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**THE ROLE OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS IN
GREAT POWER COMPETITION**

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BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE AND
SPECIAL OPERATIONS

OF THE

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS,
Washington, DC, Wednesday, February 26, 2025.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 1:30 p.m., in room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ronny Jackson [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RONNY JACKSON, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM TEXAS, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS

Dr. JACKSON. The subcommittee will come to order.

I ask unanimous consent that the chair be authorized to declare a recess at any time. Without objection, so ordered.

We have a few members that aren't here yet, but one of the things about this committee going forward is we're going to start on time. So, we're starting on time.

Today, we'll hear from our witnesses on the role of Special Operations Forces in great power competition. The United States is facing a dramatically different geopolitical environment now than at any other time in recent decades. While this century has been dominated by our efforts in the Global War on Terrorism, the new era of great power competition presents strategic challenges from revisionist states in China and Russia and their rogue state allies in Iran and North Korea.

Over the past several years, as our Nation has confronted the evolving landscape of great power competition, our special operators have adapted to meet the challenges posed by our adversaries, while continuing to combat the continuous and evolving threats posed by violent extremist organizations, military proxies, and non-state actors.

U.S. Special Operations Forces are ideally suited and organized for great power competition. The core activities of our Special Operations Units, from working with our partners around the world to help bolster their defenses in unconventional warfare capabilities to counterproliferation and special reconnaissance, is more needed today than ever before or decades in the past and offers the ability to present significant strategic and operational challenges to our adversaries, while simultaneously enabling our allies and partners to resist outside aggression.

The relationship our Special Operations Forces have built and sustained through decades of partnership with our allies is critical for our access and placement to counter our adversaries. The

United States will continue to rely on the men and women throughout the Special Operations Forces community to prepare future battle spaces, rapidly respond to contingencies in multiple theaters, and extend American influence by operating across the spectrum of competition, including below the threshold of traditional military conflict and in the gray zone.

To address this continuously changing environment, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict and Special Operations Command recently released the Joint Special Operations Forces Operating Concept for Force Development and Design Guide to the Special Operations Forces community and the Department to ensure we develop, and I quote, "a Joint Special Operations Force that rapidly fuses all-domain capabilities for tailored and simultaneous missions across the full spectrum from competition to conflict, enabled by persistent campaigning for global advantage." That sounds a little verbose and a little academic, but if you read it slowly, it makes sense.

This concept will require the Special Operations Forces community to be culturally literate in dynamic regions across the globe and proficient across evolving domains in the cyber, space, and information realms -- all while maintaining the ability to provide unique tactical combat capabilities for the Joint Force.

Today's hearing is focused on the role of Special Operations Forces as the United States embraces an era of great power competition. The subcommittee will seek to examine the unique capabilities of the Special Operations Forces service components and how Special Operations Forces' core activities may complement and enable the Joint Force to operate against strategic adversaries.

We hope to further understand how the Special Operations Force components determine what the appropriate capabilities and force structure are to support and respond to the Geographic Combatant Command requirements for great power competition and counter adversaries and non-state actors.

Our witnesses today are the commanders of the Special Operations service components and have decades of experience with the Special Operations community. I want to welcome Lieutenant General Jonathan Braga, Commander of the United States Army Special Operations Command; Lieutenant General Michael Conley, Commander of the Air Force Special Operations Command; Major General Peter Huntley, U.S. Marine Corps, Commander, Marine Forces Special Operations Command, and Rear Admiral Milton Sands, Commander, Naval Special Warfare Command.

In the interest of time, I will ask the witnesses to keep your opening statements or your opening remarks to 5 minutes or less, so that we have sufficient time for questions and answers.

With that, let me thank our witnesses for appearing before us today.

I now recognize Ranking Member Crow for his opening remarks.

[The opening statement of Dr. Jackson can be found on page 29.]

STATEMENT OF HON. JASON CROW, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM COLORADO, RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS

Mr. CROW. Thank you, Dr. Jackson.

And thank you to our Special Operations Forces Component Commanders for being here today to provide testimony on the role of U.S. Special Operations in great power competition.

The global security environment is changing rapidly. Our adversaries regularly engage in malign gray zone activities intended to challenge the United States in the global order.

As stated in the 2022 National Defense Strategy, countries like China and Russia use a broad range of diplomatic, informational, economic, and military tools to undermine our national interests.

So, to address and to protect our national interests and to combat these malign activities, we have to find various ways to counter these efforts.

Although the authority to leverage irregular warfare is not unique to Special Operations, it is essential. Irregular warfare highlights core Special Operations Forces activities like foreign internal defense, unconventional warfare, Military Information Support operations, Civil Affairs operations, and others which are essential if we are to successfully counter our competitors in the gray zone.

Indeed, our Special Operations Forces are uniquely qualified to support the whole-of-government approach of integrated deterrence when it comes to great power competition.

Our partners and allies remain key to addressing these challenges. The history of our Special Operations Forces is rooted in partnership. The generational relationships that Special Operations Forces develops with our partners gives these forces a unique understanding of the global operating environment, allowing them to work in some of the most difficult locations around the world.

These relationships also help us to identify key vulnerabilities, mitigate security concerns, and alter competitor perceptions of risks, costs, and benefits of certain actions.

So today, we will examine the core activities of Special Operations Forces and how they apply to great power competition after over two decades of Special Operations Forces focus on counterterrorism and countering threats from non-state actors and violent extremist organizations.

We must not forget the hard-won lessons of the last 20 years and we should endeavor to maintain Special Operations Forces ability to conduct counterterrorism operations, while ensuring they can support the Joint Force in great power competition.

We will examine how the new Joint Special Operations Forces Operating Concept for Force Development and Design will assist the components in shaping force requirements to focus on great power competition.

Lastly, I want to take a moment to recognize the key successes of our Special Operation Forces and what makes them the best at what they do; it's the people, and it's their families, and it's the support network. Because we would be nothing, and our Special Operations Forces would be nothing, if it weren't for the exceptional talent of Americans who step up day-in and day-out, at great risk to themselves and at great sacrifice, to perform the hardest missions that our country asks them to do.

So, thank you, Dr. Jackson, and to our witnesses.

And as always, Rangers, lead the way.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you.

We will hear from our witnesses now, and, then we will move into a question-and-answer session. Immediately following one round of questions, we will reconvene for the classified session, which will take place in Rayburn 2337. We are going to try to set a stop time of 2:30. So, I think everybody should get their questions in, based on the number of folks here, but if we don't, any questions that we don't get to, we will ask in the classified session.

So, with that, Lieutenant General Braga, we will begin with you.

**STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL JONATHAN P. BRAGA,
USA, COMMANDER, UNITED STATES ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND**

General BRAGA. Chairman Jackson, Ranking Member Crow, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thanks so much for the opportunity to represent the 36,000 members of the United States Army Special Operations Command here today. I look forward to highlighting just who we are; how we are transforming for the future, and what we require to protect the homeland and enable the Joint Force.

United States Army Special Operations Command generates combat-ready forces and innovates for today's fight and modernizes for tomorrow's challenges, while also caring for our soldiers and families in an uncertain fiscal environment. Although there is tension between these efforts, we continue to generate exceptionally high return on investment with Regionally Aligned Forces and unique capabilities.

United States Army Special Operations Command comprises less than 10 percent of the Army and receives one-half of a percent of the Army's budget, and similarly, we constitute over half of Special Operations Command and are standing with 16 percent of the budget.

Our Green Berets, Rangers, Aviators, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operations Soldiers are lethal warriors who provide a unique value proposition and options for the Nation. We are in the contact layer with approximately 3,000 soldiers deployed every day in 80 different countries, where the defense of the homeland begins.

Our people maintain generational relationships and sustain the connective tissue with our interagency and international partners.

Forces assigned to United States Army Special Operations Command also stand ready to execute crisis response activities anywhere in the world on short notice. Our formations have supported an exponential increase in crisis response requirements over the last several years.

Army Special Operations' role today is clear and the value proposition for tomorrow is valid. The future of conflict will find our forces operating in the contested, in the deep, and the denied areas supporting the Joint Force.

United States Army Special Operations Command is undergoing its largest transformation in decades. We're updating our doctrine; developing multi-domain-capable units of action; creating battle

labs; consolidating lessons learned, and innovating forward with our partners.

For the first time in decades, we have created a new occupational specialty and courses focused on technology and unmanned systems.

United States Army Special Operations Command established an Irregular Warfare Task Force to buy down risk associated with transregional threats from our adversaries.

We also cofounded the Soft-Space-Cyber Triad. This modern-day deterrence concept ensures Army Special Operations' Space and Missile Defense, and Cyber Command can serve as the eyes, ears, and teeth of the Joint Force and the Army.

Our people are innovation pathfinders. They are professional and patient problem-solvers, and their observation of today's battlefields make it clear to me that we still have much work to do.

The innovation cycle is measured in days and weeks, not months or years. Yet, our funding, acquisition processes, and bureaucracies are not optimized to innovate at the speed of need.

We must position our people in proximity to the problem with the right authorities and right resources to identify emerging capability gaps, pioneer solutions, and disseminate lessons learned to all theaters.

United States Army Special Operations Command remains committed to our top priority, our people, who are the linchpin of our success. Army Special Operations soldiers serve with distinction around the world in harm's way. And since 2001, United States Army Special Operation Command soldiers have been awarded nine Medals of Honor, three of which of those servicemembers and warriors still serve within our formation. And over the last two decades, 382 of our soldiers paid the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of the Nation.

As we work to balance readiness requirements and modernization imperatives, we remain invested in caring for our people and never forget the sacrifices that they and their families make. It is our solemn responsibility to take care of our people; set conditions for future battlefield success, and to generate the highest return on investment for the American people.

Thank you for your invitation to testify today and your continued support.

[The prepared statement of General Braga can be found in the Appendix on page 33.]

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you, sir.

Lieutenant General Conley, you are now recognized.

**STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL E. CONLEY,
USAF, COMMANDER, AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COM-
MAND**

General CONLEY. Chairman Jackson, Ranking Member Crow, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the role of Air Force Special Operations in today's strategic environment.

On behalf of Command Chief Green, myself, and the more than 20,000 men and women of Air Force Special Operations Command, I'm grateful for the opportunity to present an overview of the capa-

bilities your Air Commandos provide in safeguarding the interests of America.

Simply put, Air Force Special Operations Command exists to support our Nation's priorities by supporting the Joint Force and our Special Operations Forces partners. We do this through four primary mission areas that have evolved throughout our history: specialized mobility, strike, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and air-to-ground integration.

This year, Air Force Special Operations Command reaches a milestone, its 35th anniversary as a major command. We started as a collection of helicopters, cargo aircraft, and special tactics focused on long-range penetration, establishing airfields, and personnel recovery.

After 9/11, we evolved into a force exquisitely tailored to counterterrorism. By fielding new intelligence platforms, extensive intel networks, and advancing our interdiction capability, we honed our ability to strike terrorists at their source.

Today's Air Commandos are evolving again, using the ingenuity of our people and unique capabilities to meet our Nation's needs across four key priorities: homeland defense, crisis response, countering violent extremists, and support to theater Special Operations Forces commands.

The common theme across each phase of our history is our ability to adopt. Air Commandos repeatedly demonstrate their ability to become what the Nation needs at that time at that place.

Today, we face new challenges as we continue to adapt to the changing threat environment. We are seeing an increased demand for Air Force Special Operations Command capabilities. Since 2019, demand for your Air Commandos has surged -- in some cases even exceeding the peak levels seen during the Global War on Terror.

As we sit here today, our airmen are forward-based in strategic locations and forward-deployed in harm's way, countering malign activities and actively preventing attacks on our homeland.

And while Special Operations Forces aviation is an irreplaceable asset, it is expensive and our budget has remained largely flat in the face of rising costs. The more complex the threat environment, the more expensive it is to develop capability and maintain readiness to operate in these environments.

I contend that Air Force Special Operations Command provides a high return on investment, accounting for less than one-half of 1 percent of the Air Force's budget and a proportional part of Special Operations Command's budget, which is, roughly, only 2 percent of the Department of Defense's overall budget. For a small cost, the Nation sees an outsized return from its investment in Air Force Special Operations Command.

Air Commandos are present around the globe 24/7/365. Our Indo-Pacific-based wing is located within the first island chain -- actively building relationships with allies and partners; setting conditions for future Joint Force operations, and creating dilemmas for our adversaries.

Our wing in Europe is actually training with and supporting NATO allies, to include mentoring partnerships with our new North Atlantic Treaty Organization Special Operations Forces part-

ners, as we work together to identify both the challenges and opportunities of operating in the Arctic.

On top of all this, Air Commandos maintain a persistent deployed presence, targeting non-state actors capable of threatening American interests and our homeland, all while remaining in a 24/7 alert posture back here in the states to respond to crisis at the direction of our President.

And while we face challenges, I also see incredible opportunity and take pride in our ability to respond quickly wherever our Nation needs us. Air Force Special Operations Command is built to win. We're informed by, but not beholden to, past missions. We remain ready and adaptable.

Thank you for your continued support of America's Air Commandos who remain a cornerstone of America's competitive edge, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Conley can be found in the Appendix on page 41.]

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you, General.

Rear Admiral Sands, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL MILTON J. SANDS III, USN,
COMMANDER, NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND**

Admiral SANDS. I'm proud to be here with my fellow Special Operations Component Commanders.

Naval Special Warfare is a maritime component of Special Operations Command's Joint Force and an integral part of America's warfighting Navy.

I'm here with Force Master Chief Walter Dittmar, and we are honored to represent the 10,000 men and women of Naval Special Warfare.

Thank you for your continued support to our mission, our force, and our families.

Naval Special Warfare's purpose is to provide maritime Special Operations Forces capability to enable Joint Force lethality and survivability inside denied and contested areas.

We prioritize three capabilities: support to long-range fires, maritime kinetic effects, and maritime non-kinetic effects. The latter is our most decisive Naval Special Warfare capability.

Our ability to operate in the maritime provides the Nation with unique access across the globe. Our maritime training allows us to go where others cannot. Our operators and support personnel use combatant craft and submersibles to conduct decisive operations in support of the Joint Force.

Our people are the foundation of our capability, and these bespoke maritime assets allow us to close with the enemy.

In Naval Special Warfare, we exploit our tactical and technological advantages. Manned/unmanned teaming is our future. We will integrate this capability into our tactical formations to maximize our scale and our lethality.

We own the water; we embrace the robots, and we win every fight. Maritime Special Operations Forces activities have an outsized impact on Joint Force operations. This can be a SEAL dive pair placing explosives in the dark of night to protect Navy ships and submarines. It can look like special boat operators in low-visi-

bility craft stalking an enemy vessel to enable lethal effects. Naval Special Warfare gnaws down opponent advantages of scale.

The Nation remains underinvested in our Maritime Special Operations Account. In Naval Special Warfare, we refine our capabilities with a clear-eyed discussion of risk to bridge the gap between operations and resourcing.

Current fiscal constraints and increased deployment costs are challenging our ability to balance modernization and readiness. Our Nation maintains an advantage in the maritime domain, but our opponents are closing fast.

Naval Special Warfare represents less than 1 percent of the Navy's budget and 14 percent of Special Operations Command funding. Like each of my Special Operations teammates here, we provide a high return on investment. With that investment comes solution for some of the Nation's toughest problems.

Agility has been a hallmark of Naval Special Warfare since our inception. The return to the maritime is a return to our original identity. The first frogmen cleared lanes across Europe and the Pacific, so our forces could close with the enemy. Today, our commitment to the Nation is to be ready to do it again.

To conclude, Naval Special Warfare's purpose is our North Star. It guides us as we decide what to do and what not to do. As the Nation's Maritime Special Operations Force, we shoulder the responsibility to own the water and execute the Nation's most challenging and decisive operations.

Thank you and I look forward to our discussion.

[The prepared statement of Admiral Sands can be found in the Appendix on page 48.]

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you, Admiral.

Major General Huntley, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF MAJOR GENERAL PETER D. HUNTLEY, USMC,
COMMANDER, MARINE FORCES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COM-
MAND**

General HUNTLEY. Chairman Jackson, Ranking Member Crow, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the future of Marine Forces Special Operations Command.

For two decades, Marine Forces Special Operations Command has maintained a persistent forward presence, strengthening our relationships with strategic partners and allies, and also, defeating threats across the globe.

Our Raiders, our Special Operations Capability Specialists, and, of course, our Navy Corpsmen represent the very best of the United States Marine Corps and the broader U.S. Naval Service. And as always, we continue to embody a proud legacy, uphold the Marine Corps reputation for efficiency, effectiveness, and a high return on investment.

As national security priorities shift, Marine Forces Special Operations Command stands at the forefront of a critical transformation. We have adapted to the landscape of future conflict and prioritized modernization efforts which will enhance our ability to counter adversaries across every domain.

To do this, your continued support is foundational, and we ask for the investment necessary to cement Marine Forces Special Operations Command's role and to help our Nation win. This is not just about buying new equipment or kit. This is about maintaining and enhancing an elite, persistent inside force that has the generational relationship with strategic partners and the capability to sense, make sense, and act faster than our adversaries.

Raiders continue to be persistently deployed in key locations and our capability of surviving and thriving in contested and, of course, denied spaces -- all this while facilitating the success of the broader Joint Force.

In order to continue this, there are three things that we must do.

First, we must continue to equip and further develop the capabilities of our Raiders with cutting-edge technologies, such as advanced robotics, artificial intelligence, and networking to not only link every sensor to every shooter, but to turn small, disaggregated teams into the cornerstone of an overwhelming Joint Force.

These tools will radically increase our ability to detect and exploit adversaries' weaknesses, which will give the Joint Force the eyes and ears it will need to defeat the most advanced threats. Imagine, if you will, a small team of Raiders deployed to a small, remote island chain, capable of monitoring adversaries' movements, disrupting communications, and providing deadly, accurate, and real-time targeting information to joint assets that may be operating hundreds of miles away.

Second, your continued support for expanding our precision strike capabilities is crucial. On the modern battlefield, characterized by distributed forces, dynamic employment, and degraded communications, Marine Forces Special Operations Command will not just be the Joint Force's eyes and ears; we must also provide our own lethal and accurate fires. This will require continued investment in multi-domain strike platforms and the associated munitions to position with our forces that are in theater now. This will allow us to maintain our competitive advantage against all adversaries.

Finally, but certainly not last, we must continue investing in our people. Our rigorous training pipeline ensures we recruit and develop operators not only capable of mastering these new technologies, but also seamlessly supporting and integrating with the broader Joint Force to deliver decisive effects.

Our Raiders represent a critical asset for our Nation at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. Their skills are essential now in competition, as they will be in crisis and conflict.

These investments not only benefit Marine Forces Special Operations Command, but they will pay dividends across the entire Joint Force by providing a more lethal, agile, and integrated force that stands ready in theater today. We present a deterring threat in competition and, of course, and always, a lethal asset in conflict.

I look forward to working with this committee to ensure your investments in Marine Forces Special Operations Command continue to pay outsized dividends. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of General Huntley can be found in the Appendix on page 53.]

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you, General.

We will begin with questions now, and I will start by recognizing myself for 5 minutes.

This is to all our witnesses here today. Can each of you describe what you think is the one critical capability that your special operators and organizations contribute to great power competition and counter our No. 1 adversary China?

We will start with you, General Braga.

General BRAGA. Chairman, I think our transregional footprint and relationships, generational relationships, in the deep and contact layer out there at the near abroad to all those other places really across every Global Command and Control System, where we find the footprint of the People's Republic of China using all forms of their national power to erode international rules, norms, and behavior, and ultimately, address our national security advantage that we have out there.

We find ourselves working with our interagency partners and our international partners to push back with the ready warfare options. So, in different cases, this could be an information environment; it could be in more clandestine efforts; it could be a better understanding to inform policymakers of what efforts our adversaries are taking to erode these national security advantages.

So, we are like global sensors for the Joint Force. We provide pushback in the competition phase, but we also provide value, should it go to a high-end conflict phase.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you.

General Conley?

General CONLEY. Chairman, much like General Braga's comment, I would say our greatest attribute in the Pacific is our presence. As I mentioned in my opening statement, we have a wing located in Kadena that has been there in some way, shape, or form for decades. So, we understand the operational environment. We have longstanding, decades-long relationships with key partners over there, and we understand the battlespace.

As I prep the rest of the Air Force Special Operations Command formation for potential conflict in new theaters, having that core capability and knowledge set allows me to flow airmen in and out of that theater, pairing with partnerships of our own formation that allow us to quickly get up-to-speed and deliberately train back here in the states. So, when we move forward, we are ready to go.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you, General.

Admiral?

Admiral SANDS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Our biggest Navel Special Warfare contribution to great power competition, especially when you think of China, is our access to the maritime. As our Nation's only Maritime Special Operations Force, we provide the ability to access areas, both undersea and on the sea, that no one else can go. And this enables us to do a variety of things and support the Joint Force lethality and survivability. We view our role in the maritime to enable our Department of Defense forces, our larger Joint Force, to close with the enemy and survive as they do it.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you, sir.

General?

General HUNTLEY. Yes, Mr. Chairman.

As I spoke about in my opening remarks, we have the ability and we do live, thrive, and survive in contested and denied spaces. And as I talked about before, the ability to link any sensor with any shooter. What does that mean? That in places like the Western Pacific, or really anywhere on the globe that is going to be contested and will be difficult for Joint Forces to project power into, we are already there living, developing relationships with partners and allies, but also bring along the capabilities to link not only our organic sensing capabilities, but also the capabilities of coalition, host nation, or even our own surrogates, in order to be able to illuminate the operating space at scale to facilitate Joint Force fires and maneuver.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you, sir.

And I'm going to ask this question. This is a two-part question. It can be pretty short. But how would each of you assess your parent Service's understanding of the capabilities that you each bring to the integrated deterrence in U.S. efforts to compete against our strategic adversaries? And can you provide us a sense of the number or the percentage of requests that you receive from the combatant commanders for support that you were not able to execute and, generally, why you were not able to fulfill this request?

General BRAGA. Chairman, I can get you the exact number in a follow-up, but it is increasing, the number of operational requests that we cannot meet due to force size and/or resources, because it is more expensive to deploy and meet this demand. That is a challenge.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 67.]

Dr. JACKSON. Yes, sir.

General CONLEY. Mr. Chairman, in reverse order, I would echo what General Braga said. We commit almost 100 percent of our forces in each deployment cycle. So, there's no excess left. In order to do other things, it means tradeoffs for what we are currently tasked to do. And I can discuss more of that in the next session.

From a parent Service view, I certainly don't want to speak for my Chief, but I would say it is improving; it is good and improving. I think there was a post-Global War On Terrorism perspective that Special Operations might not be needed as much in a great power competition setting, but over the last few years I think the realization -- based on our presence, our access, and our relationships -- is that they need us more than ever. So, that relationship is strong and growing.

Dr. JACKSON. Thanks.

And, General Braga, you agree that you think that your Service understands your unique capabilities?

General BRAGA. Absolutely, Chairman. We feel fully integrated, interoperable, and we are innovating on behalf of the United States Army, and we are fully integrated with the transforming contact efforts of the United States Army.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you, sir.

Admiral?

Admiral SANDS. I would begin by saying the Navy has really a deep understanding of our capabilities. But, like my teammates, over the last two years, in particular, this has really improved. The

Navy is looking to us and saying what are your five Ws? What are the things that you are specifically going to do for us in conflict, God forbid, with China?

And so, I think we are integrated well with the Navy, especially with our submarine force, and that is only improving.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you, sir.

General?

General HUNTLEY. Yes, Mr. Chairman.

We enjoy significant and great support from the Commandant of the Marine Corps and his team. We work very closely with our sister Marine Forces, specifically Marine Corps Forces, Pacific, Marine Corps Forces Cyberspace Command, and Marine Corps Forces Space Command, to include Marine Expeditionary Forces as well, both I Marine Expeditionary Forces on the West Coast, III Marine Expeditionary Forces in Okinawa, and II Marine Expeditionary Forces here on the East Coast. So, yes, we are providing great support.

In terms of how we are marbled into the Marine Corps force design, we are making good progress there, but we definitely are part of that team, and we look forward to working with the broader Marine Corps going forward.

In terms of demands from the Joint Force, right now, we are at max capacity. We are putting everything out the door that we can in order to still maintain and train the force properly. So, there's probably more things we should be doing, and there's definitely more things that the Combatant Commands would like us to do, but we are at max capacity at this time.

Over.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you, sir.

And with that, I'm going to yield back and recognize Ranking Member Crow for questioning.

Mr. CROW. Thank you, Dr. Jackson.

I wanted to continue the conversation that we have had before about the issue of lessons learned, because we can't afford not to learn lessons learned in real time out in the world as things are rapidly evolving. The failure to do that would just be too costly.

And perhaps one of the best laboratories, although I hesitate to use that term because it is a brutal hellscape of a battle in Ukraine, but it is the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, where we are seeing new tactics, new techniques, entirely new ways of fighting being developed on a weekly and monthly basis, and both forces evolving quickly.

I'm concerned that we are not structured to do that. I mean, you all have the agility and can evolve quicker than most, given your size and the talent of your forces. But, even still, I think there are very real barriers to doing that.

So, I would love each of you to comment on what are those barriers to learning quickly. And if you could change something today to allow us to adapt more quickly to what we are learning and seeing overseas, what would it be?

And I will start on the other end with General Huntley.

General HUNTLEY. Thank you, Congressman.

I would say that, first of all, we do have a very rigorous after-action program that allows us to identify lessons. The challenge

that I will talk about here in a second is being able to implement those upgrades, if you will, to our capabilities.

We do enjoy good, I would describe, acquisition authorities, but right now the pace of modernization in the tactical space across the globe, whether it is Ukraine, whether it is in Colombia, or whether it is anywhere else in the world, is moving very fast. Our ability to modernize on pace is something that concerns me; it concerns me greatly.

And I think that would be one of the biggest challenges, particularly for Special Operations Forces going forward, is being able to keep up with the rapidly evolving. For instance, you know, artificial intelligence is moving fast.

The difference in today's operating environment than what we saw in the past 20 years is that we have always enjoyed a great advantage of being able to sense the enemy before they sense us. But with the proliferation of technologies, that is a two-way street.

Whether you are fighting against a peer competitor or whether you are fighting against a narco organization somewhere else in the world, it is out there. You see al-Shabaab, ISIS, even Clan del Golfo in Colombia, they have these capabilities at the tactical edge. They are moving fast in terms of upgrading. We need to be able to move just as fast. That is our main challenge going forward.

Admiral SANDS. Congressman, I think our lessons learned capability is good. We see rapid turnover of things happening at the front edge from our allies and partners. So, I think that is a good system that we have got, at least within Special Operations Command.

The challenge, and really our priority, is getting equipment that is required for the modern battlefield rapidly into the hands of our operators. And the reason is because they need it to survive. And so, we would like to see -- I think that is the challenge, not just the lessons learned, but taking what we are learning and turning it quickly into real capability within our force.

General CONLEY. Congressman, I would answer that in two parts.

The first, from my air-to-ground integration force, which is my special tactics community, I would say they are phenomenal at taking lessons learned and turning them into actionable things, whether that is off-the-shelf technology. They do run into some of the same challenges that my colleagues have mentioned. When we try to scale some of that stuff, we run into harder procurement challenges. But they are exceptional at learning real-time, adapting especially with small unmanned aerial systems, both offensive and defensive.

On the other hand, I would say, for my aircraft fleet, our modifications take too long. They are pricey and just the nature of our depot system, our procurement system, they take a long time. And my concern is that, by the time we get a fleet of 50 aircraft of any flavor updated to where they need to be, the technology is already irrelevant. So, it is this constant loop of trying to catch up with the enemy threat.

We largely overcome that by training our way out of it to the extent we can through developing of new tactics and procedures, but

that is only a small piece of what we really need as far as advanced modifications.

General BRAGA. Yes, Congressman.

Approximating the problem is critical. Regardless of where modern warfare is happening around the globe, we garner these lessons learned and pass them back to the Joint Force very well.

Our people are great at innovating, have fantastic ideas, but we struggle with rapid innovation, I would say funding, and even processes, where we treat similar modifications of drones, commercial off-the-shelf drones, and do a modification, but it is treated as a major end item in the acquisition kind of lens, which sometimes can take months or years. And we are not existentially motivated like some of our partners are in different theaters out there. So, we have a lot of work to do on the innovation funding and the oversight processes to make them more streamlined.

Mr. CROW. Thank you.

And very briefly, one additional question. I would ask you all to keep it to 30 seconds, so we can make sure the other members have some time.

But, you know, I said in my opening that the quality of the people is our biggest asset. Can you just speak briefly, each of you in your Services, about the challenge of recruiting and maintaining the force right now? Because I know everyone is challenged across the board.

We will start on this side, General Braga.

General BRAGA. Thank you, Congressman.

First of all, retention is very high in Special Operations Forces, from data pulling that we do, because of a sense of purpose and, honestly, family support. Everyone who is getting out of Special Operations at the end of their time highlights those two pluses of serving inside Special Operations. If you want to be surrounded by people who want to perform above the mid-standard and have missions of consequence and purpose, you come to Special Operations Forces and this high satisfaction level.

We do need help recruiting. We do need help in everyone's constituencies of getting our word out. We need to do a better job of telling our story, both nationally and at the local level. And we are working with the Army for that to tell our story better. We haven't always been good at that. So, we do have some work to do to improve our recruiting numbers, but retention is as high as it has ever been.

General CONLEY. I would say for both recruiting and retention, we are stable. There's room for improvement on both sides.

I will go back to special tactics. That is an area where we deliberately recruit, put them through assessment and selection, as they come through. So, that is a small subset of a small subset of American population that has a propensity to serve and the physical condition to serve.

So, we have always had a little bit of a struggle recruiting enough to meet the attrition rates, but we are okay there. Retention is stable, but we have high-quality individuals in our formation, and the same people, the same reasons we want them in our formation are the same reasons the private sector wants to hire

them. They want airline pilots. So, we try to incentivize them through just the quality of life and quality of mission they have.

Like General Braga said, there is an attraction to this mission. So, people want to serve. They want to be part of something bigger than themselves. So, I'm not overly concerned on the retention piece.

For our families, I think it is universal; they care about schools; they care about affordable housing, and they care about medical care in the area. So, that is stuff we try to focus on with our local civic leaders.

Admiral SANDS. Congressman, our numbers really reflect the intake through the Navy. So, we are really grateful to the Navy, and especially Navy Recruiting Command, because they bring the talent in through the front door. Once it comes to us, we have our Naval Special Warfare Center, which I consider to be our most important command. That is where we actually make SEALs and Special Warfare Combatant Crewmen. Our numbers are good. Our retention is good. But, again, it is just all about getting the right people coming through the front door into the Navy, and then, into our selection and assessment programs.

General HUNTLEY. Congressman, we are a little bit different. We don't recruit straight from the civilian population. We only recruit from within the Marine Corps. As you are well aware, the Marine Corps has made mission each year. More than that, for our purposes, they have kept the quality very high. So, our recruiting environment has been very good. We haven't had any problems. So, we are in good shape regarding that.

In terms of retention, like my sister components here, we have had a high level of retention. Once Marines are able to get into Marine Forces Special Operations Command, they have a tendency to stay. So, we are in good shape.

Thank you.

Mr. CROW. Thank you. I yield back.

Dr. JACKSON. Mr. Scott, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Braga, you mentioned this, but I want to reiterate this number. You provide just over 50 percent of Special Operations Forces, and you are one-half of 1 percent of the U.S. Army budget. Is that correct? Is that what I heard you say?

General BRAGA. Yes, sir, we receive the majority of our budget from Special Operations Command through P11 funding.

Mr. SCOTT. Okay. One of the things that we don't talk about enough, I don't believe, because it is a very big place, is partner forces. Can you speak to the role that you play in building capacity abroad and how you measure success in those fields?

General BRAGA. Yes, Congressman.

Ultimately, we have a fantastic relationship, global and generational relationship around the world, built on the bedrock of the last 20 years of counterterrorism missions that are now being applied against nation-state adversaries where we have a confluence of priorities and aligned strategic competitors. So, these same relationships that we work on in actually sharing blood and sweat on the battlefield are now being applied against new problem sets. So, it is reaping dividends there.

I would say a measure of effectiveness, when we have partner forces who are doing equivalent missions as good as us, and sometimes better than us, on the battlefield that are aligned with U.S. national security interests.

Mr. SCOTT. So, Admiral, one of the things that you spoke about -- and this is surprising to hear coming from somebody with a trident -- you are not necessarily known for your non-kinetic actions. And you said that non-kinetic was today one of the most important decisive capabilities.

Could you speak -- what I'm interested in is, as we have watched the Russians, they have been experts at this for years, misinformation, and that is part of what we are talking about. But, then, we have space; we have cyber; we have spectrum. Could you speak to that issue and why you, as a Navy SEAL, feel like that your non-kinetic actions are your most important actions in today's warfare? As we have learned from Putin, as Patton said, "Russians have no regard for human life."

Admiral SANDS. Thank you, Congressman, for the question.

The reason I say that non-kinetic effects are the most powerful thing that Navel Special Warfare can do for modern warfare is because that is where the modern war takes place. The most important regions are space, and then, cyber.

And so, our ability to get into places where other folks can't do to enable those activities on behalf of others is maybe our biggest value proposition. And so, it is not as much about us taking on a target or a single-point structure; it is more about us enabling a larger effect for the Nation.

Mr. SCOTT. I'm worried about -- and I will give you a specific example. I believe it was Mali where the French Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance picked up where Russians had killed several people, mass graves, and before the information could be gotten to the government, the Russians had spread through social media that it was the French that had killed the people.

General Braga, you are shaking your head. Do you know the situation that I'm talking about?

And the end result of that, if I'm not mistaken, is that the French were kicked out of the country. Is that correct?

General BRAGA. That's correct, Congressman.

Mr. SCOTT. I mean, this speaks to the importance of speed with regard to this new type of warfare that we are talking about. And my question is, have our authorities changed, so that we can operate fast enough when we see these things, these messages, happening in real time to get the countermesssage out from what the Russians are doing? It seems to me that, by the time we get our message out or our countermesssage out, which would be the truth out, that the effect of the Russian disinformation has already occurred and forced the good guys out of the country. How do we fix that?

General BRAGA. Congressman, we cede the information environment at our own peril. It is more important to be first in the information environment, to set the narrative, especially when you are dealing with nation-states with nation-state-sized resources against it who leverage artificial intelligence, bot farms, and the rest of it. It is critical terrain to dominate in the information environment.

Traditionally, it has been held at a very high level throughout the world of perhaps an older lens of risk acceptance. A lower level of risk would be very beneficial.

Mr. SCOTT. I'm almost out of time. I do think this is just the area we have got to improve on with the authorities and how we train our partner forces to address the issues in those countries.

Thank you all for your time.

Dr. JACKSON. Mr. Keating, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KEATING. Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thank all of you for your service.

And certainly demand, I think, for Special Operations Forces presence all around the globe is higher than ever, given those demands. I mean, even in Special Operations Forces Week 2024, General Fenton really reiterated during that period the greater demand for the character, as the character of the warfare evolves, as well as the convergence of our adversaries.

You mentioned, General Braga, too, the bond that we have had with our allies and partners, how important that is. How is the interoperability, given what you have all said about the need to get specific assets in a timely fashion? What is the interoperability with our allies and partners and how can that be improved?

General CONLEY. Congressman, I can take that one first.

I would say just continued sets and reps. The more access, the more time we spend forward -- you know, I would say to my formation that virtual presence is actual absence, and there is no replacement for being forward. So, our ability to continue to be funded and supported, to be in a forward presence gives us those touchpoints.

And right now, we are reaping benefits of lieutenants and senior airmen that had interactions as lieutenants and senior airmen that are now lieutenant colonels and chief master sergeants that have had those relationships now for 20 years.

Mr. KEATING. And I just want to shift to, General Braga mentioned the role as global sensors. I think that is a very important phrase that is there. That just doesn't mean working with our partners and our allies; it also means working with other American entities, among them, the State Department, and among them, USAID. And given the cutbacks we have had with USAID, can you speak to, particularly General Braga, the importance, as part of those global sensors and your ability to work in very difficult places in the world, having the presence of USAID and other American entities?

General BRAGA. Yes, Congressman. I have had the benefit to work with multiple embassy teams around the globe, and I think we are strongest when we have a unified, synchronized effort of all elements of national power for the United States national security interests.

Mr. KEATING. Yes, the communication together, and making sure there is no seam, there's a seamlessness with that, can you comment on that, General Huntley, too?

General HUNTLEY. Yes, Congressman. Although I can't speak directly to USAID, I will say that, outside of areas of declared hostility, the interface and being tied into the local country team, and specifically, their country plan, then helps Special Operations

Forces with their capabilities. Whether it is civil affairs, whether it is information, or whether it is building partnership capacity, if you are integrated with that country team's country plan, that is the right way to do it, and that is also in a lot of places on the globe where we provide a significant amount of value.

Mr. KEATING. Yes, I think it is not only being able to get information, sense things in terms of being a global sensor, but it is also a situation where you are building trust, and that trust is important when you are dealing with our other allies around the world.

Quickly, you know, a lot of this is going to be focused on the shift to great power and what we have to do there. Can you speak to what is occurring, too, with non-state actors and some of those challenges that still remain? The shift that we made is important, given what is happening and the character of warfare, but also we still have these non-state actors that are so difficult. Can anyone give us a little insight in terms of those challenges now?

General BRAGA. The nexus of non-state and state is, I would suggest, growing and I think our nation-state actors will take every advantage they can. Whether it is relationships with drug cartels or terrorist organizations, violent extremist organizations, every facet of power that is available will be leveraged by our nation-state adversaries, but the standalone non-governmental ones are still threats to the homeland. We look at Special Operations Forces as part of that solution to address those challenges.

Mr. KEATING. I don't know if anyone else wants to comment on that.

General HUNTLEY. Congressman, I talked about this a little bit before in my opening comments. But what we are seeing is, particularly non-state actors, their capabilities are increasing and evolving relatively fast.

You know, just a quick, casual look at al-Shabaab or ISIS in Eastern African, or even some of the narco organizations in South America, what they bring to the tactical fight is, frankly, pretty impressive. And they seem to be upgrading and improving quickly. That is just kind of where the tactical world is right now and that is where it is going. Our ability to keep up with that, we can identify that; we know what we have to do, but to be able to get those capabilities into the hands of our operators or a small tactical units, I would describe as critical.

Mr. KEATING. I think that is important, given the nature of their ability to deal with AI and other assets.

I yield back.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you.

Mr. Kelly, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KELLY. Thank you, Chairman, Dr. Jackson.

I, first, want to thank each of you. We conduct several operations in Mississippi. We do Southern Strike, which is Air-Force-centric and Special Operations Forces-specific. It is very valuable with international partners. I think that is so good.

I talked about earlier, General Huntley, our Marine Raiders' training and using those resources. We have Stennis. We have several locations. I really appreciate that and I think that partnership is really good. I think it helps in a state like Mississippi where we have the 20th Group or portions of the 20th Group.

Talking about that, I know, General Braga, that you plug into the 19th and 20th Special Forces Groups to help you support global things. Is there anything we can do to improve those relationships? Against all Reserve and National Guard, Special Operations Forces forces that plug into you, what can we do to improve that?

General BRAGA. Congressman, thank you for the question.

Like the active duty component entities underneath my command, we do struggle with making choices on O&M, operational and maintenance, funding for readiness, as well as innovation. So, whether it is training for pre-deployment or developing a new drone or a new munition, it is the same tension on the funding there. So, we do find ourselves making difficult decisions of getting our National Guard Forces ready for combat and ready for deployment.

Mr. KELLY. And if any of you have comments? If not, I will move to the next question.

Admiral Sands?

Admiral SANDS. Thanks, Congressman. Just a brief comment maybe on our Reserve Forces.

I would also offer that the condition of our Reserve Forces, whether it is in the Army or in the Navy, especially our Special Operations Reserve Forces, has really improved and it is a huge advantage to us now.

I was a U.S. Special Operations Command Africa commander before this. So, I had the 20th Group deploying out. Unbelievable capability and they are really able to back up our active duty forces.

Mr. KELLY. Thank you.

And just really quick, you know, we have the 127e; we have several different authorities that each of you use. Are there any new authorities that you think that we can help you get that help you operate? Or are there improvements or modifications that we could make to the current authorities that would help you be better at great power competition?

General BRAGA. Congressman, I would say the authorities are fantastic. The ability to blend those authorities on one singular deployment would be advantageous for us. Whether you are deployed and leveraging 127d or 127e, 333, or to build partner capacity, the ability to switch between those would be very advantageous for us, more flexibility. And I would argue again for innovation-type funding that wouldn't challenge what we need to build ready combat forces.

Mr. KELLY. And talking about that, International Military Education and Training, our State Department I think has prevented us from training almost a decade worth of people, military training for foreigners to come here and train, which later those guys wind up being the president or a minister of defense or the general of their armies or navy or admirals of their navies. How important is International Military Education and Training in building relationships with states, which we need to have great relationships to win great power competition in the Pacific and Africa and South America?

General HUNTLEY. Yes, Congressman, like my colleague to my right, I'm a former TSOC commander, Theater Special Operations Command. I'll tell you, in South America, International Military

Education and Training alumni are critical. The relationship, just the connection that builds, the affinity, frankly, for the United States, its culture, our way of government, I think pays in incredible dividends. So, I am a huge fan of International Military Education and Training.

Mr. KELLY. If we don't do that, do our competitors go give them training, which is lesser quality, but also changes their culture and values by what they learn through the military training that they get in our country or another country?

General HUNTLEY. They will actively exploit that space.

Mr. KELLY. And then, the final thing is, one of the things I really push for is fungible funds that you guys -- and I think it needs to be at the two- or three-star level, whatever theater we are talking about -- that you can do projects, military-type projects, that go through the State Department. The ambassador would need to sign off. But we do lots of money, we send money to places and we send these things, but there's no tangible results that communities can see.

And I think of what I was in Djibouti and all they needed was a foot bridge for some kids. And it cost like \$80,000 to do, but it was going to take us three years to do it. So, the Chinese just built it.

Would just small-amount projects where you could build a foot bridge, so kids don't get run over going to school, or those things, would that be helpful to you to build relationships?

General BRAGA. Congressman, it absolutely would.

And to answer your other question, International Military Education and Training is critical. I stay in contact with two of my foreign classmates from the Special Forces Qualification course three decades ago. It is absolutely critical to expand access and influence with true relationships, not partnerships, but these are real relationships.

Mr. KELLY. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you.

Mr. Ryan, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. RYAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all for being here.

Building on my esteemed colleague from the South with my Yankee accent here, can you talk -- we have talked a lot about our capabilities and our capacities, rightly so. Can you assess, in maybe 30 seconds each, how do you assess our adversaries on where their Special Operations Forces capabilities are at; where they are going, whether that is in some of the influence operations on other continents or, specifically, within United States Indo-Pacific Command? I know that is a lot in 30 seconds. But just how do we match up and what should we learn from our adversaries that you all are implementing?

General BRAGA. Congressman, thanks for the question.

I don't focus solely on Special Operations Forces versus Special Operations Forces. I do focus on their regular warfare approaches and their ability to use all facets of national power -- economic, informational, diplomacy, lawfare, psychological warfare. And that concerns me, their ease of blending all that together for a more holistic effect.

Mr. RYAN. And are they way ahead of us on that? Or significantly ahead of us?

General BRAGA. I think there are success stories around the globe where they have succeeded.

General CONLEY. Congressman, I would say, from a threat lens, they continue to improve every day. And it goes back to my opening statement, where we can't keep up with the threat because it takes us a long time to modify.

But from a Special Operations lens, I think we remain the partner of choice, but that is fragile. You know, our lack of investment, or if we take our eye off a particular country or partnership, it is at risk of someone else exploiting that.

Admiral SANDS. Mr. Congressman, as General Braga said, it is not really a Special Operations Forces-on-Special Operations Forces fight most of the time, right? So, we are going at really assessing our adversary capabilities as the larger nation.

And what we see, certainly in United States Indo-Pacific Command, is we see increasing capabilities across the board. I think everybody is, obviously, tracking on that.

And then, what you are seeing, also, in places like Russia is they are getting greater experience through combat, through actual operations. And that is going to improve any country's capabilities. So, we are keeping a close eye on that.

But I would say, at least in the maritime environment, we still are out in front.

General HUNTLEY. I will echo what my fellow commanders have talked about, sir. That is really their ability to diffuse everything, but also the freedom that they have, or freedom of actions they have, to, basically, turn on issues relatively quickly. In other words, whatever the authorities they have, they seem to be quicker than ours.

Mr. RYAN. And just kind of building on that, as you were saying, General Braga, before, this well-intentioned, but self-imposed rigidity around our different authorities and what you can do, when, and where, I think it is fair to say our adversaries are not thinking the same way, to put it lightly.

And any recommendations that you have to us, building on other questions from my colleagues, of how we can give more flexibility to you all to match that is something I think we are all very supportive of and wanting to hear and push on.

Switching gears with the small remaining time I have, General Braga, I appreciate the time we spent the other week.

Many of my colleagues may know this, and if so, I apologize, but could you just share the 18 X-Ray lessons learned around, not just recruitment for you all, but, actually, how that has affected the larger Army recruitment piece?

General BRAGA. Thank you, Congressman.

Yes, the 18 X-Ray program is critical to Special Forces. That is the off-the-street recruiting for Special Forces Green Berets, which makes up over 50 percent of our force now. We had a different model 20-25 years ago where it was only from the Army, but it is a critical lifeblood to our Special Forces Green Berets.

Since we are a high-standards organization, four out of five both Special Forces Green Berets and Rangers do not successfully make

it through our rigorous assessment and selection. Yet, they end up being successful non-commissioned officers of the United States Army, which is a benefit for the Army and recruiting efforts.

Mr. RYAN. Thank you.

And again, a lot of you are probably not aware, but I just thought it was important to think about, as we are all dealing -- other than the Marines, of course, where I was on -- dealing with the recruitment challenge. And I thought it was really creative and impressive.

So, I will yield back the balance of my time. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you.

Mr. Van Orden, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen, for coming -- and, ma'am, in the back. It is great to see you.

This is hard for me to articulate properly. We just, as Mr. Crow said, got done with a couple of decades' worth of, essentially, Counter Terrorism operations, and right now, it seems like Special Operations Forces is kind of looking for, you know, trying to find a new home.

And I would just caution you guys, you know, we talk a lot about Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and Artificial Intelligence, and all these neat-torpedo -- information warfare, and all those things. But, really, at the end of the day, a frogman and a Raider and a Green Beret and a Ranger has got to be the guy that is going to go into a room and bludgeon someone to death with their hands. And we can't get away from that. Like we are a different breed of people and we have to focus on our core competency and that is killing the enemy, up close and personal, for real. And so, I just want to make sure that we don't lose focus on that, or we will lose, and that will not be tolerated.

So, we have a conflict between the First and Fifth Special Operations Forces Truths. You know, "Humans are more important than hardware," but also most Special Operations Force missions have to be enabled by non-special operations force operators, right? And so, I just want to caution you, gentlemen, to remember. There is a reason that those are written down. They are written in blood.

So, of course, we need to have enablers. We have to have mission specialists. We need to have people that are operating these technologies. But we have to have the rifleman, General. So, that is just a word of warning. Never forget who we are. A tip of the spear, the spear is held in a hand and it is thrust into the enemy's chest. And that is how a war is won.

So, when we are talking about this great power competition stuff, we are trying to avoid a global conflagration, right? Like we want to stop World War III from happening.

And my concern is this: if you are not posturing yourselves to be able to act in these denied areas without direct communications -- we have become so dependent on communications and asking for the appropriate permissions, right? So, when we are talking about operating in a denied area where command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence is, essentially, gone electroni-

cally, what are you guys doing, as component commanders, to push down execution authorities to the lowest possible level?

General?

General HUNTLEY. Congressman, thank you for the question.

And if I could address first the part about lethality, at our very core, now and forever, we are a lethal force. We have talked about the character of war changing, but what hasn't changed is the nature of war. So, even though technology is rapidly advancing and we are doing our best to keep up, the nature of war demands that we still be able to fight close and personal.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Right on.

General HUNTLEY. So, we have not changed in that regard.

I would have to defer questions in terms of what level the authorities are to the combatant commanders, to my brothers in the Theater of Special Operations Command, but the more flexibility that we have, the more that we can provide to those combatant commanders.

Thank you.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Very well. Thank you.

Admiral?

Admiral SANDS. Thank you, Congressman.

To add onto the General's comments, and especially as a fellow SEAL, our basic core competencies are never going to go away. Like we can't ever forget that. We don't. When you talk about Naval Special Warfare's identity, that is fundamental.

And then, we also have to do these other things where we have to get to the target and it is really difficult to get there. And we need to do things that are decisive.

So, it is not an either/or for us. It's an all of the above. And I know you recognize that.

As far as pushing down the authorities, what we see, especially in United States Indo-Pacific Command, is a requirement -- it is going to be a different kind of fight. We are going to be fighting more disperse. We are going to have smaller elements and we have to fight through commander's intent, right?

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Right.

Admiral SANDS. Purpose, method, end state, we have to push that down, or we will have commanders who are just wondering what to do. So, in the absence of leadership --

Mr. VAN ORDEN. That has been my experience.

Admiral SANDS. Yes, in the absence of leadership, we lead. Or in the absence of orders and direction, right, we lead. So, that is the way that we are moving, I think, and I think I can say that for all of Special Operations Command.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. General?

General CONLEY. Thank you, Congressman.

To the first point, well, outside of our special tactics community, which is, you know, usually partnered with --

Mr. VAN ORDEN. I'm totally done.

A group of your guys saved one squad from SEAL Team 4 in Afghanistan in 20 by removing his shirt and waving his arms because an Apache got wings level and was going to smoke him with the Hellfire. So, thank you very much for saving our brother's life, sir.

General CONLEY. Yes, Congressman. I mean, I have the honor and blessing of working among heroes every day. But we also have --

Mr. VAN ORDEN. I used to.

General CONLEY. We haven't talked much about -- I mentioned it as a core mission to strike, but we also have a very lethal force that is above our Special Operations Forces partners. Whether that is AC-130s, MQ-9s, or other things, we remain good at that job.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. General, I apologize, but my time has expired, and I would like to give my colleagues the opportunity. Thank you very much for coming here today.

I yield back.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you.

Well, we have reached our time here. So, what we are going to do right now is we are going to adjourn the open session and we are going to immediately reconvene in 2337 for the classified session.

We will pick up in the order where we left off. So, everyone can ask their questions in the classified session.

Before we leave, I just want to make one comment. I want to thank you all for your time today. I want to thank you for your service to our country.

I want to thank everybody in this room that is in uniform right now for your service to our country, for the sacrifice that you and your families endure on a daily basis to keep us safe. So, thank you all.

And with that, we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:37 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

FEBRUARY 26, 2025

PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

FEBRUARY 26, 2025

Opening Statement
Chairman Ronny Jackson
Subcommittee on Intelligence and Special Operations – Hearing
The Role of Special Operations Forces in Great Power Competition
February 26, 2025 – 1:13PM – 2118 RHOB

Good afternoon.

The subcommittee will come to order. “I ask unanimous consent that the chair be authorized to declare a recess at any time. “Without objection, so ordered.”

Today we will hear from our witnesses on “The Role of Special Operations Forces in Great Power Competition.”

The United States is facing a dramatically different geopolitical environment than any other time in recent decades. While this century has been dominated by our efforts in the Global War on Terrorism, the new era of great power competition presents strategic challenges from revisionist states in China and Russia and their rogue state allies in Iran and North Korea.

Over the past several years, as our Nation has confronted the evolving landscape of great power competition, our special operators have adapted to meet the challenges posed by our adversaries, while continuing to combat the continuous and evolving threats posed by violent extremist organizations, military proxies, and non-state actors.

U.S. special operations forces are ideally suited and organized for great power competition. The core activities of our special operations units—from working with our partners around the world to help bolster their defenses and unconventional warfare capabilities to counter-proliferation and special reconnaissance—are more in-need today than they have been in decades and offer

the ability to present strategic and operational challenges to our adversaries and enable our allies and partners to resist outside aggression.

The relationships our SOF have built and sustained over decades of partnerships are critical for our access and placement to counter our adversaries

The United States will continue to rely on the men and women throughout the SOF community to prepare future battlespaces, rapidly respond to contingencies in multiple theaters, and extend American influence by operating across the spectrum of competition, including below the threshold of traditional military conflict and in the Grey Zone.

To address this continuously changing environment, ASD SOLIC and SOCOM recently released the Joint Special Operations Forces Operating Concept for Force Development and Design to guide the SOF Community and the Department to ensure we develop, and I quote, “a Joint SOF that rapidly fuses all-domain capabilities for tailored and simultaneous missions across the full spectrum from competition to conflict, enabled by persistent campaigning for global advantage.” That sounds a little verbose and academic, but if you read it slowly it is accurate and makes sense.

This concept will require the SOF community to be culturally literate in dynamic regions across the globe, and proficient across evolving domains in the cyber, space, and information realms, all while maintaining the ability to provide unique tactical combat capabilities for the joint force.

Today's hearing is focused on the role of special operations forces as the United States embraces an era of great power competition. This Subcommittee will seek to examine the unique capabilities of the SOF service components and how special operations forces' core activities may complement and enable the Joint Force to operate against strategic adversaries.

We hope to further understand how the SOF components determine what the appropriate capabilities and force structure are to support and respond to Geographic Combatant Commands requirements for GPC and counter adversaries and non-state actors.

Our witnesses today are the commanders of the Special Operations Service Components and have decades of experience with the special operations community.

I want to welcome:

Lieutenant General Jonathan P. Braga, U.S. Army
Commander, United States Army Special Operations Command

Lieutenant General Michael E. Conley, U.S. Air Force
Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command

Major General Peter D. Huntley, U.S. Marine Corps
Commander, Marine Forces Special Operations Command
and

Rear Admiral Milton J. Sands III, U.S. Navy
Commander, Naval Special Warfare Command

In the interest of time, I ask the witnesses to keep their opening remarks to five minutes or less so that we have sufficient time for questions-and-answers.

With that, let me thank our witnesses for appearing before us today. I now recognize Ranking Member Crow for any opening remarks.

Statement of
Lieutenant General Jonathan Braga
Commanding General

United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC)

Before The
House Armed Services Committee
Intelligence and Special Operations Sub-Committee
February 26, 2025



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 TSOs 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.



LT. GEN. JONATHAN P. BRAGA

Commanding General

Lt. Gen. Jonathan P. Braga assumed command, August 13, 2021, of U.S. Army Special Operations Command. Prior to commanding USASOC, Braga held the position of deputy commanding general of U.S. Army Pacific in August of 2020. Previous to that, he served as the commander of Special Operations Command Pacific.

Braga was born in Attleboro, Massachusetts in June 1969. He attended the United States Military Academy and was commissioned as an infantry officer in 1991.

Braga served in multiple positions as an infantry officer as part of the 2nd Infantry Division in Korea and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California.

Following these assignments, he graduated from the Special Forces Qualification Course and went on to serve in multiple command positions in the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) at Fort Bragg,

North Carolina and in Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico from 1995-2001. He completed numerous deployments and humanitarian relief operations throughout the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. Upon completion of this tour he returned to Fort Bragg, to serve in a United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) Special Mission Unit (SMU) and completed multiple deployments as a task force commander to Afghanistan and Iraq for Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Willing Spirit in Colombia from 2002-2005. He then achieved his master's at the Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island. Following this assignment, he served as the operations officer for the Joint Reconnaissance Task Force as part of Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) in Washington, DC and deployed to lead a Special Operations Task Force across three geographical commands from 2006-2008.

He then returned to Fort Bragg and served in several command and staff positions in the same USASOC SMU from 2008-2012. Afterwards, Lt. Gen. Braga would go on to serve as an Army War College Special Operations fellow at the Naval Post Graduate School in Monterey, California.

Lt. Gen. Braga served as the garrison commander of the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, CA from 2013- 2015 and subsequently as the chief of staff at JSOC from 2015-2017. Braga also served as the director of operations, Combined Joint Task Force—Operation Inherent Resolve, Iraq.



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STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL E. CONLEY, USAF
COMMANDER, AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

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.

2/12/25, 2:42 PM

MICHAEL E. CONLEY



BIOGRAPHY



UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL E. CONLEY

Lt. Gen. Michael E. Conley is the Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida. The command is the Air Force component of U.S. Special Operations Command. AFSOC provides Air Force special operations forces for worldwide deployment and assignment to unified combatant commanders. The command has approximately 20,800 active-duty, Reserve, Air National Guard and civilian professionals.

Lt. Gen. Conley received his commission through the United States Air Force Academy in May 1996. Since completing pilot training in 1998, he has operational experience flying the UH-1N, MH-53 and CV-22, with the majority of his assignments in special operations aviation. During his career, Lt. Gen. Conley has served multiple staff assignments, including the Joint Staff as Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Headquarters Air Force. He has commanded a squadron, wing and multiple deployed special operations air components.

Prior to assuming his current role, Lt. Gen. Conley served as the Director of Operations, Headquarters Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida.

EDUCATION

1996 Bachelor of Science, U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colo.
2000 Squadron Officer School, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.
2004 Master of Science, Management, University of Maryland University College, Md.
2006 Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, Ala., by correspondence
2008 Master of Arts, Communication, George Mason University, Va. (Air Force Intern Program)
2010 Air War College, Maxwell AFB, Ala., by correspondence
2014 Master of Arts, National Security and Strategic Studies, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, R.I.
2017 Air Force Enterprise Leadership Seminar, Kenan-Flagler Business School, University of North Carolina, N.C.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. January 1997–August 1997, Student Pilot, T-37, Vance Air Force Base, Okla.
2. August 1997–July 1998, Student Pilot, UH-1N, Fort Rucker, Ala.
3. July 1998–August 2001, UH-1N IP/Executive Officer, 1st Helicopter Squadron, Andrews AFB, Md.
4. August 2001–July 2002, Student Pilot, MH-53J, 551st Special Operations Squadron, Kirtland AFB, N.M.
5. July 2002–August 2004, MH-53J/M Instructor Pilot, 20th SOS, Hurlburt Field, Fla.
6. August 2004–February 2007, MH-53M Evaluator Pilot/Flight Commander, 21st SOS, RAF Mildenhall, United Kingdom
7. February 2007–July 2007, Assistant Operations Officer, 352nd Operations Support Squadron, RAF Mildenhall, U.K.
8. July 2007–December 2008, Air Force Intern Program-Strategic Communication, George Mason University, Fairfax, Va.
9. December 2008–August 2009, Chief, Operations Team, Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, the Pentagon, Arlington, Va.
10. August 2009–June 2011, Chief, Wing Safety/CV-22 Pilot, 1st Special Operations Wing, Hurlburt Field, Fla.
11. June 2011–July 2013, Commander, 58th OSS, Kirtland AFB, N.M.
12. July 2013–July 2014, Student, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, R.I.
13. July 2014–January 2015, Branch Chief, Joint Staff, J-7, Joint Lessons Learned Division, the Pentagon, Arlington, Va.
14. January 2015–June 2016, Deputy Director, Command Advisory Group/Special Assistant to the Combined Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Pentagon, Arlington, Va.
15. June 2016–June 2018, Vice Commander, 27th SOW, Cannon AFB, N.M.
16. June 2018–June 2020, Commander, 1st SOW, Hurlburt Field, Fla.
17. June 2020–July 2022, Deputy Commander, Combined Force Space Component Command, U.S. Space Command, Vandenberg Space Force Base, Calif.



EFFECTIVE DATES OF PROMOTION

Second Lieutenant
May 29, 1996

First Lieutenant
May 29, 1998

Captain
May 29, 2000

Major
May 01, 2006

Lieutenant Colonel
March 01, 2010

Colonel
April 01, 2016

Brigadier General
June 08, 2020

Lieutenant General
July 01, 2024



2/12/25, 2:42 PM

MICHAEL E. CONLEY

18. August 2022–July 2023, Director of Strategy, Plans, Requirements, and Programs, Headquarters Air Mobility Command, Scott AFB, Ill.
 19. July 2023–July 2024, Director of Operations, Headquarters Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Fla.
 20. July 2024–present, Commander, Headquarters Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Fla.

FLIGHT INFORMATION

Rating: command pilot
 Flight hours: more than 2,400
 Aircraft flown: T-37, UH-1H/N, MH-53J/M, MV-22, CV-22B and other special operations aircraft

MAJOR AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

Distinguished Service Medal
 Legion of Merit with oak leaf cluster
 Bronze Star Medal
 Defense Meritorious Service Medal
 Meritorious Service Medal with two oak leaf clusters
 Air Medal with five oak leaf clusters
 Aerial Achievement Medal with silver oak leaf cluster
 Air and Space Commendation Medal with two oak leaf clusters
 Air and Space Achievement Medal
 Combat Action Medal
 Humanitarian Service Medal

OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

2005 Air Force Special Operations Command Pilot of the Year

(Current as of July 2024)



STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

REAR ADMIRAL MILTON J. SANDS, USN
COMMANDER, NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

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 subcommittee members, we are honored to testify before you today on behalf of the United States Special Operations Command (SOCOM) regarding the role of United States special operations forces (SOF) in Great Power Competition. As the Commander of Naval Special Warfare (NSW), I am grateful for the opportunity to address your questions and appreciate the opportunity to explain Naval Special Warfare's (NSW) purpose and our role as the Navy and SOCOM's Maritime SOF.

NSW's purpose is to provide maritime SOF capability to enable Joint Force lethality and survivability in denied and contested areas. Our ability to operate in the maritime provides the Nation with unique access and placement across the globe. With our low observable surface and sub-surface maritime craft, diverse inventory of small unmanned systems and highly trained, small footprint, tactical maneuver elements, NSW provides a remedy to the most dynamic, uncertain, closed and challenged environments. We generate forces in support of Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs) and the larger Joint Force. Our success is measured by their ability to fight and survive. Working with Joint Force and Interagency partners, NSW deployed capability can enable efforts to clear maritime lanes for U.S. lethality. As part of that same Joint and Interagency force, NSW supports the denial of adversary capability to find and target U.S. ships and submarines. As we enter into what we assess as a new age in warfare, NSW will focus on decisive operations in denied and contested areas and remain a small force with outsized impact.

The United States has always been a maritime Nation, and this next decade will see a renewed focus on maritime security. Our maritime SOF identity is anchored by one constant trait: agility. NSW has remained relevant since the inception of the Naval Combat Demolition Units in World War II. Since then, we adapted and now leverage tactical and technological advancements to constantly improve our fighting position. As a user of unmanned systems for the past 20 years, to counter threats from non-state actors and violent extremist organizations (VEO), we recognize the real asymmetric advantage of the unmanned system by a Stand In Force: the ability to collect, disseminate and assess information for the Joint Force in the most challenged environments to close kill chains.

To support a U.S. Combatant Command (CC) in Great Power Competition, we are engaged in an urgent effort, through the Navy and SOCOM to modernize our unmanned systems portfolio with autonomous maneuver, intelligence and C2 behaviors. This allows us to scale awareness, capacity, and increase precision of our capability in the most challenged kinetic and electronic environments. Our responsibility to deter adversaries and protect our national security interests has never been higher. NSW willingly shoulders that responsibility and accountability. We will own the water, embrace the robots and win every fight.

NSW's purpose is our North Star, and we are focused on three capability areas: (1) enable Joint Force long range fires, (2) provide kinetic effects, and (3) provide non-kinetic effects. The latter may be the most important and decisive capability NSW will provide the Joint Force during competition, crisis and conflict. Our imperative is to man, train, equip, and deploy maritime SOF Task Forces (MSOTF) to employ these capabilities. The MSOTF will deploy as the maritime component of a SOCOM SOF Task Force within a TSOC or larger Joint Force.

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NSW is focused on our ability to gain, maintain, and extend Joint Force access to maritime denied and contested areas to enable tactical actions with strategic effect. We offset our NSW limitations in capacity through an increased scale of autonomous systems, target precision, a deep understanding of U.S. and adversary capabilities and command and control. This focus is tailored to support the Joint Force through NSW operations inside maritime denied and contested areas. We are integrating surface, air and subsurface drone technology, in new ways, into manned / unmanned maritime SOF teams. We continue to design, build and employ the most modern and capable SOF surface vessels and undersea mobility platforms. With the Navy and SOCOM, NSW is incorporating advancements in technology and evolutions in tactics into our training and deployed force capability.

NSW's unity of effort across our formation is paramount. NSW's "5Ws" are:

Who: NSW Maritime Special Operations Task Force

What: Provide maritime SOF capability to enable Joint Force lethality and survivability inside denied and contested areas

When: Now, Deployed MSOTFs

Where: Key maritime and electronic terrain in denied and contested areas

Why: Provide unique capabilities to deliver effects and enable Joint Force maneuver

This clarity has been valuable as we decide what to do – and more importantly – what not to do.

NSW's investments balance a portfolio of exquisite craft and low cost, commercial systems to enable Joint Force Maneuver. Current fiscal constraints and increased deployment costs are challenging NSW's ability to manage steady-state risk as opposed to deferring risk to the future. Yet, NSW has an outsized comparative advantage that solves some of the Joint Forces toughest problems.

Over the past two decades, NSW assumed risk in maritime operations to reduce risk in skills required to win in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Somalia. As we shift in focus away from land warfare Counterterrorism (CT) and Counter Violent Extremist Organization (C-VEO) operations in areas of active conflict, NSW is doubling down on our maritime skill sets. We are prioritizing maritime operations training and equipment to increase proficiency in capabilities to include combat diving, SEAL Delivery Vehicle operations, SOF maritime craft operations and maritime interdiction operations. Because we recognize the critical role that partnerships play in deterring and dissuading malign actors, NSW is expanding our engagements with new Allies and Partners in the Pacific and European theaters. We are investing in relationships with Norway, Finland, Romania, Italy, Germany and the UK with the goal of building real operational capability. We are particularly focused on working with Norway on cold water operations with a focus on the Arctic. We will maintain foundational CT and C-VEO capabilities as we remain required to execute CT and C-VEO during crisis. The command and control, intelligence and surveillance skills we developed and refined through two decades of war remain valuable in Great Power Competition (GPC).

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NSW is unique in our ability to operate and survive in denied and contested areas. Because we have clandestine surface and subsurface maritime mobility platforms, we can go where others cannot. We operate and maintain the Nation's only SOF penetrating maritime mobility capability. These craft provide us with a level of operational freedom and flexibility that is unmatched by any other branch of service. In terms of GPC, these craft are essential for conducting operations in environments where the U.S., Russia and China are competing for access and resources. Our ability to provide decisive capability to ensure Joint Force lethality and survivability depends upon our ability to be on-scene but unseen with enemy vessels and maritime infrastructure. We will maintain our investments in maritime mobility platforms and fleet integration to execute maritime operations. We are moving out on SOCOM's direction to decrease fungibility between our SOF components to maximize specialization and force lethality.

As the Nation's maritime SOF force, NSW will refine our capabilities with a clear-eyed discussion of risk to bridge the gap between operations and resourcing. We will make decisions that prioritize our maritime SOF capability to enable Joint Force lethality and survivability. Our community speaks in terms of risk, and we will accept risk in capabilities that can be covered by other SOF service components.

NSW remains agile, and we are again evolving to meet the requirements of our Nation. The return to the maritime is, for NSW, a return to our roots and our original identity. NSW capability is underpinned by the skill and determination of our combat operators, combat support and combat service support personnel. The importance of each member of our formation is not determined by their proximity to the "X." This means that the value of an individual sailor or government civilian in our ranks is not based on how close they are to the target.

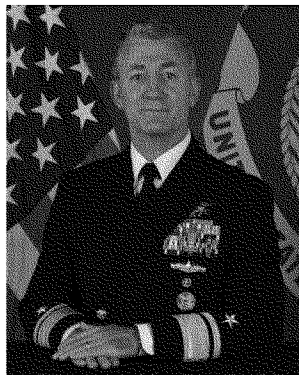
Under SOCOM, NSW is a supporting command to the Navy and Joint Force. We think of ourselves as a "trim tab on the rudder of the Navy" and Joint Force. Like a trim tab, we are small, but we enable the movement of the entire vessel. We mitigate our limited capacity with precision, speed, agility and talent and our unique maritime acumen makes our Force a decisive element to the TSOCs for employment.

In conclusion, NSW has an important and distinct role within SOCOM and the Joint Force to address the challenges presented by Great Power Competition. We provide the Joint Force with access to our competitors' maritime flank. Whether creating dilemmas for our competitors, reassuring Allies and Partners, disrupting VEOs or responding to crisis, NSW will shoulder our responsibility to provide maritime SOF capability to enable Joint Force lethality and survivability in denied and contested areas. Thank you.



Rear Admiral Milton Sands III

Commander, Naval Special Warfare Command



Rear Adm. Sands is a native of Farmington, Connecticut and graduated from The United States Naval Academy in 1992 with a Bachelor of Science in Oceanography. He holds a Master's in Military Strategy and Planning from the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in Norfolk, Virginia.

His operational tours included surface warfare officer assignments onboard Newport-class tank landing ship USS Saginaw (LST 1188) and Spruance-class destroyer USS John Rodgers (DD 983). After graduating Basic Underwater Demolition / SEAL (BUD/S) training with class 203, he was assigned to SEAL Delivery Vehicle Team 1. Additional assignments include two tours with SEAL Team 2, and assignment to a joint task force in Afghanistan. Sands served as an operations officer for a joint task force in Iraq;

chief of staff, Naval Special Warfare Group 2; and chief of staff, Naval Special Warfare Development Group. He commanded SEAL Team 8, a Joint Task Force in Iraq, and Naval Special Warfare Group 2.

Ashore Sands was a joint planner at Special Operations Command, Europe; a Counter Terrorism and Public Policy Fellow at Duke University's Sanford, School of Public Policy as part of the Navy's Federal Executive Fellowship program; director of Counter Terrorism and Operations for the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict; deputy operations officer, Joint Special Operations Command; and vice president, Joint Special Operations University.

Sands' flag officer tours include chief of staff, U.S. Special Operations Command; commander, Special Operations Command Africa; and commander, Naval Service Training Command.

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STATEMENT OF
MAJOR GENERAL PETER D. HUNTLEY, U.S. MARINE CORPS
COMMANDER
U.S. MARINE FORCES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND
BEFORE THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS
February 26, 2025

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Sands is authorized to wear the Defense Superior Service Medal (2 awards), Legion of Merit, Defense Meritorious Service Medal (3 awards), Bronze Star Medal (2 awards), as well as various other personal, unit and service awards.

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Introduction

Chairman Jackson, Ranking Member Crow, and other distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to update you on the status and posture of Marine Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC). I am honored to testify alongside my fellow Special Operations Forces (SOF) Component Commanders and extremely proud to be in command as MARSOC moves into its 20th year. You have my gratitude for the exceptional support for our warfighters from this committee and the rest of Congress. We continue to build upon the Marine Corps legacy of those warriors that have gone before us and are evolving back to our World War II Raider roots in the great power competition of the Pacific Island-Hopping Campaign but in a 21st Century way and in every domain. This is our most important role in manning, training, and equipping MARSOF to be employed by our Theater Special Operations Components (TSOCs) to deter and when necessary, win wars.

At MARSOC, "The Marine Raider is our platform." This is not just a bumper sticker for us. Our people give us a comparative and competitive advantage from other Service components and adversaries. Raider and Special Operations Capability Specialists (SOCS) training pipelines are stronger than ever and have evolved to match our other modernization efforts. Deployed forces have developed generational relationships with key allies and partners in strategically valuable theaters consistently creating advantage.

With global trends shifting and the geo-political environment creating challenges for our Nation, we have clarity on the threats and the modern operating environment. The shift from counterterrorism to global competition in the operational environment requires a change in MARSOC capability development and force application. Fiscal realities continue to force hard

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choices as we seek to balance steady-state readiness with the resources necessary to modernize for future operational challenges. We are taking full advantage of the opportunities our positioning, access and placement with key allies and partners, and close relationship with the Marine Corps Force Design efforts provide.

Inside Forces must be ready to “fight tonight” while continuing to build capacity and improve capability, with an acute focus on acknowledged time horizons. Balanced investment will ensure the apportionment of resources to win the “fight tonight” does not incur downstream risk for our modernization efforts to win the fight tomorrow. As a key part of the Stand-in Force, MARSOC formations persist in their forward positions continuing to develop and leverage the multi-generational relationships with allies and partners that deter aggression and set the conditions for success in times of conflict. Critical to these efforts, Raiders are innovating at the tactical edge and helping set the theater by introducing the rapidly increasing benefits of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and cooperative autonomous robotics to the primary theater before our adversaries can. With these technologies, we are enabling key allies to deter malign activity, increase their maritime domain awareness, and ready to begin targeting immediately in crisis or conflict. Simultaneously we are integrating these critical capabilities through continuous experimentation in theater to increase Joint Force lethality and survivability particularly focused on enabling Joint Fires and Enhance Maneuver.

Our efforts at MARSOC are providing special operations capabilities to solve key operational challenges that provide the Joint Force advantage in competition and conflict. We have been focusing on capabilities and force development, continuous forward deployment in priority theaters, and strong integration with our service, the joint force, and partners.

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How We Win

Leveraging our deep background in Counter-Violent Extremist Organizations (C-VEO), whether it be our significant work in Afghanistan where small, disaggregated Raider formations significantly suppressed and reduced insurgent activity to MARSOC's role in the defeat of ISIS in Iraq or enabling the Philippines to nearly eliminate a once thriving terrorism challenge. MARSOC are now finding efficiencies and opportunities to shape and influence the environment for joint force advantage in great power conflict. C-VEO and strategic competition operations, activities and investments are not mutually exclusive. MARSOC and SOCOM writ large have been innovatively leveraging the placement, access, and partnership C-VEO grants us to compete globally against peer adversaries.

MARSOC maintains a persistent forward deployed presence in support of operations across the globe, with over 400 personnel deployed in 17 countries. Our comparative small size allows us to be agile but forces us to exercise strategic discipline in our employment strategy. We deploy for purpose to bolster security, build capacity, and prevent wider conflict. Hyper-enabled Marine Special Operations Companies (MSOCs) remain deployed to conduct operations in the Indo-Pacific Command, Central Command, and Africa Command, with elements episodically deployed in support of the European and Southern Commands. MARSOC generates a persistently deployed Special Operations Task Force (SOTF), and an episodically employed Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF).

Our organically capable, targeting focused MARSOC units excel at collecting and fusing information that illuminates adversary actions and networks. Making that information available

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to the Joint Force and allies and partners at “machine speed” which is critical to closing Kill Chains. MARSOF’s ability to operate proximate to targets can provide vital, track-quality data to enable Joint Fires. MARSOF are establishing resilient, multi-domain Kill Webs that facilitate the connection of any sensor to any shooter by SOF, General Purpose Forces, allies and partners to find, fix, and characterize an adversaries’ critical capabilities. Our ability to collect data in competition helps us understand an adversaries’ patterns of life and methods, which allows us to deter adversary actions or more rapidly hold their strategic capabilities at risk if conflict arises. If necessary, fused data becomes the information necessary to close a kill chain – matching a weapon to a target - at a pace and intensity an adversary cannot match. MARSOC is focused on developing, evaluating, and exercising these multi-domain Kill Webs in competition to enable decisive targeting at the onset of crisis or conflict.

MARSOC units continuously conduct activities to shape and influence the environment, from expanding partner capability and capacity through training, advising, and assisting to supporting combat operations with the lethality to overwhelm an enemy’s ability to seize and maintain the initiative to win. As seen with MARSOC’s efforts alongside the Armed forces of Philippines against terrorist threats and now Maritime Domain Awareness activities. We pursue missions in strategically important regions that facilitate close ties to the Naval Forces, including Fleet Marine Forces. Our core maritime characteristic makes us an impactful part of the Inside Force necessary at the persistent forward edge of deterrence to generate multi-domain options for the Joint Force.

How We Transform

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We are well positioned for rapid modernization and force transformation. The operations and activities our force elements are conducting now align with the future vision of MARSOC we articulated in 2018 and began pursuing shortly thereafter via concept development, requirements definition, experimentation, and test and evaluation. Our disciplined approach to capability development is focused on solving Joint Force key operational challenges against near-peer adversaries that also increase our capabilities in low-intensity conflict. Our goal is to hyper-enable the Raider via creation of an augmented reality that expands their ability to sense, make sense, and provide multi-domain effects decisively. Further, the hyper-enablement at the tactical edge will be sharable and usable at machine speed by the Joint Force to enable operational-level decision making. We make every effort to build capability that meets our requirements by, with, and through our Service and will continue to serve as the connector between Joint SOF and the Marine Corps. We have never been more closely aligned to our Service in terms of concepts, capability development, and operational integration.

MAROSC is leading the development of sense capabilities within USMC and SOCOM that include a suite of air, ground, and maritime robots that can operate cooperatively and autonomously to reduce the cognitive load on operators. They will carry multi-domain sensors that can better characterize the adversary than current high-cost, and limited-survivable intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) can. High-capacity edge compute capability employing Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning tools will ingest and fuse the massive amount of data from our sensors into coherent and digestible information for the tactical

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commanders. Simultaneously, we will export that data out of the tactical bubble via resilient means of transport in formats that enable Joint Force targeting and Kill Chain closure.

Organic finish solutions include survivable kinetic weapons like precisions strike systems. We recently completed operational testing on our first precisions strike munition is on track to field this year. Non-kinetic multi-domain solutions will provide SOF-peculiar means to deny, degrade, or disrupt adversary systems. They are less provocative and expand our flexible deterrence options in competition or response options in conflict.

Our People

MARSOC maintains a high, but sustainable, operational tempo in support of our nation's strategic priorities. We pride ourselves on being the example of an effective and efficient force, providing continuous returns on investment across the competition continuum. For almost 20 years, we have continually calculated the effectiveness of our force design and employment, assuring the nation that the Marine Corps provides a SOF built upon the unique character and traditions of the Service that capitalizes upon those valued resources provided to the command.

To generate the highly trained Raiders required to execute these missions, the Marine Raider Training Center (MRTC) conducted three Assessment and Selection courses and graduated two Individual Training Course (ITC) classes that produced our Special Operations Officers (SOO) and Critical Skills Operators (CSO). MRTC also conducted advanced skills courses which enhances our direct operations skills, intelligence collection capabilities, discreet capabilities in technical surveillance, cyber-enabling skills, advanced Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), Sensitive Site Exploitation (SSE), Survival Escape Resistance and Evasion (SERE),

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and advanced communications. This instruction provided by MRTC evolved with the incorporation of lessons learned from the operating forces, experimentation, wargames, and the MARSOC Unit Readiness Exercise (URX) called RAVEN.

MARSOC's RAVEN exercise maintains pace with the changing global operating environment by incorporating elements of strategic threats capable of trans-regional effects in its design. These threats, often asymmetric, are encountered across multiple domains by U.S. power projection in highly contested spaces. Through steady engagement with GCCs and TSOCs, RAVEN provides relevant pre-deployment training (and unit certification) for on-going operations in support of multiple Combatant Command Operation Plans and Theater Security Cooperation Plan requirements. The exercise iteratively improves by including operational commands' guidance, After Action Reviews, and joint lessons learned to implement the latest trends, threats, and tactics. We hold this exercise twice annually and invite members of the subcommittee to attend, at your convenience.

Closing

In closing, we remain committed to providing our Nation with Marine Raiders that possess superior special operations capabilities, who understand the demanding requirements to seamlessly operate across the competition continuum, and whose actions continually demonstrate the motto *Spiritus Invictus*, or 'unconquerable spirit.' Your Marine Raiders will remain always faithful, always forward, and on behalf of the men and women of MARSOC, I thank the Sub-Committee for your leadership, commitment to national security, and continued support to those in uniform and their families. Semper Fidelis.

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Commander

MAJOR GENERAL PETER D. HUNTLEY

Major General Huntley commissioned in December 1991 in the U.S. Marine Corps through the Platoon Leader's Course.

After completing Infantry Officer Course in 1992, he reported to 1st Battalion, 9th Marines and deployed as a Platoon Commander to Somalia in support of Operation UNISOM II. After returning to Camp Pendleton, he was reassigned as a Company Executive Officer in 2d Battalion, 1st Marines and completed another deployment as part of WESTPAC 95.

Following graduation from career level school, he served as Operations Officer for 45 Commando Group (Royal Marines) during peace keeping operations in the Balkans and during the early phases of the United Kingdom's participation in Afghanistan (2001-2002). After returning to the United States, he reported to 3d Battalion, 6th Marines where he commanded Task Force Kabul during operations in support of the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan (2002) and served as the Battalion Executive Officer during deployment for operations in eastern Afghanistan (2004).

In 2005, he deployed as the Operations Officer for the II MEF Iraqi Security Force Cell in Al Anbar. From 2006-2009, Major General Huntley served with a joint unit, conducting multiple deployments in support of the Global War on Terrorism. From 2009-2011, he served as the Commander of 2d Marine Special Operations Battalion and Special Operations Task Force – West in Afghanistan.

Following graduation from the National War College, Major General Huntley served within the Office of the Secretary of Defense (2012-2014). From 2014-2015, Major General Huntley served as Director of Operations and Plans for the Combined Joint Interagency Task Force-Syria. During the period 2015-2017 he served as Commanding Officer, Marine Raider Regiment. Also, during 2017 Major General Huntley served as Commanding Officer, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Iraq.

Major General Huntley went on to serve as the Chief of Staff, Joint Special Operations Command; Deputy Commander Marine Forces Special Operations Command; Director, Operations Division, Plans, Policies and Operations; and Commander, Special Operations Command South.

Major General Huntley has been married to Krista Huntley for 35 years and they have three children.

**WITNESS RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED DURING
THE HEARING**

FEBRUARY 26, 2025

RESPONSE TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY DR. JACKSON

General BRAGA. The Army views their Special Operations Forces as integrated, interoperable, and innovating across the spectrum of conflict on behalf of the Joint Force. Special Operations Command and ASD SO/LIC are currently assisting OSD and the services with accurately modeling SOF through wargaming and simulation analysis. ARSOF are in high demand. USASOC was able to fill 95.46% of validated requirements from Theater Special Operations Commands and Geographic Combatant Commands for the current fiscal year. We fill what requirements we can while maintaining unit integrity, regional alignment, and appropriate deploy-to-dwell ratios. If we do not fill a requirement, it is either in order to maintain those tenants, or, due to a lack of personnel. [See page 11.]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING

FEBRUARY 26, 2025

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY DR. JACKSON

Dr. JACKSON. Can you provide us the number or percentage of requests you receive from the GCC's for support that were not able to execute and generally why you are not able to fulfill the request? Please include the total number of requests for forces/capability.

General BRAGA. USASOC receives requirements from Geographic Combatant Commanders or Theater Special Operations Commanders once validated by Special Operations Command. USASOC was able to fill all but 37 of 816 (95.46%) validated requirements from Theater Special Operations Commands and Geographic Combatant Commands for the current fiscal year. We fill what requirements we can while maintaining unit integrity, regional alignment, and appropriate deploy-to-dwell ratios. If we do not fill a requirement, it is either in order to maintain those tenants, or, due to a lack of personnel.

Dr. JACKSON. What impact will the cuts to Army SOF have on your ability to meet GCC requirements and support the joint force?

General BRAGA. Further cuts will have an impact on USASOC's ability to generate forces in support of Theater Special Operations Commands and the Geographic Combatant Commands. USASOC will continue to commit available personnel against prioritized requirements while balancing our mandate to generate trained and ready forces. Additionally, to mitigate the effects of any potential cuts, USASOC is providing conus-based support by centralizing select capabilities to conduct analysis and planning support to deployed units from home station.

Dr. JACKSON. Can you provide us the number or percentage of requests you receive from the GCC's for support that were not able to execute and generally why you are not able to fulfill the request? Please include the total number of requests for forces/capability.

General CONLEY. In Fiscal Year 2025, Air Force Special Operations Command received a total of 61 requests from 5 Geographic Combatant Commanders to deploy a total of 5,601 personnel - the Command was able to fill 47 (77%) of these requests (2,585 Air Commandos). The Command remains 100% committed for Force Elements, in addition to Department of the Air Force Air Expeditionary Forces (AEF) and Special Operations Forces ad-hoc requirements. In support of EUCOM, CENTCOM, INDOPACOM, SOUTHCOM, and AFRICOM, the Command has deployed 3.5 Special Operations Task Groups, 11 Special Operations Task Units, and 6.5 Special Tactics Teams, in addition to 66 ad-hoc and AEF taskings. My objective is to provide a lethal, capable, and responsive force to the Geographic Combatant Commanders to protect the Homeland and support the President's objectives.

Dr. JACKSON. Can you provide us the number or percentage of requests you receive from the GCC's for support that were not able to execute and generally why you are not able to fulfill the request? Please include the total number of requests for forces/capability.

General HUNTLEY. In Fiscal Year 2024, we received a total of 57 requests from the Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs) to deploy an additional 134 personnel across all seven GCCs beyond those already scheduled to deploy. After carefully evaluating each request, we were able to fulfill 3 staff support requests, accounting for 7 personnel, with 2 requests supporting INDOPACOM and 1 supporting EUCOM. To provide further context, we actively review and prioritize all requests based on operational requirements and resource availability. Unfortunately, we were unable to execute 54 of the 57 requests (94.73%) due to various constraints, including competing operational demands, limited personnel and unit of action availability, and existing deployment commitments. We are working closely with the GCCs to understand their priorities and requirements, and we are exploring ways to enhance our support to these critical commands. By doing so, we aim to increase our responsiveness to emerging requests and improve our overall support to the GCCs and the Joint Force.

Dr. JACKSON. Can you provide us the number or percentage of requests you receive from the GCC's for support that were not able to execute and generally why you are not able to fulfill the request? Please include the total number of requests for forces/capability.

Admiral SANDS. In Fiscal Year 2025 to date, GCCs have requested Naval Special Warfare (NSW) force elements and Individual Augmentation in support of 79 theater campaign activities validated by the Joint Staff. Of these 79 total requirements, 50 were baseline requirements (submitted via the annual requirements cycle) and 29 have been emergent (out-of-cycle) requirements. Of the 50 baseline requirements, NSW did not source 10 (20% unfulfilled). Of the 29 emergent requirements thus far, NSW did not source 7 (24% unfulfilled). (Note: Request for Individual Augmentation normally include multiple personnel under a single requirement.) In aggregate, NSW was unable to source approximately 22% of the requirements, generally due to a lack of inventory of the force element or service member specialty requested or lack of ability to provide the forces on an enduring (vice episodic) basis if required.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. HAMADEH

Mr. HAMADEH. The Army recently announced a reduction of 3,000 positions in Special Operations Forces, including cuts to the 8th Psychological Operations Group. This decision comes at a time when adversaries like China and Iran are heavily investing in information warfare and propaganda efforts. Why is the Army reducing its information warfare capabilities instead of expanding them to counter these threats?

General BRAGA. USASOC, as a Title 10 Headquarters, provided inputs to HQDA's Total Army Analysis throughout the process. With respect to psychological operations forces, USASOC examined where to divest of legacy capabilities to invest for the future operating environment. Of note, we are also committed to and participate in the Army's Continuous Transformation initiatives. To that end, USASOC is integrating its psychological operations capabilities within our Special Forces Groups to enable more cohesive information operations.

Mr. HAMADEH. Did the Army conduct an analysis of how these cuts to Special Operations Forces might impact our ability to compete in information warfare against adversaries like China?

General BRAGA. The Army did conduct analysis-and included USASOC in the dialogue-on how cuts to SOF might impact the US Government's ability to compete against our adversaries. The Army also trusted all of its subordinate headquarters, such as USASOC, with deciding how to establish the right mitigation methods to meet the intent of TAA while preserving capabilities. With respect to psychological operations forces, USASOC examined where to divest of legacy capabilities to invest for the future operating environment. Of note, USASOC is integrating its psychological operations capabilities within our Special Forces Groups to enable more cohesive information operations.

Mr. HAMADEH. Lieutenant General Jonathan Braga 8) Mr. Hamadeh. The Army's white paper on force structure transformation states that reductions prioritize positions that are "historically vacant or hard to fill." However, recent data shows record-high enlistment under President Trump's administration. If recruitment challenges are no longer a primary issue, why is the Army still pursuing these cuts to SOF?

General BRAGA. Recruiting remains a top priority for the Army and USASOC. US Army Recruiting Command and HQDA are best postured to address the broader state of recruiting and separately, the future Army End Strength. TAA cycles do not wholly align with other variables, such as SOF recruiting and retention-which has its own unique timeline. Specifically, given ARSOF's unique training pipelines for our various military occupational specialties, broader successes may not manifest in our formations for 1 to 3 years. Despite these challenges, our standards remain high.

Mr. HAMADEH. Will you commit to reversing these reductions and rebuilding psychological operations teams? If not, will you at least commit to halting further reductions without consulting Congress?

General BRAGA. HQDA is best postured to address the broader state of future Army End Strength. As the USASOC Commander, I understand the value of psychological operations and continue to commit to advocating for our capabilities based on lessons learned throughout the operating environment wherever possible. Additionally, all commanders have a responsibility to contribute to information operations. As the commander of ARSOF and proponent for three specific military occupational specialties, I further commit to increasing the cohesiveness of information operations wherever able and making the most capable PSYOP forces with the resources provided.

Mr. HAMADEH. As adversaries like China and Iran continue to expand their influence through unconventional means, how is SOCOM adapting its core activities-

such as unconventional warfare and information operations-to maintain a competitive edge in contested environments?

General BRAGA. US Special Operations Command addressed its adaptation of its core activities in the SOF Renaissance publication in late 2024. It is "returning to its roots of unconventional warfare" while balancing the needs of readiness, modernization, and operations. ARSOF were created for this era and are well postured moving forward.

Mr. HAMADEH. Given rising demands on Special Operations Forces amidst finite resources, what specific investments or policy changes are needed to ensure SOF remains ready, lethal, and adaptable in this era of great power competition?

General BRAGA. Investments and policy are the purview of others (such as Congress, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, the Military Department Secretaries, and Commander, United States Special Operations Command). To address the challenges previously described in my testimony, I ask for your continued support for our efforts to:

Establish an irregular warfare headquarters to address transregional threats posed by our adversaries.

Remove barriers to establishing and training multidomain capable units of action and the required and associated individual expertise.

Reexamine our doctrine to best integrate with the Army and Joint Force Warfighting concepts.

Create linkages between USASOC, Space and Missile Defense, and Cyber Commands will best enable us to support the Joint Force and the Army. As I stated in my testimony, I see several challenges based on observations of the current operating environment:

DoD's funding, acquisition processes, and bureaucracies are not optimized to innovate at the speed of need.

Current fiscal authorities are not structured to meet the needs of the operating environment.

Our people always benefit from the greatest proximity to problems but require the right operational and fiscal authorities to identify emerging capability gaps, pioneer solutions, share innovations, and disseminate lessons learned.

Mr. HAMADEH. Arizona's Davis-Monthan Air Force Base has been selected as the site for AFSOC's third power projection wing under the "Re-Optimization for Great Power Competition" initiative. However, this transition is currently paused by the Pentagon. Question: Can you provide insight into how this pause will impact the timeline and strategic importance of transitioning AFSOC operations to Davis-Monthan?

General CONLEY. The establishment of an AFSOC Power Projection Wing at Davis Monthan is separate from, and not impacted by, the larger Reoptimization efforts currently on pause. The strategic basing decision is awaiting National Environmental Policy Act analysis completion to move to final decision. The Final EIS Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register on 14 March 2025 with a review period end-date of 14 April 2025. We anticipate an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Record of Decision and the Strategic Basing Decision to be made in the Summer of 2025 (FY25/Q3). (<https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2025-04109/p-6>)

Mr. HAMADEH. What steps can Congress take to ensure AFSOC's third power projection wing transfer remains on track and supports Arizona's 8th District?

General CONLEY. Fund Air Force Military Construction requirements within the Future Years Defense Program to ensure the timely completion of the planned 492d Special Operations Wing beddown at Davis-Monthan AFB

Mr. HAMADEH. As adversaries like China and Iran continue to expand their influence through unconventional means, how is SOCOM adapting its core activities-such as unconventional warfare and information operations-to maintain a competitive edge in contested environments?

General CONLEY. Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) is in a state of transformation - adapting into the force needed to operate in this new reality. Today, Air Commandos deploy through a force generation model, providing a repeatable, predictable, and sustainable solution to present AFSOC forces. AFSOC counters our adversaries' use of coercive statecraft in competition by, with, and through our Allies and partners. Leveraging long-standing relationships, AFSOC uses our access and placement to conduct asymmetric activities that challenge our competitors' capabilities. AFSOC also supports irregular warfare by employing Special Operations Air Advisors and other SOF experts to conduct specialized activities to enhance our ally and partners capabilities for competition and conflict. This enables them to share the burden of their own defense. These activities help develop the United States as a partner of choice creating interoperable and integrated part-

nerships. Encouraging our Allies and partners to focus on areas in which they have a competitive advantage allows AFSOC to focus on areas that support our own national defense.

Mr. HAMADEH. Given rising demands on Special Operations Forces amidst finite resources, what specific investments or policy changes are needed to ensure SOF remains ready, lethal, and adaptable in this era of great power competition?

General CONLEY. AFSOC enables the Joint Force by delivering SOF mobility, strike, intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) and air to ground integration across the spectrum of competition and conflict. To maintain readiness, lethality, and adaptability, AFSOC must be able to invest now in the things it will need later, providing our force with the right tools to prevail across the spectrum of conflict, supported by agile acquisitions processes, and reducing barriers to unit fielding and employment of emerging technologies. AFSOC will modernize via resilient and distributed command and control; resilient position, navigation, and timing; modernized data links; effective radio frequency countermeasures; crypto modernization; and proliferated low-earth orbit satellite connectivity. Future all-domain effects must be adaptable and modular, allowing them to be tailorable to a range of threats while being survivable. Adaptive airborne mission networks will allow a single operator to control multiple unmanned aerial systems, providing mass ISR and an expanded magazine of kinetic and non-kinetic effects. Our aircraft must be updated with capabilities enabling long-range penetration and survivability for strike and specialized mobility operations. Our Special Tactics Airmen need critical sensing and enhanced communication abilities, robust command and control, and resilient air-to-ground integration. AFSOC welcomes further discussion at higher classification levels.

Mr. HAMADEH. As adversaries like China and Iran continue to expand their influence through unconventional means, how is SOCOM adapting its core activities—such as unconventional warfare and information operations—to maintain a competitive edge in contested environments?

General HUNTLEY. As adversaries like China and Iran expand their influence through unconventional means, U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) is adapting its core activities to maintain a competitive edge in contested environments. At Marine Forces Special Operations Command (MARFORSOC), we are proactively integrating operations in the information environment (OIE) capabilities, including cyber, space, and influence, to deliver strategic effects in support of Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCCs). We developed this integrated employment concept in close coordination with the Marine Corps, Joint Force, and inter-agency partners, and we are now expanding it to additional GCCs to address their most pressing strategic requirements. Additionally, to mitigate risks in this contested environment, we are developing and implementing new policies that standardize personal and operational communication mechanisms, techniques, and procedures for both CONUS training and forward-deployed operations. By establishing these standardized protocols, we are reducing the risk of adversary collection and aggregation of unclassified data, which will significantly decrease the overall risk to our force and mission in support of GCCs. We are taking a proactive and coordinated approach to enhance our unconventional warfare and information operations capabilities, ensuring that MARFORSOC remains a key contributor to the success of our GCCs and the broader SOCOM enterprise.

Mr. HAMADEH. Given rising demands on Special Operations Forces amidst finite resources, what specific investments or policy changes are needed to ensure SOF remains ready, lethal, and adaptable in this era of great power competition?

General HUNTLEY. Globally deployed Special Operations Forces working with allies and partners in competition and conflict are witnessing incredible advances in tactical sensing and lethality, especially with small robots. SOF formations are advising and assisting allies and partners in the development and employment of capabilities that are unavailable to SOF formations because of legacy acquisition models (to include requirements generation and test and evaluation) and lack of funding to create a small, attritable robot innovation culture.

Mr. HAMADEH. As adversaries like China and Iran continue to expand their influence through unconventional means, how is SOCOM adapting its core activities—such as unconventional warfare and information operations—to maintain a competitive edge in contested environments?

Admiral SANDS. NSW is maintaining its competitive edge by incorporating more man-portable, boat-portable, and vehicle-portable combat systems into the tactics, techniques, and procedures for our core activities. These next-generation combat systems use advanced technologies to increase their power density, mobility, reliability, survivability, and lethality. With these systems - which can be manned, unmanned, or unattended - SOF teams can mitigate combat risks by standing off from

longer ranges, advising partners remotely, scaling up actions with swarms and automation, and minimizing SOF footprints. These advancements enable SOF to maneuver deeper into denied environments, remain inconspicuous, target more precisely, and gauge our lethality better, which enables SOF actions to more effectively support our partners and allies as they are less disruptive and destructive than conventional wide-area strikes. In the cases of Unconventional Warfare and Foreign Internal Defense, SOF's improving survivability and lethality is enabling US forces to provide effective support to partners that helps preserve their legitimacy and resilience. Smaller, more survivable, and more lethal teams in contested environments rely even greater on effective, long range communications and information operations. Naval Special Warfare Command (NSWC) supports the Joint Force through information Operations/Operations in the Information Environment (IO/OIE) by incorporating non-kinetic effects to complement kinetic actions and asymmetrically counter the activities of our adversaries. We may use the following Information Related Capabilities to this end:

- Operations Security
- Military Deception
- Military Information Support Operations/Psychological Operations
- Electronic Warfare
- Cyber Operations
- Space Control
- Strategic Narratives
- Special Technical Operations

Intelligence Support to IO/OIE To better meet operational requirements in contested areas, we intend to continue to increase the number of personnel trained in IO/OIE and to leverage emergent technologies.

Mr. HAMADEH. Given rising demands on Special Operations Forces amidst finite resources, what specific investments or policy changes are needed to ensure SOF remains ready, lethal, and adaptable in this era of great power competition?

Admiral SANDS. We still require strategic investments in personnel, platforms, technology, and infrastructure to remain ready, lethal, and adaptable in this era of Great Power Competition (GPC). We must prioritize talent management, budget stability, and interagency collaboration to ensure our special operations forces continue to excel. First, humans are more important than hardware - and so is software! Platforms, technology, and infrastructure are key enablers of SOF lethality. In this next generation of warfare, we will pursue investments in maritime mobility, electronic warfare, unmanned systems, manned / unmanned teaming and advanced sensors. Our intent is to scale our maritime SOF capability with robots to enable Joint Force lethality and survivability inside denied and contested areas. Second, the acquisition communities supporting NSW require more flexibility and agility in our budgeting processes. Continuing Resolutions create major disruptions and reduce our ability to man, train, and equip "ready, lethal, and adaptable forces." A stable and predictable budget allows us to plan and execute with greater precision, as well as partner effectively with the Defense Industrial Base, ensuring that our personnel receive the training and equipment they need to stay ahead of the curve. Third, we must prioritize talent management and retention strategies within our active duty and civil service workforce. Our personnel are our greatest asset, and it's essential that we continue to invest in their development, whether through education, mentorship, or career advancement opportunities. NSW will continue to work with the Navy to recruit the best talent for assessment and selection. This will help us retain top talent and maintain our competitive edge. Finally, we need to focus on building stronger relationships with our interagency partners and allies. As we face more complex global challenges, it is essential that we collaborate more effectively across the spectrum of conflict - from crisis response to combat operations.