

Opening Statement
Chairman James R. Langevin
Intelligence and Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee
Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Request for Department of Defense
USSOCOM
April 9, 2019

Welcome to today's hearing on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Budget Request for United States Special Operations Command (SOCOM) and Special Operations Forces (SOF).

It is an understatement to say that the world has changed since the establishment of the Command in 1987. 9/11 dramatically altered the national security landscape. SOF personnel have been deployed for almost two decades. Despite policy shifts and planned drawdowns, even today they continue to deploy in support of Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Outside of declared theaters of active armed conflict, Geographic Combatant Commanders have what some would call an "insatiable appetite" for SOF to achieve the objectives in their campaign plans, and they have made use of Congressional authorities granted to the Department over the last decade including security cooperation, support of ongoing operations, exercises, and other activities to do so.

The Department has recognized that GCC requirements are a major contributor to high op-tempo. For instance, one stated purpose of the Africa Command force optimization effort, announced in November 2015, was to decrease the burden on SOF. However, "optimization" relies upon events that may not transpire anytime soon, such as assignment of a Security Forces Assistant Brigade to the continent, and I am concerned that this optimization may be

happening without an adequate plan to continue to support our partners and allies in Africa and beyond.

For years, I have highlighted this ever-increasing demand. SOF have critical skillsets and conduct activities that can be employed across the full spectrum of conflict and against all types of warfare. They are the “force of choice.” Yet, we must be prudent about how the force is employed, or we risk breaking the tip of the spear.

General Tony Thomas, the previous commander of SOCOM, took action to manage the demand for SOF. To that end, the deploy-to-dwell ratio has improved for a substantial percentage of the force, yet more must be done to continue this positive trend and reduce the burden on our SOF personnel. As SOCOM aligns to the National Defense Strategy (NDS), continuing to understand and manage that demand, *not just increasing the size of the force*, will remain a key component of readiness.

Prior to his retirement, General Thomas, along with the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Low Intensity Conflict, Mr. Owen West, began an effort related to professionalism and ethics in the force. The effort is to understand and correct what they identified as a “disordered value system” in the force. This subcommittee is committed to maintaining a sound culture our quiet professionals can thrive in. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses how they will continue to build on the efforts underway.

The FY20 Budget Request for USSOCOM totals \$13.8 billion. As in years past, there is more than \$4 billion of SOCOM funding requested in the overseas contingency operations (OCO) account. Approximately 90% of SOCOM funding in OCO is for activities and programs that are enduring. This concerns me because baseline funding is crucial to providing USSOCOM stability. Furthermore, when base funding is improperly classified as “contingency,” it prevents Congress from

fulfilling its oversight role and considering the totality of enduring defense spending in the current and future years.

I am pleased that the SOCOM request includes SOF-peculiar investments in technologies outlined in the NDS such as directed energy, cyber, and space capabilities. However, as I recently noted in the subcommittee's hearing on Science and Technology, I remain concerned that policy is not being developed as fast as the technology. Maturation of policy and technology must occur simultaneously so we can field the latest and greatest capabilities to our warfighters.

SOCOM's proposed investments in behavioral health and family support under the Preservation of the Force and Families initiative has increased. Tragically, in 2018, suicide rates amongst SOF nearly tripled. Family support and behavioral health should be considered as important, if not more important, as the physical well-being aspects of the initiative. We must take care of our people and families.

SOCOM's budget request also includes investments for implementation of some of the recommendations from the Niger investigation, like those relating to training. This is important progress, and I am glad to see the command is not resting on its laurels with respect to the incident in Niger. However, I remain disappointed and dismayed that the Department has not yet provided the families of the fallen, or the American people, with final decisions on awards and reprimands and is conducting yet another review almost a year and a half later.

SOCOM's budget request is only about 2% of the Department's total request. When coupled with funding requested by the Military Departments and other agencies for support, the total requested funding relating to SOF is over \$20 billion, or about 4% of the total DoD request in FY20.

The Military Departments' budget requests and efforts have a profound impact on SOF. Since release of the NDS, we have carefully scrutinized SOCOM's alignment to the outlined priorities, but we haven't been as diligent in ensuring the Services continue to support SOCOM requirements for a sustainable counterterrorism campaign and fully account for SOF equities in budget decisions relating to future capability development and posture. This hearing provides us an opportunity to understand where there may be a mismatch in budget requests, and how Service challenges - like recruiting and retention – impact the Title 10 responsibilities of SOCOM.

Testifying today is Mr. Mark Mitchell, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict. Secretary Mitchell is a decorated Army combat vet from the SOF community who was amongst the first U.S. soldiers on the ground in Afghanistan after 9/11. For his actions in battle alongside the Northern Alliance during November 2001 he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, our nation's second highest military award. He commanded a Joint Special Operations Task Force in Iraq from 2010-2011.

In 2014, Mr. Mitchell served in the National Security Council as the Director for Counterterrorism on the National Security Council where he was a critical player in the effort for the Presidential Policy Review of Hostage Policy.

Mr. Mitchell, welcome back and thank you for your service. I look forward to hearing from you about continued implementation and execution of Section 922 of the Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act. This legislation elevated the role and responsibility of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict to a service-like secretary for SOCOM.

Also before us today is General Richard D. Clarke. General Clarke assumed command of SOCOM less than two weeks ago. General Clarke, welcome and thank you for being here.

General Clarke has served the nation for nearly 35 years. His most recent assignment was on the Joint Staff as the Director for Strategy, Plans and Policy, J5. He served as the Commanding General of the 82nd Airborne, spent six years in the 75th Ranger Regiment in CENTCOM and EUCOM, and was the Director of Operations at Joint Special Operations Command from 2009-2011, including during the Osama bin Laden raid.

General Clarke was also the Commandant of Cadets at West Point. He has deployed countless times to Iraq and Afghanistan and deployed in support of Operation Desert Storm. He is a recipient of the Distinguished Service Medal and Defense Superior Service Medal. He appears before us today as the 12th Commander of SOCOM.

General, thank you for your service. With your background, you are well poised to ensure that SOCOM is structured appropriately and ready to effectively execute the NDS, as well as fulfill Coordinating Authority responsibilities. I also want to thank Mrs. Clarke for being here today and thank her for her commitment to the nation.

Thank you.

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