S.-based large-scale exercises to certify our warfighting readiness, Naval Special Warfare’s integration and participation in Fleet and Marine exercises are yielding

mutually beneficial dividends, from enhancing interoperability and facilitating alignment against adversary threats, to fostering innovation and increasing lethality through our shared understanding of capabilities and experimentation. Deepening Fleet and Joint partnerships is crucial to sustaining and expanding capability and the future vectors that can be expanded from it, including non-kinetic effects. Through Fleet exchanges and Joint exercise training, Naval Special Warfare demonstrates emergent capabilities that increase operational and strategic advantage, fleet survivability and provide Fleet and Joint Commanders options from a ready force against emerging strategic threats.

Naval Special Warfare's role in war games is another area we are informing Cabinet-level policy makers while learning their priorities, and then translating that experience in tactical level war games where our foundational formations can develop their own military concepts to increase idea sharing from the bottom-up. The success of Naval Special Warfare's war game series is particularly noteworthy, having generated numerous concepts for integrated deterrence and justifications for further research, development, test and evaluation funding.

Force Re-design for Greater Lethality, Innovation and Resiliency

We are now holding approximately one-third of our combat ready forces in ready reserve, an unprecedented adjustment that increases USSOCOM flexibility globally for deliberate deploy for purpose NAVSOF missions that we will proactively shape in support of Combatant Command campaign objectives. Critically, this design provides our forces the time and space to experiment with concepts that drive step changes in capability advancement, experimentation, and concept development that we can conduct at lower training risk because these forces are combat ready and have already mastered core mission essential tasks.

We are urgently implementing changes across our tactical formations while aligned with the Joint Warfighting Concept. At the core tactical maneuver element level, we re-shaped our force from 72 to 48 platoons and reinvested SEAL combat power within the remaining platoons to increase their survivability and lethality. This one change increased tactical leader selectivity by over 33 percent, another contributing factor to solve for leadership failure risk. Realigning end-strength savings as we evolve the platoon of the future for relevance, we added a maneuver element for reconnaissance and the capacity to integrate new technologies within the platoon, including leveraging non-kinetic effects and multi-domain unmanned systems. We are driving the next evolution as we experiment and operate with this new force design model.

As a core force design imperative, we integrated two O-6 level Major Commands – Naval Special Warfare Groups THREE and TEN – to form Naval Special Warfare Group EIGHT, aligning undersea capabilities for distinctive maritime access with the ability to fuse various sensor capabilities, non-kinetic effects, and multi-domain unmanned systems. This shift also provides a greater command and control capability, warfighting function depth, and unity of command for the highest complexity missions ahead. We continue our Force Design initiatives within intelligence and sustainment warfighting functions as well.

Balancing Enduring C-VEO Mission with Integrated Deterrence

Naval Special Warfare capabilities are essential to defending the nation against both peer adversaries and extremist threats. Counterterrorism (CT) and Countering Violent Extremist Organizations (CVEO) remain core missions as these threats endure and possibly accelerate with the proliferation of scalable, lethal technologies. We are leveraging lessons learned from the last 20 years and applying cutting edge technologies to advance our strategic advantage in the direct-action mission set, with applications to both CT and nuclear peer adversary threats. We continue to expand objective certification exercises to sustain CT/CVEO capabilities and deliver step changes in combat readiness with the integration of peer-level opposition forces and detection technologies. These adjustments and innovations – with the modernization of our ranges – make our force more survivable, lethal and precise. We will never underestimate non-state threats and acknowledge that Naval Special Warfare will continue to provide critical contributions to the defense of the homeland from terrorism.

Developing Critical Partnerships

Naval Special Warfare is actively expanding our integration with the Nation's intelligence enterprise and research and development partners. We are prioritizing international and trans-regional relationships with reliable global partners for combined operations where our nations' interests align. Since my testimony last year, we initiated efforts to strengthen our relationships with select partners where we can achieve maximum effect in support of evolving threat profiles. I have personally engaged with SOF leaders across our most critical partner nations within the Indo-Pacific and European theaters. Continuing our shoulder-to-shoulder work with allies and partners expands options to ensure access for the Joint Force. We are continuing to invest to build critical relationships, develop combined tactics, techniques, and procedures, define logistics and facility support requirements, and posture for rapid execution and mutual support in time of crisis.

Together, Naval Special Warfare leaders and our critical allies and partners will identify the next actions and initiatives we must take to prepare for an uncertain future – including optimizing our enterprise intelligence support for strategic targets, expanding all domain unmanned system investments, investing in expeditionary sustainment depth, acquiring resources for research, development, test and evaluation, and employing authorities and permissions to rapidly prototype in-house solutions to deliver what the Nation needs to win over its adversaries.

Conclusion

Naval Special Warfare remains a team of common purpose – trust and candor – creativity and resilience. A team with a diverse set of roles, responsibilities, experiences, and perspectives – a diversity and inclusivity that we embrace as we seek to solve the hardest problems – a diversity fused together by an unyielding pursuit of excellence and an ironclad commitment to the Nation and all who selflessly serve. Naval Special Warfare's grit and gallantry are a powerful testimony to the attributes of a highly reliable, bold, and resolute team, testimony to the attributes we relentlessly develop – the attributes that make possible the incredibly complex and high-risk operations our Nation asks of us. We demand individual, unit, and community accountability to uphold our standard.

As Force Master Chief Bill King and I engage with our force, we express gratitude for their service and personally present a United States Constitution to every member with a letter inside from us that emphasizes humility and authenticity – and the criticality of remaining apolitical and non-partisan. This tangible reminder of the oath we all took to protect and defend our great Nation – and serve all Americans – reinforces what it means to be stewards of Naval Special Warfare and always mission ready.

We will continue our relentless drive to advance distinctive maritime and irregular options that increase national leverage and expand the ways we deter the Nation's adversaries. We remain grateful for the support of the American people, and we will continue to be stewards of the incredible trust that you and our Nation place in us. Thank you for your continued support of and care for all our Sailors, Civilians and Naval Special Warfare families.