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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 share my assessment of the health and mission readiness of Naval Special Warfare. I am honored and humbled to testify alongside my fellow Special Operations service component commanders.

Over 10,000 strong, the men and women of Naval Special Warfare include 2,998 Sea, Air, Land operators, our SEALs; 790 Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewmen, commonly referred to as SWCC; 4,549 combat support and combat service support personnel; 737 reservists and 1,261 civilians. Our active duty force account for 2.4% of the Navy's overall personnel and 14.3% of U.S. Special Operations Command's (USSOCOM) personnel. Our funding represents under 1% of the Department of the Navy, and less than 9% of USSOCOM's MFP-11 budget.

Today, our Nation faces unprecedented challenges and increasing geopolitical risk; the rise of peer adversary powers, economic and social disruptions, and lowering technological barriers to new informational, biological, chemical and improvised nuclear threats – which form together a crucible of destabilizing threats and opportunities. Naval Special Warfare, as the Nation's premier Naval Commando force, is undergoing deliberate and urgent transformation to meet new threats and create opportunities to maintain competitive advantage. The uncertain operating environment ahead requires we continuously reinforce the bedrock principles and values that make our team timeless and authentic – a team humble in triumph and fully accountable in failure.

We strive to strengthen the character, cognitive and leadership attributes of our high performing – and highly-reliable – organization. The Naval Special Warfare community is a team with a diverse set of backgrounds, roles, responsibilities, experiences, and perspectives. We embrace our diversity and foster inclusivity to solve the hardest problems – together – with an unyielding pursuit of excellence and an ironclad commitment to the Nation and *all* who selflessly serve. Our sacred oath demands we uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and continuously reflect on who we are – what the Nation expects – and what the Nation needs us to be. Our *standard* is the relentless pursuit of excellence in the defense of the Nation and to be *stewards* of the incredible trust that the Nation places in our force.

This posture statement is a current update on our people, our activities, and our distinctive capabilities for the Nation's defense. I present the report to the committee and the American people with humility – a humility sharpened in Naval Special Warfare's combat losses, mission failures, and imperfection – a humility that drives our sense of urgency to learn, to evolve, and to come back stronger and even more resolute. The update reflects Department of Defense, Special Operations Command, the Chief of Naval Operations' NAVPLAN, the

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USSOCOM Comprehensive Review findings, my 60-day commander assessment following assumption of command on 9/11/2020, the Secretary's recent guidance on leadership to root out extremism and sexual harassment and assault, and a continual environmental scan of global threats to core United States interests.

STRENGTHEN FORCE and FAMILIES

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 powerful team fused together and enrolled with a common purpose; trust and candor; and, creativity and resilience. While our fighting formations embody unparalleled warfighting grit and determination, our families represent the highest levels of self-sacrifice and commitment, and among them, none more than our Gold Star families. My first official correspondence, upon assuming command, were letters to each of our Gold Star families to acknowledge their sacrifice, express the force's gratitude for their continued support, and underscore our commitment to always stand with them. The remarkable thing about our Gold Star families is the inspiration and support they sustain in our formation – their strong sense of service *leads us*. *They give us* confidence knowing they are always alongside. We honor their sacrifice with our mission focus and stewardship – they will never be forgotten.

Assessing and Selecting Character, Cognitive and Leadership Attributes

SOCOM's 2019 Comprehensive Review found SOF over-valued candidates' easily measured physical attributes, introducing a potential blind spot regarding character and behavioral attributes. This mission critical finding informed the ways we are substantively and deliberately transforming the ways and means with which we objectively assess our community's character, cognitive and leadership attributes. With directed cadre and peer evaluations and years of candidate character-related data assessment, we are implementing a repeatable and reliable process to increase leadership selection and pairing precision.

We recently conducted our first Naval Special Warfare Leader Assessment Program pilot with a cohort of forty-eight eligible commander command-level candidates to increase the precision of legacy community and service administrative selection processes – an enterprise capstone initiative that integrates other Service experimentation and lessons to accelerate our own. For the first time we incorporated a double-blind interview process and counter-cognitive bias training to increase objectivity and fairness of selection decisions, psychometric testing, writing and physical evaluation, and directed peer and subordinate assessments. The pilot is an example of a methodical approach to “build a little, test a little, learn a lot” as we iteratively evolve new ways and means of officer and enlisted leader selection and pairing. My intent is to expand the effort at all echelons of officer and enlisted leadership where we enforce standards and correct deviations. We expect to see the biggest returns 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.

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Additionally, we integrated the rubrics and data tools for an approach that is fundamentally changing how we assess individual performance, inform developmental plans and understand combat mission readiness. Our Continuum of Leadership Development (CLD) program provides the comprehensive assessment framework to record, assess, and facilitate improvement of individual performance and develop character throughout *every phase* of an Naval Special Warfare operator's career leadership progression – assessments indexed against Naval Special Warfare's specific character, cognitive and leadership attributes. 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 possible latent risk through consistent rubric-based performance assessment inputs, directed peer and subordinate evaluations, and leadership observation.

We brought together functional leaders across Preservation of the Force & Family, Force Medical, Force Psychology, and CLD programs to accelerate data fusion for decision making at the individual and enterprise level. Each program is impressive, but disparate data sets and dissonance in programs were preventing a holistic and precise sight picture for health of the force assessments and mission readiness judgments. I directed the establishment of a Total Performance Task Force (TPTF) to unify efforts, reduce data barriers, and shape data-driven decisions for individual and unit awareness, and ultimately integrated decision advantage. I consider the TPTF effort an imperative to advance a resilient and high-performing Naval Special Warfare force and ensure world-class leadership selection and development.

In my recently signed Law of Armed Conflict (Law of War) Program Instruction, I communicated guidance to the force: "It is a defining characteristic of our community that we value ownership and accountability for our actions. We will be strong in character, strong in accountability, strong in moral and ethical foundations, and strong in leadership." We enacted several strategies to ensure we provide the tools to exceed and sustain ethical standards, including through challenging and operationally relevant training dilemmas designed to test, assess and develop Law of Armed Conflict and ethical decision making. Our most experienced and respected leaders of all ranks facilitate tactical ethics conditioning through immersive dynamic and ambiguous scenarios that enhance the context, quality and effectiveness of our experiential approach. Our Chaplain teammates also regularly lead a Just Warrior course that enriches ethical and moral distinctions and reinforces the SEAL Ethos and SWCC Creed. Just warrior training and tactical ethical conditioning form the foundation of our Tactical Ethical Training program that complements triannual Law of War training conducted at each Naval Special Warfare major command.

Diversity and Inclusivity

Substantively expanding candidate diversity is essential to strengthen our formation and reflect the American citizens we defend. The complexity and risk of our mission requires that we transform the ways and means we identify, establish first contact, and conduct initial candidate selection for SEAL and SWCC recruitment contracts. Upon assuming command, I assessed we required a new candidate outreach model and task organization to proactively reach under-represented demographics and geographic areas. In partnership with Navy Recruiting Command, I directed our assessment, selection and training command to establish a new

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subordinate command (the equivalent of a SEAL Team) to sustain and lead our candidate assessment programs and proactively engage potential candidates to deepen our forces' diversity. The newly designated Naval Special Warfare Assessment Command will immediately plan, coordinate, execute, and sustain a series of recruiting 'combines' to proactively engage with under-represented demographics across the United States. These combines will principally focus on the cognitive, character, and leadership attributes we select for in Naval Special Warfare. We expect to execute our first 'combine' this spring.

A critical Inclusivity and Diversity initiative was the disestablishment of our specialized 800 Division in recruit training where Naval Special Warfare, Diving and Explosive Ordnance Disposal recruits were segregated from the rest of the Navy recruit population. Within 60 days of the Change of Command, with strong Navy support, we "shuttered" our separate Division at Navy Boot Camp and reintegrated our recruit candidates with their Navy teammates. We internally identified this opportunity, enrolled several constituencies in the concept, and rapidly delivered to set the conditions for SEAL and SWCC candidates to now solve their first problems – in their first Navy crucible events – alongside a diverse cohort of recruits to authentically build understanding, empathy and respect.

A Healthy and Resilient Team

The long-term health and well-being of our operators and families is a top priority. Rooted in the SOF truth that humans are more important than hardware, we matured and implemented Human Factors Councils (HFCs) at all echelons to proactively identify potential personal and/or professional circumstances likely to negatively impact a member's mission effective performance – including proactively identifying mental health issues and suicide risk. HFC considers stressors related to social, interpersonal, psychological, occupational, legal, medical, or financial difficulties. An individual's Human Factor Profile is reviewed twice each year and the data is protected and tracked over time to monitor trends and progress of identified issues. The return on HFC is threefold; 1) create opportunities for individual reflection and development, 2) better position care providers for support, and 3) inform leadership left of issues that affect the health and readiness of the force.

Optimizing our combat readiness requires continuing the advances in our Cognitive Health programs to improve and promote operator brain health – and also destigmatize mental health. Similar to hearing loss assessments, today we monitor long term brain health with a "Neurocognitive Assessment" every two years to baseline and track changes. We are collaboratively engaged in blast exposure research at all severity levels that can lead to brain damage and utilize Cognitive Enhancement Practitioners to improve cognitive readiness. Lastly, two initiatives currently underway include the launch of an eight session Brain Health Series that is helping operators, support providers and families learn how to improve and protect their brain health. The second will improve utilization of Automated Neuropsychological Assessment Metrics (ANAM) data (computer-based assessments of cognitive domain) to better inform operators and medical providers so they can interpret abnormal findings.

A relatively new addition to our broader POTFF effort is the Readiness for SOF Transition (R4ST) Program which guides and mentors Naval Special Warfare teammates and

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their families in making successful transitions to veteran life and amplifies their opportunity to lead in civil society. R4ST supports Force Readiness and long-term health with education, accountability, and data collection and shapes behaviors that reduce risk to SOF members and their families in the last 24 months in service. The R4ST team has provided services to over 900 Naval Special Warfare service members and their families and has improved whole health and wellness, financial preparedness, family adjustment, and resiliency for our team members. The next priority is collecting measures of performance and effectiveness that will continue to refine our approach in ensuring successful transitions of Naval Special Warfare operators to life as productive veteran citizens.

INNOVATE for RELEVANCE

Naval Special Warfare aggressively innovates for military advantage and edge. We are accelerating innovation on *hard target mission imperatives*, divesting to create opportunity for high return strategic capabilities and prioritizing on defining missions that *only we can do* for the Nation in the maritime domain – on and under the sea – and into the littorals. A mission critical focus for our innovation efforts are Artificial Intelligence (AI), Multi-domain Unmanned Systems (UxS), and our most important asset, people. From new missions we are developing new partnerships with commands like U.S. Strategic Command, U.S. Space Command, and U.S. Cyber Command. These alignment opportunities create new irregular ways of integrating joint *information related capabilities* necessary to credibly *influence, shape and deter adversaries*.

Modernizing Capability Development

The Nation will continue to require our *distinctive* ability to gain, maintain, and extend access in contested environments for decision advantage and the precise application of kinetic and non-kinetic effects. The challenges ahead require emphasis on maritime interoperability, developing new scalable effects technologies, and innovative all domain integration in ways that strengthen deterrence. We are seizing the opportunity to develop *asymmetric solutions* to the Chief of Naval Operations' Key Operational Problems, strengthen diplomatic leverage, undermine adversary confidence, and create dilemmas to increase Joint Force survivability and lethality. We are adjusting our task organization to integrate undersea domain capabilities with robust all source intelligence depth, tactical cyber enablement and operations capabilities. Along with electronic warfare and sensitive activities, these strategic investments deliver highly reliable and distinctive capabilities – across the competition continuum to support the Joint Force in peer adversary conflict.

We are experimenting with the tactical application of Naval Special Warfare small craft employment concepts in complex and contested environments to deny adversarial use of critical areas and achieve theater command operational objectives. We are expanding on existing investments to provide a collection of unique, scalable capabilities across the competition continuum that expand the reach and improve survivability of the Joint Force to compete and win in contested or denied environments. Our small craft platforms are increasingly integrating capabilities with the Fleet and Joint Force to provide Indications and Warnings, forward reconnaissance, targeting and strike. We see near-term potential with *multi-domain unmanned* capabilities in ways that advance the Fleet's Distributed Maritime Operations concept.

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Our compact footprint allows us to operate with stealth and speed beyond conventional forces, but our small unit size and specialized equipment limit the scale and number of objectives we can reasonably pursue. AI and autonomous UxS systems will act as force multipliers to extend our reach into contested spaces, reduce risk to our personnel, provide real time battlespace awareness and decision making, and scale the number of targets we can hold at risk.

A Digital Age Force

We developed a new task force, nested with the Navy's Strategic framework and SOCOM's AI strategy, to *accelerate adoption of AI/ML strategies*. This task force will develop and guide enterprise AI strategies, establish organizational and process constructs, and provide oversight on the development of priority AI efforts. We are developing a formal, sustainable, and durable organization, architecture, infrastructure, and processes to ensure an AI enabled warfighting future. Our three priority AI investment areas are AI for Personnel, AI for Corporate, and AI for Warfare. AI for Personnel's pilot programs involve enhanced Recruitment, Assessment, Selection and Training, Inclusion and Diversity; Human Factors / Health; and, Human Performance; injury prevention, brain health, and service longevity. AI for Corporate focuses on auditability, property accountability, predictive maintenance and expeditionary logistics in contested operating areas.

In order to advance AI adoption, we hired our first Chief Technology Officer (CTO). A serial entrepreneur with extensive experience inside large technology enterprises, our CTO brings the perspective to rapidly transform Naval Special Warfare. The CTO's immediate objective is to prioritize Naval Special Warfare's Human Weapon System digital/data transformation, a fully integrated approach to digitally support and empower leader decisions on human readiness. This all-encompassing effort will span Recruitment, Assessment, Selection and Training, Continuum of Leader Development, Health and Human Performance, Human Factors Councils and Readiness for SOF Transition, to enable advanced predictive and prescriptive decision support for People, Trainers, Providers, and Commanders.

We continue to modernize our enterprise data engineering services to accommodate an expansion of Naval Special Warfare AI/Machine Learning (ML) capabilities. The Naval Special Warfare Data Environment (NDE) is the foundational plumbing to support *structured and unstructured authoritative data* from disparate, disconnected, and internal data sources to access, ingest, cleanse, curate, store, model, and analyze data efficiently and effectively. The NDE includes Operational Data Stores, Warehouses, and Lakes in order to connect business systems, data analytics, and machine learning initiatives with authoritative data. This effort to consolidate all data under one secure architecture maximizes efficiency and provides data services on-demand to the authorized user regardless of network, geographic, or organizational separation of provider.

AI for Warfare centers on computer vision and robotic process automation on Naval Special Warfare Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance and mobility platforms, autonomy, collaborative intelligence, and networking small autonomous unmanned platforms, and Battlefield Decision Support Assistance in Man Machine Teaming. This innovative

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approach to warfare expands Naval Special Warfare's ability to Process Exploit and Disseminate intelligence. AI for Warfare's focus directly supports our force's precision and lethality.

COMPETE and WIN

With USSOCOM and Navy support, I am shaping the community – focusing on transformation of the architecture, routines and culture – in ways that substantively prepare our force for the future. Over the past eight months, we made bold, transformative changes to improve warfighting readiness, force development and training for *peer-level strategic competition, crisis and conflict*. We bore-sighted on distinctive capabilities that extend the reach of the intelligence enterprise for understanding, deliver dilemmas early in crisis to undermine adversary confidence and provide all domain effects from distinctive maritime access vectors to solve the Joint Force's hardest problems.

The Navy's Commandos, A Legacy of Transformation

Naval Special Warfare's legacy starts in World War II; from Scouts and Raiders and the maritime units of the Office of Strategic Services, to Underwater Demolition Teams, to the establishment of SEAL Teams in January 1962. We are the U.S. Navy's Commandos – tightly linked in support of Fleet Commanders. We recently accelerated our participation in Fleet exercises to experiment with the ways we can distinctively contribute to the Navy's key operational problems. Our focus on the undersea domain and reach into littoral regions requires further advancements in platforms that extend mission ranges and payload options – including cyber and electronic warfare effects. Our force's value proposition as an inside force in conflict, partnered or unilateral, creates opportunity to impose costs and complicate adversary targeting while extending the reach of Joint Force fires.

Balancing Enduring C-VEO Mission with Strategic Competition

Naval Special Warfare capabilities are essential to address both violent extremist threats and strategic competition with other states. Counterterrorism (CT) and Countering Violent Extremist Organizations (C-VEO) remain a core mission as these threats endure and *possibly accelerate* with the proliferation of lethal technologies like synthetic biological weapons. We must continue to develop new and more cost-effective intelligence collection and disruption approaches to CT and CVEO while we balance orientation on the distinctive Strategic Competition mission. We adjusted warfighting readiness cycles and objective certification exercises to sustain CT / C-VEO capabilities and deliver *step changes* in combat readiness with the integration of peer-level opposition forces and detection technologies. These adjustments and innovations make our force more lethal and precise. We will never underestimate terrorist threats and we acknowledge that Naval Special Warfare will continue to provide critical contributions to the defense of the homeland from external terrorist threats.

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Optimizing Command and Control and Warfighting Certification for What's Next

We are rapidly implementing a reorganization of the SEAL Teams from 8 to 6 subordinate SEAL platoons to make our force more lethal with the addition of a third maneuver element in each of the 6 platoons. This allows a recapitalization of three SEAL Teams-worth of tactical leadership across the community to invest in the Special Boat Teams, Special Reconnaissance Teams and SEAL Delivery Teams – creating greater operational diversity and leadership depth. To realize *step changes* in innovative capabilities for peer threats, we are coordinating with SOCOM to identify opportunities to hold approximately a third of our mission ready force in reserve to deploy for purpose and to experiment with new tactics, techniques and procedures for our most stressing hard targets. I see opportunity to accelerate change at lower training risk after our force masters its core mission essential tasks; only after becoming brilliant in the basics can we push past *incremental changes* to deliver the *step changes* in capability within each operational deployment cycle.

Naval Special Warfare is developing the infrastructure and placing the right leadership to command and control our highest risk and most complex strategic operations – reinforcing domain specific warfighting function expertise to identify and reduce risks for the Secretary. Our increased focus on *red teaming* proposed operations fully develops our community's operational IQ to iteratively mitigate risk in planning and rehearsal phases. The investments in reorganizing command and control provide us greater ability to leverage and integrate national and theater capabilities as well as *deep domain expertise* across *all joint warfighting* functions to give us greater decision dominance across all mission phases.

We are moving with a sense of urgency and a disciplined analytical approach to Certify, Verify, and Validate deploying and deployable O-5 and O-6 headquarters to prepare for uncertainty and provide our forces the best leadership to win. With my subordinate commanders and senior enlisted leadership, we directly lead, coach, teach, mentor and assess force readiness during each TRIDENT exercise to ensure our forces are ready for the Nation's hardest targets. We continue to advance the relevancy and complexity of the Joint National Training Capability Exercise TRIDENT to challenge joint Special Operations operators and capabilities. We proactively sought out peer objective evaluators from Marine Special Operations Command to assist with unvarnished and bias-mitigated external assessments. This is exactly the transparent approach we must take on to be ready – to authentically seek edge. We also increased our organic Naval Special Warfare training cadre depth to provide mentorship based on recent combat experience.

Within our transformative investments, we refocused on ensuring global access in the maritime domain with a range of mobility, signature and scalable kinetic and non-kinetic effects capabilities. Each capability investment is distinctive and designed to increase the lethality or survivability of the Joint Force across the competition continuum and into crisis and conflict. True to Special Operations core tenets, we aim to serve as an 'inside force' creating dilemmas for the adversary and advantage inside where the enemy perceives superiority across all domains. With our rapid, force-wide transformation, we are delivering on the creative ways we can asymmetrically solve hard problems and do the things we must do now ahead of crisis.

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SERVICE and STEWARDSHIP

The current geo-political uncertainty demands the Nation's Naval Commandos innovate to compete strategically and win in conflict with the American principles and values that make our Nation and our team timeless and authentic – a team humble in triumph and fully accountable in failure. At Senior Chief (SEAL) Ed Byers' Medal of Honor ceremony in the White House East Room in 2016, President Obama quoted William Faulkner – saying “*I believe man will not merely endure. He will prevail because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.*” Words appropriate for the men and women of Naval Special Warfare and our joint Special Operations teammates, words that capture our resilient journey through highs and lows – through failure, combat loss, and triumph. We are 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.