

Statement for the Record of

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To the

House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel

For a Hearing on

“Improving Recovery and Full Accounting of POW/MIA Personnel from All Past  
Conflicts”

April 2, 2009

I very much appreciate the interest the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel maintains in the Department of Defense’s mission to obtain the fullest possible accounting of Americans lost while serving in harm’s way. Likewise, I truly welcome the opportunity this Subcommittee has extended to the Department to lay out its views on how we are moving to enhance the success of this critical mission.

One of the primary reasons the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) was formed in 1993 was to ensure the families, the veterans service organizations, and the American public in general, received all releasable information our government has assembled on the cases of our citizens who became missing as a result of hostile actions while serving the interests of our Nation. In my agency alone, we devote approximately one-third of our resources to ensuring that these groups and the Congress remain fully informed of our efforts and our progress. Also, as you may know, families are entitled to

receive all declassified information that pertains to their cases. We take this commitment seriously, and we work hard at it every day.

### **Personnel Accounting Community Strategy**

Our goal is to provide equitable treatment to all groups representing all conflicts. Last summer I testified that we were in the process of reviewing our strategy to account for our missing. I am pleased to report today that we recently completed updating our Personnel Accounting Community Strategy so it better reflects sound management and business practices while honoring the sacrifices of all of our brave men and women, regardless of the conflict in which they were lost. I previously provided copies of the strategy to this Subcommittee and today I am including a copy for the record along with my statement.

The Personnel Accounting Community Strategy has three purposes. First, our strategy explains the strategic themes underlying our mission which provide the basis for our policies which drive our operations. Next, it describes the current efforts we are making to ensure the entirety of the Accounting Community has a common understanding of our requirements and practices. Finally, it explores the possible mission environment of the near future and describes the challenges we will face and the goals we will pursue to adapt to these emerging requirements.

The strategy also details the requirements placed upon us, the environments in which we operate, and the collective actions we must take to ensure we maximize mission accomplishment. In implementing the strategy, each agency within the Personnel Accounting Community is responsible for developing its own unique organizational strategy and operational plans that will best and most fully support these requirements within the constraints of our mission environment and resources. Each organization has specific and unique internal expertise that enables it to best conduct its own planning for meeting mission goals; but coordination and cooperation between the Community's diverse agencies is absolutely crucial to ensuring all of our requirements are met and gaps are filled.

This strategy looks forward five to seven years and it has the following strategic goals:

- Provide the most effective operational capability for the mission.
- Ensure the availability of adequate resources to accomplish our mission.
- Maintain unity of effort.
- Provide transparency in community efforts.

Our strategic themes are:

- We serve the interests of the missing individual.
- The American public has expectations that must be addressed.
- There are geopolitical limitations on this mission and desirable geopolitical outcomes that extend beyond this mission.

The modern personnel accounting mission was shaped largely in response to public concerns raised during and after the Vietnam War. With the passage of time and our successes in recovering, identifying, and returning hundreds of formerly missing Americans, many of those concerns have been overcome. Personnel Accounting has evolved into an institutional mission that will continue into the foreseeable future. It continues to serve as an engagement tool with countries around the world and, as such, the accounting mission supports the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy. With that in mind, and with agreement among community members that every unaccounted-for individual is equally important, this strategy reinforces personnel accounting's role as an enduring mission for the Department of Defense. We will continuously evaluate and review our strategy and update it, as necessary.

### **Allocation of Resources Across Conflicts**

As I also stated before this Subcommittee in last July's hearing, we are taking a hard look at how we allocate our limited resources across different conflicts. When I



meet with family members of our missing – as I do virtually every month -- I do not see World War II, Korean War, Cold War, or Vietnam War; I see Americans who have sacrificed so much for this country, and who are entitled to have their sacrifices respected and honored.

There are more than 80,000 Americans who did not return from World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War. Each month, when we hold our Family Update meetings in cities and towns across the country, we see the grief and the pain that so many of the families of our unaccounted-for service members still suffer, some after more than 60 years. This pain is real, and it is never-ending – there is no closure for these thousands of American citizens. Therefore, as long as this nation and its government remain committed to finding its missing sons and daughters, we will continue to carry on this mission.

I am pleased to report that we are in the final stages of writing our Community guidance. As the Subcommittee is well aware, the strategy that we've been using since 2006 primarily allocated resources based on the "most recent conflict first." This guidance will further define and seek to implement the broad themes contained in our recent Personnel Accounting Community Strategy. The goal of our new policy guidance is the fullest possible accounting of Americans who did not return home from past conflicts and the recovery of those who still might be held captive, determining which

remains are recoverable, and recovering and identifying the remains of those who perished.

Although the requirements to achieve this goal differ according to the circumstances associated with each loss and, more importantly, by conflict, the sacrifice made by each missing American is equally important, not only to his or her family, but also to a grateful nation. The guidance we are developing also covers allocating resources among the conflicts, and incorporates standards applicable to all losses, regardless of conflict. It also reflects requirements unique to each conflict, to include research, investigation, analysis, excavations, and remains identifications. This new approach will be used to allocate resources over the next five years. It will no longer be based primarily on allocating resources by the “most recent conflict first,” but now will be based on prioritizing all aspects of the mission. Our first priority will continue to be resolving the cases of those from past conflicts who were captured or possibly could have been captured and did not return. The next priority will be to seek to maintain the remains recovery operations tempo of the last five years; build the capacity to double the number of identifications without reducing operations or shifting focus; ensure our capacity to respond to short-notice requirements; and increase investigation, research, and analysis support. This policy guidance will be used to develop more detailed guidance and strategies for World War II, the Korean War, the Cold War, and the Vietnam War.

We have already begun some initiatives to accomplish the goals of this guidance. Most notably is our goal to double the number of identifications, an issue I have previously discussed with the Subcommittee. In January, we contracted for a study that is looking at doubling the rate of identifications over the next five years. I must emphasize that this study had no preconditions on whether or not the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command's (JPAC) Central Identification Laboratory should be moved or another satellite laboratory built elsewhere. We simply directed the contractor to look at the best way to double the rate of identifications. We hope to soon have some preliminary results to share with the Subcommittee.

On a related issue, over the past year we have worked with the Joint Staff and the Military Departments on ways to improve the collection rates of DNA reference samples from families of our missing. I asked the Joint Staff for its views on this important effort, and they have determined that additional resources could make an improvement in this area. We are hopeful they will be able to allocate those resources to the Military Departments and we can enhance our rate of collections. We also are continuing to seek to reinvigorate the United States-Russia Joint Commission on POWs and MIAs through the diplomatic process.

### **Transition from Current Conflict to Post Conflict Accounting**

We are continuously seeking ways to improve how we deliver our service – keeping the promise that our government has made to account as fully as possible for those became missing while serving our nation. But our first and foremost efforts today are to bring back alive those who now and in the future go into harm’s way.

Our primary obligation as a government is to bring everyone home alive from foreign battlefields, as such; I am responsible for developing policy to honor this obligation. I am sure you have seen the heroic stories of those rescued from today’s conflicts, but a little-known and seldom mentioned fact is that there is only one soldier missing from Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq, and none from Afghanistan. We also have a small number of civilian contractors missing from those conflicts. We see this dramatic shift as a direct result of circumstances related to at least two areas: The first is technology which enables us to keep track of our own people on the battlefield, and to bring them out of harm’s way, if need be; the second is the fact there are lessons learned from previous conflicts that we apply to today’s combat scenarios. Capitalizing on the Department’s expertise in personnel recovery, my office, under the sponsorship of the National Security Council’s Counterterrorism Steering Group, is leading efforts to develop policy to integrate a whole-of-government approach to personnel recovery. This effort is codified in a personnel recovery annex and addendum to National Security Presidential Directive 12, “U.S. Citizens Taken Hostage Abroad.” In this annex the concept of personnel recovery is integrated into national policy, thus synchronizing all

United States Government capabilities in the preparation, prevention and response efforts to recover isolated persons.

Last summer, I testified that we were preparing to make a transition from current conflict accounting to post conflict accounting (for example when the few cases of those missing from our current conflicts will transition from the combatant command's responsibility for accounting to DPMO-JPAC responsibility). We are working with the combatant commands and the Military Departments, in accordance with existing Department of Defense instructions, to ensure a smooth transition. To assist this effort, the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency is conducting a capabilities-based assessment to determine how to best accomplish and resource this mission.

### **The Way Ahead**

To continue our success into the future, I believe we must leverage technology more effectively, and this includes using information technology to communicate better with our constituents and to gather the information that is essential to resolving cases. To this end, we have taken initial steps to develop a technology for information sharing that will allow not only the analysts and researchers from all the personnel accounting community organizations to share information and analysis on a collaborative basis, but also will allow families to access information related to their specific case.

Foremost, our current efforts have been directed at ways to ensure that we avoid getting locked into fixed strategies or ways of doing business. Today's mission of accounting for our missing arose from the government's efforts during and following the Vietnam War; but although both warfare and technology has changed, the never-ending pain of having a missing loved one has not changed. I see this every day, as I interact with our families. This effort to account for the missing from all conflicts is one promise that I will not abandon.

To effectively serve our constituents, we must constantly evaluate and assess our methods of operations, resource bases, and command relationships to ensure they are doing what we need and want them to do. Those things that are not serving the purpose for which they were intended must be clearly identified, then changed or eliminated.

Several years ago Congress asked the Department for an assessment of the organization and funding of JPAC. We completed this study and reported to Congress. However, we did not stop our analysis there. We are currently discussing with officials within the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff whether our current organizational structure is sufficient or if a significant reorganization of the entire personnel accounting and personnel recovery communities is warranted. These discussions are preliminary and it is too early to fully brief the Subcommittee on them; however, I will keep you informed of our progress.

We must continue to honor the sacrifices of our heroes of past conflicts, but we must also keep our eyes on both the present and the future. We owe a debt to those who are currently serving our Nation, as well as those who will serve in the future. That debt is to do all that we can to ensure them we will “keep the promise.”

We must encourage out-of-the-box thinking on this issue. While we shouldn't reject tradition just for the sake of doing things differently, we shouldn't allow tradition to become a straitjacket to innovation.

I have touched on our current directions in accounting for our historical losses, as well as on several issues directed at our future efforts and our future commitments. I have thoroughly enjoyed leading this issue for the Department over the last several years and working with Congress, in general, and with this Subcommittee, in particular. On behalf of all the men and women within the Department who work this issue every day, I thank you for your concern and your continued support of this very important issue.