

STATEMENT OF

LIEUTENANT GENERAL STATEMENT OF

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COMMANDER  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

BEFORE THE

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES SUBCOMMITTEE

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Chairwoman Ernst, Ranking Member Heinrich and distinguished members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you as the Commander of Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) on behalf of your superb Air Commandos. Today, I will share with you how AFSOC is ready to win tomorrow's fight for our nation if called upon, regardless of the adversary.

As United States Special Operations Command's (USSOCOM) air component, we continuously strive to hone capability and evolve our force to remain Ready, Relevant, and Resilient -- our three AFSOC priorities. I want to express my gratitude for the resources projected in Presidential Budget (PB) 2019, as these fully fund our requirements and will help us turn a strategic corner as we engage in the Great Powers competition.

In line with the National Defense Strategy (NDS), AFSOC has the duty and opportunity to shape specialized airpower to accentuate both the far low-end and high-end of the conflict spectrum. As General Thomas testified before your committee two months ago, Special Operations' unique capabilities are in high demand across the globe. For 17 years, AFSOC has been focused on Counter-Violent Extremist Organizations (CVEO) operations. This has accelerated the AFSOC operations tempo and has drawn our efforts towards the low-end of the conflict spectrum. We realize these efforts are predominately long-term engagements in which cumulative tactical effects lead to long-term strategic impact. To make such engagements successful, AFSOC must lower the resource and opportunity costs of conducting persistent CVEO operations. We must drive down the cost of conducting Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), Processing, Exploitation and Dissemination (PED), and Strike – especially in permissive environments. Conversely, AFSOC operations on the high-end are predominately

those that deliver strategic impact in a short amount of time. AFSOC must be capable and flexible in order to confront competitors across a range of potential conflict scenarios. We must develop a force that is more lethal and resilient in contested environments. We must be able to gain and maintain advantage in the information domain. Harmonizing our systems wherever possible will achieve efficiencies of scale and interoperability savings along these lines of effort.

This analysis brings me to AFSOC's first priority: READINESS. For nearly three decades, AFSOC has effectively and decisively delivered specialized airpower around the globe, often at a moment's notice. Our battlefield performance remains unmatched. However, the character of war continually evolves. AFSOC must remain agile and ready to prepare for the unpredictable. AFSOC must build full-spectrum readiness while ensuring that we are postured to "fight tonight". We are invested in virtual, adaptive, and realistic training to build readiness beyond traditional means. Using virtual reality to integrate live training environments with simulators reduces training costs, lowers personnel tempo, and enables us to realistically exercise high-end mission sets.

Another way to maximize readiness is by strengthening our network of allies and attracting new partners. AFSOC stands with our Indo-Pacific, Middle Eastern, African, European, and hemispheric allies and partners, providing assurance and enhanced aviation capabilities against a subversive Russia and an increasingly expansionist China. Ensuring readiness both home and abroad, AFSOC conducted 78 exercises and training events with partner nations in 2017, including stateside capstone exercises like our recently concluded EMERALD WARRIOR. Overseas-based exercises, led by our OCONUS units and occasionally augmented with CONUS forces, play a critical role enabling Theater Special Operations

Command (TSOC) and Global Combatant Command (GCC) regional campaign plans. Conducting bilateral and multilateral events with the Republic of Korea, Japan, the Republic of India, the Republic of Estonia, the United Kingdom, France, and others, our Air Commandos bolster the capabilities of partner nations, create pockets of containment, and ensure interoperability between American, allied, and partner forces. We welcome hosting members of this committee at any future exercises to see firsthand the value our Air Commandos deliver to allies, partners, and the nation.

Our Combat Aviation Advisors (CAA) are the vanguard of AFSOC's Irregular Warfare force. Specializing in Aviation Foreign Internal Defense (AvFID) operations, CAAs recently enhanced indigenous aviation operations in the Kingdom of Thailand, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and the Republic of Poland. PB-19 dramatically improves our AvFID capability by doubling our CAA capacity with 152 additional advisors, and by adding five AvFID Armed ISR aircraft. CAA force growth ensures engagement with Combatant Commanders' highest priority countries. As we work to build out the full CAA capability portfolio and bring more partner nations on board to share the security, we enthusiastically support the Air Force's Light Attack Aircraft initiative. Using an economically feasible Light Attack platform would allow us to scale aviation training for our allies, expand procurement and maintenance efficiencies, and maximize opportunities to build partner capacity.

Should a bolstered allied network fail to deter aggression, AFSOC remains postured to deter, compete, and win against strategic competitors via our second priority: RELEVANCE. To meet the challenges enumerated in the NDS, AFSOC must cultivate a balanced force for high- and low-end conflict by investing in new capabilities while leveraging current capabilities in

new, innovative ways. This strategy aims to balance and expand AFSOC relevance across the spectrum of conflict to deter, and if necessary defeat, adversaries in a dynamic and ever-changing security environment. AFSOC embraces the process of innovation from within our formation, striving towards a balance of incremental and transformational efforts that are cost-effective and that extend strategic purpose.

AFSOC assiduously investigates new and unique ways to organize, train, and equip against strategic competitors. We promote General Goldfein's "*current technology used in new ways*" approach to rapid, cost-effective, and impactful innovation. AFSOC finds the way against America's toughest enemies, dating back to daring infiltration missions against Nazi Germany's Fortress Europe and the front lines of Imperial Japan. This ethos endured through the decades, and is still alive and well in your Air Commandos of today. Regardless of threats, AFSOC finds quick and lethal solutions, understanding the shifting geopolitical landscape and constantly adjusting our force presentation to maximize lethality and applicability for tomorrow's fight.

Maintaining a relevant force and fleet demands that we continually refine and modernize the force through programming priorities. By accelerating programs essential to retiring legacy aircraft, AFSOC can reinvest cost savings into future capabilities. For example, the MC-130J Talon III program provides adverse weather terrain following/terrain avoidance, radar threat avoidance/protection, and communication networking capabilities significantly more advanced than our current MC-130H Talon II fleet built in the 1980s. New Radar Frequency Countermeasures technologies bring expanded capabilities, allowing digital upgrades that protect against emerging enemy threats without replacing complete systems. Airborne Mission Networking provides a suite of integrated situational awareness and

communication tools providing the crew with a correlated common operating picture of the air and ground battlespace that does not currently exist in SOF mobility aircraft. PB-19 funding is critical to synchronize the Talon III design and testing, thus enabling a timely recapitalization of the Talon II fleet. Fielding of Talon III capabilities is critical to maintaining the relevance of our SOF C-130 specialized mobility fleet across all spectrums.

Knowing we must innovate at the speed of relevancy, we are currently fielding our newest gunship using “plug and play” technology already evaluated in other AFSOC platforms. This allows for an expedited fielding timeline, and more rapidly delivers the best lethality to our warfighters. Additionally, AFSOC is adjusting tactics, techniques, and procedures, and adding low-cost modifications to current assets. These new combinations aim to produce cascading problems for America’s adversaries, creating strategic dilemmas and buying time for the Joint Force to act and react accordingly. The faster we can go from concept to the battlefield, the better.

Other key emergent technologies at AFSOC include the gunship High Energy Laser, a non-kinetic weapon system employed to achieve high precision lethal effects on targets with little to no acoustic signature and very low collateral damage. High Energy Lasers are a truly remarkable and innovative technology, one that is capable of dramatically shaping the battlefield to our advantage. Additional gunship advancements include the use of Adverse Weather Engagement Systems and Tactical Off-Board Sensing technologies. These systems enable our AC-130 gunship fleet to target, sense, and engage despite adverse weather conditions.

Looking beyond the next ridgeline, we are interested in developments relating to Next Generation Vertical Take Off and Landing capabilities. We see this presenting a revolutionary leap in vertical lift range and speed using advanced turbofan technology. Additionally, our Next Generation Manned ISR platform is going through requirement validation. We know this capability must be operable in a more contested threat environment than we've become accustomed to, and thus we're looking for increases in endurance, range, speed, capacity, payload, and advanced defensive systems. Staying relevant requires persistence.

AFSOC is working with USSOCOM and Air Force Space Command to increase interoperability. As the Department of Defense's lead component for the space warfighting domain, the Air Force aims to advance space-based technology to maintain superiority in the ultimate high ground. The Joint Force's reliance on these space effects, such as GPS, ISR, and communications capabilities will grow exponentially, despite increased threats in the domain. We have adopted a resilient space enhancement strategy to ensure these capabilities are available for AFSOC missions throughout the conflict spectrum. Future employment opportunities include Alternative Beyond-Line-of-Sight options during operations and resilient positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT) systems in denied environments.

AFSOC heavily leverages both Air Force and USSOCOM research and development investments, but also tracks key Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL), Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), Office of the Secretary of Defense Strategic Capabilities Office (SCO), and industry projects that align with our innovation focus. For example, we are partners with USSOCOM, AFRL, and industry for Project MAVEN. This Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence initiative leverages machine learning and artificial intelligence

capabilities to free precious human capital from labor-intensive ISR categorization work. AFSOC leverages USSOCOM's SOFWERX network to reach largely untapped non-traditional sources of innovation in the commercial markets. SOFWERX recently facilitated assessments for AFSOC of new systems and technologies, like reducing the size, weight and power of the equipment carried by our Special Tactics operators. AFWERX is a similarly-scoped Air Force program that is relatively new, and is beginning to work other issues related to Special Tactics.

Finally, our third priority is RESILIENCY. What defines AFSOC is not technology or platforms. Rather, we are defined by our people – Active Duty, Guard, Reserve, and civilians alike - and their relentless application of our ethos and strategic values balanced across the spectrum of conflict. Tomorrow's fight is unknowable but one thing is certain: it must be an integrated joint venture where our creative concepts will win out. AFSOC fervently believes a diverse formation lends itself to this end and we develop all Air Commandos accordingly. In fact, AFSOC employs the skills of female aviators in combat operations, and has done so since 1994. The Air Force proudly promoted our first female Air Commando to the rank of Brigadier General this year, and over 13% of our senior enlisted formation is female, a ratio that compares favorably to the rest of the Air Force. We have benefited from the expertise of female leadership at the squadron, group, and wing level for years, and will continue to do so into the future.

Humans, not hardware, allow us to accomplish our mission. Our Air Commandos, families, and relationships are our most valuable assets; but they are also our most vulnerable. Our Nation calls upon us to provide specialized airpower, oftentimes at a moment's notice. We proudly stand ready to answer our nation's call. We understand the impact of this demanding

and perilous mission. Therefore, the immediate and enduring resiliency of our force, family, and relationships, is the critical foundation for everything we do. We consider this an essential task to maintain readiness of the AFSOC force.

The readiness and relevance of our force is for naught if we neglect our physical, mental, spiritual, and social fitness. Utilizing USSOCOM's Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) and the Air Force's Comprehensive Airman Fitness programs, we ensure that our Air Commandos, including our brave gold star families, have access to every possible tool to achieve resiliency every day and we exploit every opportunity to encourage our Airmen to use these tools.

POTFF enables us to deliver Human Performance Programs designed to meet the unique needs of our warfighters. It delivers Psychological Performance Programs to improve our cognitive and behavioral performance. It integrates family resilience initiatives into Social Performance Programs, enhancing service-provided programs. POTFF allows us to deliver Spiritual Performance Programs to enhance core beliefs, values, awareness, relationships and experiences. Our team is grateful for your resolute support of AFSOC, as the continued funding of USSOCOM's POTFF program is vital to the long-term psychological, spiritual, social, and physical resiliency of the nation's bravest warriors. After all, the invisible wounds of war can be just as debilitating as physical injuries.

AFSOC is on a glide path to meet the Secretary of Defense's goal of 1:2 deployment-to-dwell for the active force and 1:5 for reserve forces. Currently, 17% of deployed AFSOC personnel have a deployment-to-dwell of less than 1:2 and there are no individuals deployed below 1:1. To balance the insatiable global demand for specialized airpower, we are

consistently working towards a maintainable deployment tempo for the long-term health of our force, while enhancing focus on recruiting, retention, and preservation of the force initiatives.

Chairwoman Ernst, Ranking Member Heinrich, and Members of the Committee, AFSOC represents our nation's finest assets and our enduring strategic advantage. On behalf of all Air Commandos thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.