

Statement of
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U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

Introduction

Chairman Jackson, Ranking Member Crow, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to represent the over 36,000 men and women of Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF). I am proud to accompany my fellow Special Operations Service Component Commanders and to highlight the role of United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) in Great Power Competition, responding to crisis, and preparing to win in conflict as part of the greater United States Special Operations Command (SOCOM) mission.

USASOC, representing only 8% of the Army formation and 0.5% of the Army budget, provides more than 51% of the Nation's Special Operations Forces (SOF), and consistently fills over 55% of the U.S. SOF deployments worldwide – generating an exceptionally high return on investment for the Army and for SOCOM. We maintain an enduring presence with approximately 3,000 Soldiers deployed across nearly 80 countries to train foreign forces, integrate with partners and allies, and provide support to ongoing conflicts in EUCOM and CENTCOM, as well as our efforts in INDOPACOM, AFRICOM, and SOUTHCOM. We must also maintain our crisis response capability given a 180% increase in operations in the last three years, and five missions executed by USASOC forces last year alone.

USASOC's challenge is one of increasing operational demands, including competition, counter violent extremist organizations (C-VEO), and crisis response, despite significant challenges. We must meet Title X responsibilities (Man, Train, Equip); care for our assigned Soldiers and Families; deploy globally to train and integrate with foreign forces in support of Great Power Competition; transform and modernize our formation for Multi-Domain and Large-Scale Combat Operations; respond to crises around the globe; and maintain support for ongoing conflicts. Put simply: we are asked to generate, employ, and care for our Soldiers and their Families, without sacrificing readiness or lethality, while innovating and transforming to address the challenges of tomorrow.

USASOC aims to balance resources against the readiness required to compete and respond to crisis today, and those required to innovate and modernize to be ready for future conflict. We leverage lessons learned through our global access and placement to develop innovative solutions and employ our agile formations to path find and act as early adopters for the Army and the Joint Force.

The Current Security Environment

Our Nation, faced with challenges of increasing quantity and complexity in an era of constrained resources, is at a strategic inflection point. Technology is rapidly changing the character of war, enabling adversaries to influence populations and challenge our traditional military advantage. As part of a broader strategy to challenge the United States' national interests, rival nation states are making incremental gains outside of the United States' traditional areas of strength to threaten the delicate balance of peace and international norms in which we have invested since the end of the second World War. USASOC is tailor made, like SOCOM, for this era.

Compounding the threat, we are witnessing increasing military partnership between the People's Republic of China (PRC), Russia, Iran, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), including the recent deployment of soldiers from the DPRK to the front lines in Russia's war against Ukraine. Each of these states is acting globally to challenge our national interests, while Violent Extremist and Terrorist Organizations (VEO) continue to destabilize global and regional governance and threaten Americans at home and abroad.

The USASOC Enterprise

USASOC's operational force is comprised of Special Forces, who are our premier practitioners of partnered Irregular Warfare; Psychological Operations, who use the power of influence to shape operational environments; Civil Affairs, who conduct civil reconnaissance, human terrain mapping, and build population and governance resilience against crisis; Rangers, who specialize in direct action raids and joint forcible entry; and Army Special Operations Forces Aviators, who provide SOF unique rotary wing and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance capability. Our generational relationships, language and cultural understanding, and irregular approach uniquely posture the Army's Special Operators from all five capabilities to contribute to Great Power Competition.

Our generating force resides in our premier training institution, which is responsible for 115 doctrinal publications – 10% of the Army's total doctrine. The John Fitzgerald Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (SWCS) assesses, selects and trains over 3,000 Soldiers daily and 19,000 Soldiers annually, providing an education that ranges from high-end combat skills to master's degrees. SWCS also updates Army educational programs annually to incorporate lessons learned from modern battlefields like Ukraine and ensures we receive the Army (P2) funding required to train Soldiers and leaders.

People Are Our Platform

People are the linchpin of our success and will always be our priority. Since 2001, USASOC Soldiers have been awarded nine Medals of Honor, three of whom are still serving within our formation. 92 Soldiers have earned a purple heart since my testimony in 2022; 20 of those in the last year. Though our Nation is not directly involved in named combat operations, the demands on our force continue to grow.

As we balance competition, crisis response, conflict, and transformation, we must remain invested in caring for our people and focused on maintaining readiness across our force. USASOC's new force generational model, which includes the use of Army National Guard Special Forces Soldiers from the 19th and 20th Special Forces Groups, has reduced our operational deployment to dwell (home station) ratio from a 1:2 to a 1:3. This total force approach to meeting our increasing operational demands while building readiness in our ARNG formations requires a balancing of resources (e.g., the aforementioned order to active duty for selected reservists under 12304b) to sustain long-term. We continue to reassess our force offering to balance sustainable force generation and the requirements of operational commands.

We also continue to apply our professional impatience toward developing a mechanism for a baseline measurement of each Soldier's overall well-being. Our most recent efforts in brain health and blast overpressure, aligned with DoD implementation guidance, contribute to a data-driven approach to integrate advanced safety measures. We are working to remotely log events and capture cumulative risk and exposure to allow commanders and Soldiers to make informed decisions that improve safety and preserve the long-term health of Army Soldiers without any loss of lethality. In fact, all our work is underpinned by the necessity to maintain lethality and readiness while protecting our people.

Competing Today

USASOC's primary task is, and always has been, Irregular Warfare; and this is more important than ever. This asymmetric approach to defending our homeland has been part of our DNA since before the American Revolution. Our modern Army Special Operations legacy resides firmly in World War Two, including the OSS who enabled resistance forces behind enemy lines, and Merrill's Marauders who penetrated deep into Japanese-held territory in Southeast Asia.

Although the Global War on Terror (GWOT) necessitated a shift to Counterterrorism and Counter-Insurgency Operations (COIN) that honed our combat skills and expanded our generational relationships, USASOC is returning our focus to our Irregular Warfare roots. The same generational relationships that underpinned our success in CT and COIN are vital to our success in Irregular Warfare, providing the backbone for Competition-required tasks like Unconventional Warfare (UW) and Foreign Internal Defense (FID). These relationships support our global access and extend our network of sensors, enabling ARSOF to detect our adversaries' transregional activities and providing commanders options to counter below the threshold of conflict. Our global network enables the identification of effects against our adversaries beyond specific geographic boundaries.

ARSOF's access and placement, developed through our relationships, also provides the terrestrial link for SOF-Space-Cyber Triad operations, conducted with partners from the Army's Cyber Command (ARCYBER) and Space and Missile Defense Command (SMDC). By utilizing our physical presence and networks, the Army's SOF enables and enhances the employment of scalable, precision cyberspace and space effects against physical, cognitive, and virtual objectives. The SOF-Space-Cyber Triad, combining deep sensing and access and placement, serves the eyes, ears and teeth for the Joint Force, providing options through multiple theaters in competition, crisis, and conflict.

Through Irregular Warfare, ARSOF will develop Flexible Deterrence and Flexible Response options through the TSOCs and SOCOM to the Department of Defense, provide a deep sensing capability for the Joint Force in conflict, and sustain our counterterrorism and counterinsurgency capabilities. On initiation of conflict, Army Special Operations operating in the enemy's deep will integrate with the networks and partner forces with whom they have trained and conduct Unconventional Warfare to enable the Army and the Joint Force.

Innovating for Tomorrow

Like all Army commanders, I am challenged by the rapid pace of innovation today. The cycle of innovation on the front lines in Ukraine is as short as one week, shorter still for drone warfare. On the battlefields of yesterday, SOF developed the 'Find, Fix, Finish, Exploit, Analyze' Cycle to evolve our threat picture. Today, a new cycle focused on innovation will drive battlefield success. The rapid pace of innovation is driving the need for the development of new capabilities at an increasing pace that exceeds current acquisition processes. New technology must be responsive to the needs on the front lines. The side that innovates through this ecosystem the fastest will win.

Being responsive is not enough. We must position our units – our people – in proximity to the problem with the right support to learn rapidly from our partners' experience and develop and disseminate novel solutions to fill emerging capability gaps. In the current environment, co-locating the right support and the right partners (i.e., academia, industry, and technology) near the point of need is as important as having the operators required to implement it.

For our part, USASOC is training, advising, and learning from our partners, employing Soldiers with passions in coding and technical development, and partnering with industry and academia to place experts in the proximity necessary for rapid innovation. Because of our connected global SOF network, our Soldiers in the United States European Command (EUCOM) are able to pass lessons to our partners in the United States Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) and around the globe at speed. USASOC is codifying and sharing the lessons learned from these efforts to prepare Warfighters across the Joint Force, transforming our organizational and institutional structure, and investing in the development and testing of new technologies at home.

In that vein, USASOC established the first Army Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) focused on Robotics and Autonomous Systems across all domains. The new 390A MOS will develop Soldiers with the deep expertise necessary for innovation and integration of drone technology on the modern battlefield. These Soldiers will also be capable of advising commanders on the integration of new technology into their broader operations. This threat-informed investment was done without additional resourcing in a no growth environment, in which we made prudent decisions against present risks. This is also a path finding effort in support of the Army and SOCOM.

USASOC continues to evolve to meet current and future demands. To enable this transformational change, USASOC is integrated with HQDA G-3/5/7, Army Futures Command (AFC), and Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to support the Army's and SOCOM's Continuous Transformation campaigns of learning.

The development of new courses, like the Robotics and Unmanned Systems Integration Course (RUSIC) exemplifies this point. RUSIC enables ARSOF Soldiers to address unprecedented technological advancements and deliver a competitive advantage to the Joint Force. RUSIC graduates are U.S. Army-certified master trainers qualified as UAS pilots with the ability to train and qualify their own teammates, propagating knowledge and skills throughout the formation. Graduates are also ready to teach, train, and enable partner forces to employ UAS and cUAS capabilities on the battlefield, strengthening our coalitions. USASOC is pursuing a similar effort to develop a course to advance the baseline technical proficiency of our Signals Intelligence and

Electronic Warfare (SI/EW) Soldiers. Tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) distilled from lessons learned through modern warfare are permeating through our force and driving changes to our organizational structure.

Bridging the Gap

The future of our effectiveness as a fighting force relies on seamless integration across all warfighting functions within the Joint Force. Requests for ARSOF Soldiers are increasing globally. If new requirements continue to be added to our plate without others being removed or without appropriate resourcing, then a requirements resource mismatch could result. Such a mismatch would create risk dilemmas for our force, mission, and families as we struggle to modernize, innovate, and remain ready while providing operational support to our partners and allies around the globe. Despite this challenge, USASOC will remain in lockstep with the Army and the SOCOM to ensure our efforts complement both of theirs while advancing capabilities for every Soldier.

USASOC's global presence today provides proximity to existing conflicts, emerging flash points, and regions in competition that help us bridge the gap to future conflict. This proximity and associated familiarity is an opportunity to understand and articulate capability gaps for which we require assistance from subject matter experts and industry leaders. We continue seeking interested partners across these areas to develop the most innovative solutions to our most advanced technical problems. Physical co-location will continue to be key for the rapid development of new capabilities; Soldiers, technology developers, and equipment testers work best when working together close to the problem. We must also be able to transfer these lessons and technology to our foreign partners to enable their success.

Rapid innovation and collaboration with industry requires fiscal agility to reallocate resources within the year of execution to pursue the latest and most promising technological advancements. We must build new processes for acquisitions, focusing on a capability-based budget structure rather than programs or platforms. We must be able to quickly invest in industry partners who are providing relevant technology at the speed of war, and rapidly divest of those who cannot meet this requirement. We must strike a balance where competition drives innovation while keeping people as the foremost consideration.

Simultaneously, USASOC remains committed to eliminating foreign interference in our own supply chains through supplier vetting, improved cybersecurity, and diversifying source options. A National Initiative to build our capabilities in unmanned systems across sea, ground, and air will increase our force protection by ensuring we strengthen and protect our domestic capacity for production. Help from Congress here will be critical to the success of this effort.

Conclusion

USASOC acknowledges the operating environment will continue to evolve as our state and non-state adversaries seek to challenge international rules and norms below the threshold of conflict. USASOC, comprised of America's finest men and women, will remain persistently forward deployed, invested in generational relationships, and in

competition with our adversaries for global influence. Our culture of problem-solving, professional impatience, and perseverance will enable the Joint Force to prevail. We look forward to working with Congress to turn SOF start-ups into codified successes for the Army. Thank you for the invitation to speak, and for your continued support to your Army's Special Operations Forces.