

Opening Statement of Chairman Howard P. “Buck” McKeon
Posture Hearing on U.S. Central, Special Operations, and Transportation Commands

March 6, 2013

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. The House Armed Services Committee meets to receive testimony on the posture of U.S. Central, Special Operations, and Transportation Commands. Today, we have with us General James Mattis, Admiral William McRaven, and General William Fraser. Thank you for joining us today.

The CENTCOM area of responsibility remains a critical focus of the U.S. military. Over the next year in Afghanistan, the United States will be withdrawing 34,000 troops, and the ANSF will be fully in the lead across Afghanistan for the first time. These major changes to the security context in Afghanistan – all of which will be occurring during the same time period – could present new forms of risk to U.S. interests in Afghanistan and the region. Likewise, the broader challenges within the CENTCOM area of responsibility – including the conflict in Syria, the nuclear ambitions of Iran, and the uncertain political transition in Egypt – continue to pose strategic risk to U.S. interests. However, in my view, among the greatest strategic risks within the Middle East remains the on-going ambiguity associated with U.S. commitment to our regional allies – and the region itself.

Additionally, I remain concerned about the threats posed by transnational terrorism. The threat from al-Qaeda is real. It is global, networked, and clandestine. U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) and our special operations forces play a critical role in counterterrorism, unconventional warfare, and countering weapons of mass destruction. SOCOM has achieved extraordinary integration with each of the services, the U.S. interagency, and our international partners. However, an emphasis on direct action during the last 11 years of combat may have left our special operations forces out of balance for a future that will increasingly require building partnership capacity and advisory and assistance efforts. Looking forward, our special operations forces must remain flexible enough to counter the transnational terrorist threat with decisive force when warranted – but, at the same time, globally postured to prevent transnational terrorism from manifesting into operational and strategic threats – through international partnerships and regional alliances.

Finally, TRANSCOM continues to execute the logistical requirements for on-going U.S. military efforts across the globe. The challenges TRANSCOM faces continue to grow. As our military prepares to redeploy from Afghanistan and as we rebalance to the Asia Pacific, we must remain ready to respond to contingencies elsewhere in the Middle East – and Africa. These operational necessities come as the military is being forced to shed force structure, curtail flying hours, and return ships to port – reducing the availability of the very lift capacity upon which TRANSCOM relies. This Committee has taken steps to mitigate these shortfalls, but much remains to be done.

In short, CENTCOM, SOCOM, and TRANSCOM are executing vital military missions in across the globe. We are extremely grateful for your service to our country. I look forward to your testimony.