

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**

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**BEFORE THE**

**COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE & SPECIAL OPERATIONS**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**FEBRUARY 26, 2025**



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Chairman Jackson, Ranking Member Crow, and distinguished members of this subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to partner with Congress and discuss the role of Air Force Special Operations Forces in Great Power Competition. I am honored to present an overview of the skills and capabilities our Airmen provide in safeguarding the interest of our Nation.

Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) is approaching our 35th anniversary as a major command. Over that time, we have evolved from a fleet of helicopters, modified cargo planes, and a special tactics force focused on airfield operations and personnel recovery, into an enterprise, committed to delivering special operations precision strike, specialized mobility, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), and air-ground integration focused on enabling Joint Force operations. Throughout those evolutions as it is today, the Nation's main effort remains AFSOC's main effort.

Despite being the smallest Air Force Major Command, receiving 0.4% of the Air Force total obligation authority, AFSOC has well and faithfully answered our Nation's call. Time and again, our Airmen have displayed courage and valor in the skies and on the battlefield. Since September 11th, 2001, our Airmen have received 123 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 64 Silver Stars, 12 Air Force Crosses, and one Medal of Honor. AFSOC provides agile and adaptive capabilities designed to prevail in strategic competition, enable the Joint Force in armed conflict, and decisively respond to crises and violent extremist organizations. Now AFSOC finds ourselves at a nexus of transformation within our United States Air Force (USAF) and Special Operations Command (USSOCOM).

AFSOC organizes, trains, and equips forces to present units of action to global combatant commands (GCCs) and theater special operations commands (TSOCs), unsurpassed in our core missions. We conduct these mission sets in the continuing context of counter-violent extremist organizations (C-VEO) and counter-terrorism, while re-optimizing for future competition and conflict. AFSOC's dual role as the air component of USSOCOM and the SOF component of the USAF means we cannot afford to choose between deterrence, integrated crisis response, and C-VEO; we remain prepared to do all three, and do them well.

Two factors inform AFSOC's approach to this change: resourcing and a shift in focus. First, as the Nation prepares to face our pacing threat, AFSOC is forced to continue innovation in an increasingly resource-constrained environment, leveraging the equipment we have in new and innovative ways while fielding the capabilities required to remain ahead of our adversary. Second there has been a shift from supporting C-VEO for 20 years to now balancing requirements for strategic competition, large-scale combat operations, C-VEO, and crisis response. These factors force us to navigate hard choices to ensure we adequately resource readiness for today without incurring risk to modernization efforts required for future contingencies.

### **SUPPORT TO GREAT POWER COMPETITION**

In our dual capacity, AFSOC supports the core missions of the USAF, GCCs, and TSOCs, including air and space superiority, ISR, rapid global mobility, and global strike. Simultaneously, we leverage our unique capabilities to enhance the effectiveness of special operations, providing critical enablers that amplify the impact of SOCOM's missions. By integrating our airpower capabilities with the broader special operations enterprise, we create a synergistic effect that enhances the overall potency of the Joint Force.

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- **Preparing Through Partnerships:** Today, AFSOC Air Commandos operate around the globe, working alongside our partners in 24 nations, strengthening our ability to interoperate as a coalition of nations with shared values. Further supporting this, AFSOC's basing strategy includes two overseas wings in the Indo-Pacific and Europe. This approach sustains access and placement in strategically significant locales, enhancing our relationships with some of our closest allies. Additionally, the re-organization of our CONUS wings to regionally focused units of action enables us to develop a long stare capability, and establish close ties with key nations within their respective areas of responsibility. This emphasis across our force structure and operational employment allows AFSOC to foster vital connections, placement, and swift response to conflict scenarios.
- **Shaping the Operational Environment to Prevent Conflict:** With access and placement, AFSOC Airmen cultivate the key partner nation relationships required to shape the operational environment for the Joint Force. This approach is further promoted by the creation of five Theater Air Operations Squadrons, specialized units focused on a geographic region, concentrating on relationship-building, coalition coordination, and shaping the environment for collective defense and joint operations.
- **Preserving Strategic Focus:** AFSOC provides the Joint Force with irregular, non-traditional, cost-effective, and scalable options to complement conventional capabilities. By leveraging SOF strike, air mobility, ISR, and air-ground integration, AFSOC enables equivalent effects with a smaller footprint and greater flexibility available to the conventional force, allowing for more strategic access and placement. Ongoing developments in capabilities such as enhanced precision effects allow outsized impacts in contested areas of responsibilities while simultaneously freeing up other assets to better focus on strategic competitors.
- **Enabling the Joint Force to Prevail:** Should conflict occur, AFSOC serves a dual role supporting the air component and special operations component by providing the Joint Force with key enablers required for long-range targeting, kinetic, and non-kinetic effects. Along with enabling the targeting process for the Joint Force, AFSOC will provide infiltration, personnel recovery, and resupply capabilities for Joint Forces in high threat and contested environments.

To achieve these priorities and initiatives, AFSOC is focused on three key areas: Raise Air Commandos, Ready Our Force to Win, and Relevance through Adaptation. These efforts allow AFSOC to continue delivering agile and adaptive capabilities designed to prevail in strategic competition, enable the Joint Force in armed conflict, and decisively respond to crises and violent extremist organizations.

### **PEOPLE: RAISING AIR COMMANDOS**

Our people remain our comparative and competitive advantage, and we must deliberately develop adaptable, prepared, lethal, and resilient Airmen with the mentality to win. Within AFSOC, our Airmen are specially trained to merge creativity, tactical expertise, boldness, and discipline to overcome the nation's most complex security challenges. Our Airmen demonstrate an understanding of the operational environment, are tactical and technical experts in their craft, skilled in multi-domain operations, and execute on mission-type orders.

Raising our Airmen into Air Commandos prioritizes a mastery of the basics and embodying

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a culture of disciplined professionalism, starting during on-boarding and continuing support throughout the member's career. In 2023, AFSOC established the Air Commando Development Center, focused on the deliberate development of Air Commandos from the individual, to unit of action level. We have identified core competencies that allows Air Commandos to execute our assigned missions across the spectrum of conflict. We not only raise our Air Commandos, but actively engage their families to ensure all are part of our culture and armed with the resources to excel as a SOF family. To accomplish this, AFSOC leverages Air Force and USSOCOM resources to ensure no Air Commando or their family are left behind.

In concert with Air Commando development, AFSOC continues to leverage the immense benefits provided by the Preservation of the Force and Family programs. Through these programs, Air Commandos and their families gain access to resources that enhance resiliency, ultimately improving our lethality as a cohesive force. With this deliberate approach and a focus on people, we strive to mold Air Commandos ready for current conflict and prepared to face any strategic threat.

Developing Air Commandos with these competencies requires time and resources – they cannot be mass produced. Therefore, we must deliberately work to retain our high quality and professionally disciplined force. Financial incentives, bonuses, and policies can only solve part of this challenge. Quality of Life (QoL) and Quality of Mission (QoM) are essential to our Air Commandos' well-being and job satisfaction. QoL refers to the overall well-being of our Airmen and their families, including access to quality housing, schools, childcare, medical care, and community support. QoM, on the other hand, focuses on factors that impact Airmen's job satisfaction, motivation, and personal or professional growth within their service duties. By prioritizing QoL and QoM, and focusing on force generation, force development, and force modernization, we can maintain a high-quality force, ready to overcome the nation's most complex security challenges.

### **WIN: READY OUR FORCE TO WIN**

With Air Commandos who embody the key attributes, discipline, and creativity required, we create units of action. Unlike how we deployed for the last 20 years, each unit of action is tailored to the mission need and remains focused on their operational environment, threat, and mission for 18 months before arriving in theater. Mission-aligned units of action are critical to supporting joint warfighting concepts. Our ability to aggregate for effect then disaggregate for survivability hinges on the Air Commando's ability to think and operate in absence of detailed higher-echelon guidance.

To reflect this in AFSOC's organization, current functionally aligned wings are realigning to reflect and prepare for the nation's priority missions. Each will have its own structure, with a redesigned concept of support for expeditionary operations to ensure wings are prepared to execute their missions with assigned Airmen and units. The mission aligned wings are critical components that will ensure we have the force posture necessary for deterrence, integrated crisis response, and C-VEO.

### **TRANSFORM: RELEVANCE THROUGH ADAPTATION**

To simultaneously remain ready and relevant against today's threats while adapting for the future, AFSOC must look across multiple time horizons. We cannot focus exclusively on today at

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the expense of tomorrow or vice versa. Our ability to face a technologically capable adversary requires continuous adaptation of our force, technology, and operational tactics. Balanced investment is necessary such that modernization efforts keep pace with the evolution of the operating environment without incurring unacceptable levels of risk to readiness. AFSOC meets this challenge through our force design process, matching capabilities to threats.

AFSOC is committed to specific force modernization efforts, advancements that will reap benefits not only in crisis, but across the spectrum of conflict in a variety of operational environments. These modernization efforts include technology which allows our mobility platforms to become strike assets integrating with fourth and fifth-generation platforms providing kinetic and non-kinetic effects. We are fielding adaptive airborne mesh networks that allow single operators to control multiple unmanned aerial systems, providing mass ISR, and an expanded magazine of kinetic and non-kinetic effects while providing distributed command and control solutions to the Joint Force. These advancements are not far time-horizons, and AFSOC has demonstrated these capabilities in a variety of test environments.

AFSOC is also focused on maximizing the capabilities of the kit we have. In December of 2024 AFSOC took delivery of the last MC-130J and is in the process of systematically modernizing the MC-130J fleet updating capabilities to enable long range penetration and survivability against technologically advanced air threats. AFSOC will also take delivery of the last CV-22 in 2025. The CV-22 will continue to play a critical role in future operations especially in the Indo-Pacific. The range, speed, runway independence, and all-weather penetrating capabilities make it an ideal platform for future operations in strategic competition and conflict. To reach this future potential, it is time for major upgrades incorporating new technologies and lessons learned from the first generation of this platform. Finally, we expect the first OA-1K platform delivered to AFSOC in spring of this year, with a current resourced fleet capacity of 62 aircraft. The OA-1K, as a low-cost, modular, multi-mission platform with the capability to conduct close air support and intelligence missions, will play a critical role in preserving conventional and special operations forces strategic focus on our pacing challenge, while ensuring violent extremist organizations are held at risk.

## CONCLUSION

USSOCOM, AFSOC, and the other SOF components bring unique and critical capabilities to the Joint Force in Great Power Competition, enhancing its ability to compete effectively across the spectrum of conflict. AFSOC integrates and delivers effects where and when no one else can. Air Commandos are a global shaping force providing specialized strike, ISR, mobility, and air-ground integration to support the Joint Force in campaigning and provide asymmetric effects in crisis and conflict. By providing these critical capabilities, SOF and its components play a vital role in supporting the Joint Force's success in Great Power Competition and are essential to achieving national security objectives in an increasingly complex and competitive environment. Our unique access and placement combined with rapidly fielded, effective, and efficient capabilities create strategic advantage: Any Place, Any Time, Anywhere.