

STATEMENT OF
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SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT

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Introduction

Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Langevin, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to address you as Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/ Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD (SO/LIC)). The administration and Congress have demonstrated a clear commitment to the special operations force (SOF) community, as evidenced by the strength of the SOF budget in the current fiscal year. Thank you for your support of special operations (SO) initiatives and resources.

I am very pleased to be joined today by the commander of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), GEN Joe Votel, who is working to make his exceptional command even more effective, responsive and resilient. I am here to report on our ability to meet our nation's most pressing national security concerns, now and in the future, and the health and welfare of our Nation's special operations community. We are well-postured to meet those national security requirements, but I also want to address some of the challenges we face.

The Oversight Role of ASD (SO/LIC)

As the senior policy advisor on special operations and counterterrorism to the Secretary of Defense, I am committed to ensuring that our special operations force is well-prepared to face threats to the United States, our allies, and other international partners worldwide—not just in the current areas of active combat, but in emerging areas of instability and potential conflict around the globe such as Eastern Europe, North Africa, and Asia. Such preparation includes strategic planning for our nation’s future SOF requirements.

In my role as a “Service-like Secretary” for SOF, I serve as the principal civilian advisor to the Secretary of Defense on special operations, counterterrorism, and counter threat finance activities and capabilities. I established and led a Special Operations Policy Oversight Council (SOPOC) to execute my responsibilities and provide policy and guidance to USSOCOM, coordinate special operations-related matters across the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), and institutionalize my responsibilities as outlined in statute and Department of Defense (DoD) directives. The purpose of the council is to continuously improve policy, joint processes, and procedures that facilitate the development, integration, implementation, and sustainment of the Department’s special operations capability

efforts. There has been continued emphasis on increasing our comparative advantage in special operations capabilities during the previous three Quadrennial Defense Reviews (QDR). This council will provide a governance mechanism for insuring Department level oversight and implementation of the QDRs and other Department directives.

Effective Oversight in a Changing Fiscal Environment

One of several critical responsibilities of ASD (SO/LIC) is the supervision and oversight of special operations and other Department resources. As the nature of today's security environment rapidly changes, our challenge is to maintain SOF's comparative capability advantage in a constrained budgetary environment. We must wisely use our limited resources efficiently and effectively to maintain a mission ready SOF that can rapidly respond in support of combatant command requirements. Today SOF accounts for approximately 1.8% of the total Defense budget, and we continue to strengthen our budget management to maximize taxpayers' return on investment in SOF. By leveraging the subject matter expertise of the USSOCOM, Joint Staff and the OSD staff, we have enhanced our oversight of already-established processes to ensure the best use of resources. I appreciate the \$2 million appropriated in fiscal year 2015 for additional SO/LIC staffing. We

will continue to work closely with you and your staff as we implement these focused resources.

For the past two years, the Bipartisan Budget Act enabled DoD to make decisions based on policy and operational requirements. The act eased some of the DoD budget cuts that had been projected in the President's budget requests for fiscal years 2014 and 2015. Although, the conventional force has taken the brunt of these budget cuts, Services have remained steadfast in providing the critical Service-provided capabilities that enables SOF to perform their mission. We acknowledge the fact that sequestration-level cuts remain the law for fiscal year 2016 and beyond. However, if sequestration returns, or if we receive funding levels below the President's request, we will be challenged to continue to provide enough SOF capability to respond to global security threats. This is especially challenging considering SOF's interdependence with Service-provided capabilities.

SOF and the Conventional Force: Complementary Capabilities

I fully support the strategy of building the capacity and capabilities of the Services. I believe the complementary capabilities shared by conventional and special operation forces create strength and innovation for both. For more than a decade, we have been operating side by side in conflicts across the globe. The extensive

combat employment of both forces in shared battle spaces has increased the need to coordinate our operations closely. Sharing tactics, techniques, and procedures between SOF and conventional forces has resulted in increasing our collective capabilities to execute missions across the full-spectrum of combat and non-combat related activities.

Nevertheless, beyond major contingencies, SOF remain the force of choice for those security force assistance missions in non-permissive and politically-sensitive areas, and missions where the host nation demands a small footprint. SOF continues to train partner nation special operations forces and conventional forces, improving their capabilities to conduct counterterrorism operations. The partnership between conventional and special operations forces is stronger than ever, and the Services continue to complement SOF's capabilities by providing combat enablers that are not organic to SOF units or are not available in adequate quantities. These service-provided capabilities and support mechanisms, including intelligence and combat service support, are not only vital to special operations mission success, but also to the readiness and well-being of the SOF community.

The Number One SOF Truth

The capabilities SOF bring to both combat and peacetime missions are the product of the number one SOF Truth: “Humans are more important than hardware”. As ASD (SO/LIC), it is my duty to advise and coordinate personnel issues relating to the SOF community.

Our people are the foundation of special operations, and we strive to ensure our force has the support system necessary to ensure their long-term prosperity and health. During the DoD Fiscal Year 2015 Program and Budget Review, the Department conducted a comprehensive assessment of SOF force structure, operational requirements, and capabilities at various resourcing levels. The review focused on ensuring DoD retains the special operations capabilities needed to meet current and future operational requirements.

To meet combatant command requirements overseas, we increased SOF end-strength levels and we enhanced their theater special operations commands. At home, we re-emphasized the alignment of continental United States-based SOF units with combatant commands to increase unit readiness through regionally-focused training, cultural awareness, language proficiency, operational planning,

and partner relationships. Reshaping SOF operational units, elements, and platforms in this way, prepares us to meet future operational requirements.

In addition to considering the size and shape of our force, we must ensure the physical and mental resilience of the individuals who make up our force. This is a challenge. After almost 14 years of continual combat deployments, combined with a demanding training regime needed to keep the force sharp, has caused significant stress on the force and their families. In the conventional force, the average number of deployments over the past 12 years was 1.12 times, with only 58 percent of conventional service members having any deployment history. In contrast, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of all USSOCOM personnel were deployed up to five times over the past 12 years. It is clear that this stress has taken a toll on the force. Although SOF suicide rates have had a modest decline over the past two years, there is much to be learned about the causes of suicide and effective prevention. What we know is even one suicide is one too many, and that is why your continued support of the Preservation of the Force and Families (POTFF) program is critical to sustaining our special operations capability. While POTFF primarily benefits the special operations service member's physical, spiritual, mental, and social needs, it provides a much-needed positive impact on SOF families as well. USSOCOM, in coordination with DoD Health Affairs, has added

behavioral health professionals, and we continue our efforts to de-mystify and de-stigmatize behavioral healthcare within the ranks. As ASD (SO/LIC), I also continue to support and enhance resiliency training currently being conducted through USSOCOM service component programs. GEN Votel's testimony will cover this in depth, but the benefits cannot be overstated.

Another personnel issue currently under implementation is the Department's Women in the Service Review. ASD (SO/LIC) has supported USSOCOM's methodical implementation of the decisional timeline provided to Congress in 2013. We will continue to support USSOCOM as they conclude their studies and develop gender-neutral standards. This fall, we will help prepare and inform recommendations for Secretary Carter's final decision.

The Continued Need for Agile Authorities

Today's security environment is rapidly changing and constantly evolving with new regional and global threats. To rapidly respond to these threats, the Department must have agile and adaptable authorities to enable and facilitate both our own and partner nations' capabilities. Support for foreign partners is fundamental to operational success in overseas contingency operations, and U.S. financial and logistical support is necessary to ensure their continued participation.

We appreciate your acknowledgement of our efforts with the codification of section 1206 as a permanent Global Train and Equip (GTE) authority under section 2282 in Title X, U.S. Code. This new permanent authority is testament not only to the importance of building partnership capacity (BPC), but of our collective efforts to combat violent extremism globally.

Although BPC authorities such as GTE and the Global Security Contingency Fund (GSCF) help us address emerging threats and opportunities, it takes time to build a partner's capacity. Once built, ensuring our partners can sustain their combating terrorism capacity beyond initial training becomes a significant priority. Neither GTE nor GSCF accommodates sustainment costs, so we work hand-in-hand with our partners at the State Department to ensure Foreign Military Financing (FMF) or a partner's national funds are identified and used to sustain these programs. The State Department is a critical partner in the execution of both GTE and GSCF, which are both dual-key authorities.

Within GTE, DoD leads the execution of programs, and all funds are provided through Title X. Within GSCF, State leads the execution of programs and provides at least 20% of the funding, while DoD provides the remaining funds. In total, we execute approximately \$325 Million annually to support our foreign partners

through GTE, and have executed \$103 Million in GSCF funds since its inception in 2011. The agile, unallocated funding afforded by these authorities enables implementers to rapidly respond to the urgent needs of partner nations more expeditiously than is possible through traditional mechanisms.

In addition to the GTE and GSCF, the Department recently designated ASD (SO/LIC) as the manager of the Counterterrorism Partnership Fund (CTPF). This new fund allows us to conduct BPC activities at a much greater scale than ever before. This program is coming online at a critical junction in our counterterrorism campaigns across Africa and the Middle East.

Finally, there exists a nexus between criminal enterprises and terrorist activities. More and more, we are seeing the convergence between criminal networks that facilitate the movement of people, weapons, drugs, and funding within conflict zones and violent extremists who take advantage of those channels as well. The destabilizing nature of these illicit activities underpins the importance of shared security concerns and capacity building with our partners. The counter-drug authorities under section 1004 and 1022 permit SOF to provide tactical training to partner nation military and security forces for countering activities related to drug

trafficking, transnational organized crime, threat finance, and terrorism is one tool to respond to this linkage.

Role of the 1208 Combating Terrorism Authority as Distinct from BPC

Section 1208 provides the Secretary of Defense with authority to provide support to foreign forces engaged in supporting or facilitating ongoing military operations by U.S. SOF to combat terrorism in a wide range of operational environments, often where SOF are operating under austere conditions and require specialized support from indigenous forces or persons. This authority has been critical to our special operations counterterrorism efforts and will remain so. It provides us with the ability to apply a modest portion of our major force program (MFP)-11 budget to deliver critical enablers to select irregular forces, groups or individuals directly involved in counterterrorism efforts. I appreciate Congress' continued support for this authority since 2005, as well as the recent increase in funding and extension of the authority through 2017.

The Future of SOF

The large ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have dominated our collective national security focus for more than 13 years, but we are looking beyond that

towards the future. As our strategic challenges evolve, so too must SOF. From the persistent risk of attacks on America and our allies to an increasingly assertive Russia, there are no short-term fixes or one-size-fits-all solutions to the threats we face.

The emergence of the entity known as Islamic State of Iraq in the Levant (ISIL) is one such example. Although the Department believes it has the legal authorities necessary to continue its efforts to respond to the ISIL threat, the President has noted that our nation is strongest when the Administration and Congress work together on issues as serious as the use of military force. The President's recent Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) proposal to Congress provides necessary flexibility to successfully pursue the armed conflict against ISIL.

Although at this time we do not anticipate conducting operations in countries other than Iraq or Syria, the proposal contains no geographic limitation. The proposal would also provide the flexibility to conduct ground combat operations in certain limited circumstances, such as rescue operations involving U.S. or coalition personnel or SOF operations to take military action against ISIL leadership. While the fight against ISIL will not be over quickly, the proposed three-year sunset will provide the next President, Congress, and the American people an opportunity to assess the progress we have made against ISIL and evaluate these authorities again.

I look forward to working with Congress to pass a bipartisan AUMF specifically tailored to address the threat posed by ISIL.

These long-term threats require long-term, strategic thinking. To that end, Defense leadership and USSOCOM are developing a department-wide approach to employ special operations capabilities known as the Campaign Plan for Global Special Operations (CP-GSO). This campaign plan relies on SOF postured regionally, networked globally, and partnered across the interagency with international allies and partner nations to provide combatant commanders maximum flexibility to respond to emerging requirements.

Conclusion

In closing, we are all proud of our roles in supporting the Soldiers, Sailors, Airman, Marines, and Civilians, assigned to USSOCOM, as well as their families. We have asked much of the men and women assigned to our SOF units and their families since 9/11. We will continue to ask much of them in the future to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world with constantly evolving regional and global threats.

We are, therefore, committed to doing everything we can to ensure that these brave warriors have the best training, equipment, and overall support we can possibly provide. We will continue to work closely with Congress to ensure we have the right policies, agile authorities, and enhanced oversight structure in place to employ SOF effectively. I thank Congress for its continuing support of our men and women in uniform and their families, and look forward to your questions.