

STATEMENT OF

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COMMANDING GENERAL

UNITED STATES ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

BEFORE THE

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES SUBCOMMITTEE

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Introduction

Chairman Kelly, Ranking Member Ernst, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to represent the 35,000 women and men 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 testify alongside my Joint Force special operations component commanders. The power of SOF is in our ability to converge each of our unique capabilities to provide our Nation with tailored and flexible options to accomplish the mission. Your Army SOF remain engaged globally, ensuring violent extremists remain on their heels, while setting advantageous conditions in strategic competition. We are aligned with the priorities set in the 2018 National Defense Strategy and the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance.

I want to start off by recognizing the tremendous contributions and sacrifices of our Army Special Operations Forces (SOF), especially over the last 20 years. We believe our women and men are, without question, the best in the world; they conduct their missions with humility, professionalism, and integrity. We are thankful for their valor and for their service. We are also humbled by the sacrifices borne by our military families, we owe them so much, and we thank this committee for your continued support of them. We will never forget our fallen heroes and the sacrifices borne by our cherished Gold Star families. Please keep in your hearts the over 1,700 Gold Star mothers, fathers, spouses, grandparents, and children we hold dear in our USASOC family.

Our Soldiers carry burdens of combat that few will ever know, much less fully understand, and so, I would like to thank this committee for your stalwart sponsorship of the preservation of the force and family (POTFF) program. With POTFF resources we can respond to the needs of our force quickly and flexibly, and we hope you will continue your sponsorship of this impactful program. We are expanding our effort in four ways:

- Researching special operations' most common health and wellness issues; after 20 years of sustained combat, we owe our people more. Emerging research is shedding light on the serious brain health problems that special operations forces are accumulating throughout their careers. Mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) has become the signature injury of our Nation's wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria; and low-level blast exposure remains a serious health concern as Soldiers train and fight daily with high overpressure weapons systems. We want to take evidence-based processes, methods, and tools derived from such research, and rapidly accelerate delivering them to the force.
- Increasing our inclusivity by supporting the specific needs of our women in uniform. Our recent survey on women in Army special operations highlighted specific challenges that we must address such as, injury-causing ill-fitting equipment, postpartum rehabilitation, and childcare. Over 5,000 survey respondents informed these findings.
- Planning to surge our access to behavioral health resources and pursuing pathways to develop our own experts through unique graduate education opportunities or certification programs in fields such as social work or counseling. We believe this will also help us improve our ability to identify and treat mental illness, and potentially, even prevent tragic suicides.

- Providing our Soldiers better support as they transition into retirement. We do not seek to replace transition support from the Army or the Department of Veterans Affairs, but to enhance it through public-private partnerships. These partnerships will help us continue to provide our operators with access to critical resources and stay connected to our force.

We are also committed to attracting and retaining the best and brightest talent, especially those of diverse backgrounds. Diversity is fundamental to what makes us special, and we recognize that the inclusion of minorities, women, and individuals with unique skillsets or cultural backgrounds are vital to our success in the future fight; this is a readiness issue. Our standards will always remain high – they must. To place the right people in the right unit, at the right time, we need help finding and recruiting top candidates. We are currently limited in our ability to reach highly qualified pools of talent who do not know they are welcome in special operations, and it will require dedicated SOF recruiting initiatives and close coordination with our service to get better.

Army special operations developed capabilities to remotely arm the Theater Special Operations Commands and Geographic Combatant Commands with information warfare options in countering violent extremism and for use in strategic competition. We are partnered closely with cyber forces, we are training SOF tactical cyber operators, and we are postured to compete in the information environment when directed. If we are not able to employ information at the edge when we need it, we will never gain the advantage over our adversaries.

We also focused on remaining agile in today's fight and to prepare for the complex battlefield of tomorrow. While we greatly appreciate our SOF-unique procurement authorities and ways to rapidly test and field technology solutions, we are powering those mechanisms down to the lowest possible level to ensure our technology is not disconnected from operators on the ground. We believe in empowering our Soldiers at the tactical level as much as possible to innovate and solve problems faster and with immediate impact to keep pace in the information age. We also rely on our services to help us achieve key modernization objectives, and we are nested with our Army to ensure special operations' priority research and development areas are funded. Secure, resilient, reliable, and redundant communications that our forces can use in hostile or denied environments remain a critical requirement, and countering unmanned aerial systems is a demonstrated need now. We are starting to see the dividends from our artificial intelligence (AI) and data management investments in practice and we must continue to press against boundaries to realize their full potential in warfare.

USASOC is in step with U.S. Special Operations Command and the U.S. Army. We are committed to maintaining your trust and continuing our absolute transparency with Congress and the American people. We look forward to sharing our progress over the past two years and discussing the persistent challenges that we face.

Who We Are

Nearly twenty years of continuous battlefield experience and success in the counter violent extremism (CVE) fight serves as the foundation of our competitive advantage in today's complex security environment. Everything Army Special Operations Forces learned and earned is relevant to U.S. global engagement in strategic competition. We are positioned around the world and in the information space executing missions and training where we compete to win. Teamed with our allies

and partners, our global presence, unique capabilities, and values we represent contribute every day to our Nation's security. Our cultural expertise and proven relationships help build trust, strengthen alliances, and create space for American diplomacy abroad.

Army Special Operations Forces provide more than 53 percent of the Nation's Special Operations Forces and consistently fill over 64 percent of all United States SOF deployments worldwide. We deploy for purpose to strengthen partners and allies, enable host nation security, and solidify the U.S. as the partner of choice. Our global presence consistently positions us in over 70 countries, conducting over 200 missions, often in locations where violent extremists and great power competitors operate to undermine our national interests and those of our allies and partners.

Strategic competition is what our forces were always designed to do; our legacy is rooted in the spirit of "irregular warfare" – the human-centric struggle for influence and legitimacy – even before we called it that. From Cold War "low-intensity conflict" to the "gray zone" we describe today, we support partners against oppression and help build resilience against subversion. Investments in our partner networks, cultivated over decades, generate understanding, and create opportunities to influence, especially in areas where China, Russia, and Iran are increasingly active. When called upon, our forces prevail through the daring determination, precise lethality, and agile creativity which are the hallmarks of our profession. These traits are what make us truly special and guarantee our success on any battlefield.

We are proud of what our talented formations achieve at home and abroad each day. The 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne) is comprised of Special Forces, also known as Green Berets, who conduct unconventional warfare with and through partners, and support their internal defense; Psychological Operations experts conduct information warfare to expose and disrupt adversary influence campaigns and to shape behaviors of key audiences; Civil Affairs professionals, our diplomatic warriors, engage with local leaders, government officials, and populations to expand interagency reach and to enable military objectives. Language proficiency, regional expertise, and cultural understanding help our team build effective partner forces as part of a broader U.S. government approach. Our special operations sustainment forces in the 528th Sustainment Brigade provide tailored logistics, communications, medical, and intelligence support to the global SOF network to ensure we remain agile, lethal, and expeditionary. Together, these capabilities allow small units to live among, train, advise, and fight alongside foreign partners to shape strategic outcomes. These forces are regionally aligned to maintain persistent focus on Asia and the Pacific; Europe, Russia, and the Arctic; Central and South America; and the Middle East, even as we sustain our fight against violent extremism.

The U.S. Army John F. Kennedy special Warfare Center and School assesses, selects, and trains world-class Special Forces, Psychological Operations, and Civil Affairs warriors. Each year, this center of excellence trains more than 13,000 Army, joint, and foreign military personnel in basic and advanced SOF skills. The school teaches 115 courses taught at 180 training locations in 10 different states. They execute 77,000 parachute jumps, 6,000 underwater dives, and expend over 3 million rounds of ammunition in training annually to ensure our Soldiers remain the best. This is where the highest of standards begin, and it is where the passion for what we do is instilled.

The U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command provides precision rotary wing aviation for SOF worldwide. Our aviators are highly trained to maintain and operate the most advanced helicopters; they fly in high risk and politically sensitive areas where others cannot or will not go. They also provide aviation advisory support to enhance the aviation capabilities of our allies and partners. The 75th Ranger Regiment is the Nation's premier large-scale light infantry force. Known for speed and violence of action, Rangers maintain a force capable of deploying within 18 hours anywhere in the world. At USASOC headquarters, we man, train, equip, and resource our forces to execute our missions to support the joint force and interagency across the spectrum of conflict.

People

Our people are our priority. We are laser-focused on advancing programs to build on the strength, agility, and lethality of our people, who are the foundation of our success. We are investing in our Soldiers, civilians, and families by setting conditions for more modern programs and policies that attract, retain, and sustain our force. As a direct result of our emphasis on recruiting, we were able to meet, and in some cases exceed, our Fiscal Year 2020 recruiting goals; of note, Psychological Operations enlisted recruiting had their best year since 2016. We continue to pursue initiatives across all our commands to expand recruiting and retention efforts.

We energized our commands to make sure we are taking care of our people in the right way. This includes a holistic look at our human performance and wellness programs and facilities, our talent management processes, and how we foster inclusive environments where everyone can thrive and reach their full potential. We are committed to treating our highly trained talent with dignity and respect; it is an integral part of being the best. As you know, women are integrated into every single one of our formations on the line and in leadership roles; our policy and programming focus is now to make sure we are supporting them and their families throughout their careers in special operations.

We would also like to announce two new programs aimed at preparing and selecting the right leaders at the most impactful levels. In 2020, we implemented the team sergeant assessment and preparation (TSAP) program to set our most influential and experienced SOF professionals up for success. The team sergeants are the backbone of our organization, so we commissioned this program to assess them through a one-week series of physical, psychological, leadership, technical skill, and tactical proficiency events, which informs a deliberate developmental plan for each individual and informs decisions on future assignments. In parallel, we also implemented a similar program for field grade officers to continue to assess their development, potential, and to provide them targeted mentorship. At their core, these programs will ensure competent, experienced leaders develop the next generation of SOF, enforce accountability, and evolve our culture. This is a critical investment in ourselves to foster trust in our ranks by continuing to select our best to lead our formations today and tomorrow.

Over the next year, we will continue to invest in our people by 1) relentlessly pursuing the best possible policies and programs that will create an environment our warriors can all thrive in; 2) knock down any remaining barriers – whether they are real or perceived – to attract a diverse force and be intentionally inclusive; 3) push the boundaries on our current talent management processes; 4) and pursue comprehensive health and performance research to protect and enhance our operators.

Readiness

We enabled our units to train and sustain the highest state of readiness, and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic by deliberately mitigating risk to both our force and to our mission. Our warriors maintained an unblinking eye on violent extremist organizations, and remained ready to compete, deter, and win against any threat.

We have rebalanced our force to a healthier deployment-to-dwell ratio; increasing training time to hone our skills and providing more predictability for our families. Over the past two years, we implemented a 1:3 force generation model for most of our formations. Discipline and deliberate decision-making in sourcing mission requirements continues to improve our overall deployment-to-dwell ratio and ensures our resources are directed at missions only we can do.

This new force generation model adds six additional months to the readiness cycle to afford our units time to train on their hardest mission essential tasks. This additional training time has had a positive impact on our readiness, especially as our forces prove their mettle in Army and joint force exercises and has strengthened our ties with conventional forces. For example, our Special Forces expanded their capability to focus on countering weapons of mass destruction and continue to train in the harsh environments of underground facilities; they are also pressing our ability to excel in the subzero temperatures of the Arctic. As we have seen globally, improvised explosive devices are not going away. In January, the Army directed the assignment of the 21st and 28th explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) companies to USASOC to fill a critical capability gap within our formation and to increase joint SOF survivability.

We made tremendous strides in the information space with the creation of the Information Warfare Center (IWC) at Ft. Bragg and the re-organization of our psychological operations groups. Our operators are now able to provide operational and tactical level support to global information warfare efforts from home base. We invite you to visit the IWC to see for yourself how this emerging capability converges psychological operations, cyber, space, deception, and electronic warfare at the tactical and operational level for the TSOCs and the broader SOF enterprise. This effort is distinct from and complementary to the efforts of USSOCOM's Joint MISO Web Ops Center which is focused on social media and online messaging platforms. Our changes to SOF information warfare operations coincides with updated deception, cyber, social media, and psychological operations courses of instruction as well as our Army-directed efforts to develop an information advantage training environment.

We want every fight to be unfair as we pressure our adversaries from every angle and across all domains. It has never been more important to understand the cognitive, social, economic, and physical influences that affect human behavior. This is why we are aggressively training in the information space. To further enhance our teams, we are also incorporating counter threat finance into our transregional tool kit.

Modernization

While no one knows for sure what the future operating environment will look like, we do not expect it to look like how we fought the past 20 years – we must modernize toward what we envision

is the worst environment imaginable. To win on the dynamic battlefield of tomorrow, we must increase our ability to survive, thrive, and win.

As we improved our readiness, we restructured our modernization entities with an eye towards tomorrow. We are pairing today's battlefield experience and innovation with concepts and technology to modernize how we are organized, how we compete, and how we fight. We are retaining the hard-earned expertise from nearly 20 years of sustained combat, while simultaneously leveraging every advantage of cutting-edge technology. We established the USASOC Force Modernization Center to accelerate our ability to change, keep pace with Army modernization efforts and Army Futures Command, and streamline our approach to delivering new capabilities.

Special operations are making significant modernization advancements in three major pathways: 1) our human performance advantage enabled by POTFF funding; 2) we are practicing information warfare and pressing the limits of advance; and 3) our hyper-enabled teams approach. Hyper-enabled teams address the toughest problems our operators will face at the most fundamental level: how they shoot, move, communicate, and survive in highly contested environments. Organic capability is what we will need to fight mobile, independently, and disaggregated. We must be able to process a large amount of real-time information and deliver precision organic fires all while staying undetected. We are investing in low-probability of intercept and detection high bandwidth resilient communications networks; a wide array of precision fires capability including everything from hand-held lethal drones to ground-launched large payload loiter munitions; next generation intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) with multi-sensor, over-the-horizon, autonomously piloted platforms that use AI to identify their targets; assured precision navigation alternatives when global positioning system (GPS) is not an option; and any technology that minimizes our signature or provides "digital camouflage."

We also continue to chip away at challenges such as evolving our workforce skills; we need to train our own data scientists, cloud architects, coders, and application developers. We must also address our supply chain vulnerabilities by expanding our industrial base to prevent over-reliance on critical foreign-made components. Despite our setbacks, we remain optimistic. Our force is very talented, mature, and thrives in ambiguous environments to solve the hardest problems. In Army SOF, technology enhances, but never replaces our base of exceptional talent. Continued investment in our people is our competitive advantage now and must be sustained in the future.

Conclusion

We sincerely hope that you will come to visit USASOC and our formations to see our efforts firsthand. We appreciate your continued support as we work to realize our vision to provide the Nation with the world's most capable Army Special Operations Forces ever. We understand America's trust in Army special operations is hard-earned and is re-earned every day. Our Army and American values provide the foundation by which we fight, reflect our culture, and are the key combat multiplier as we look to an increasingly complex and challenging future. With your support, we will continue to prepare our forces to be more ready every day, with the training, equipment, concepts, and confidence to fight and win decisively. I look forward to answering your questions and working together.