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BEFORE THE 114th CONGRESS HOUSE
ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES

MARCH 1, 2016

Introduction

Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Langevin, and distinguished members of the Committee, in the absence of a sitting, Senate confirmed, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict, I appear before you today performing the duties of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for SO/LIC. I am pleased to be joined today by the Commander of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), General Joe Votel. General Votel has been an exceptional USSOCOM commander, and our entire SOLIC team was very glad to learn that he has been nominated to lead U.S. Central Command.

Congress has demonstrated a clear commitment to the special operations force (SOF) enterprise, as evidenced by your thoughtful oversight and by the strength of the SOF budget in the current fiscal year. Thank you for your support of special operations initiatives and resources.

I am here to report on the health and welfare of our Nation's SOF enterprise, the progress we have made and the challenges we face, and on our ability to address our country's security concerns using special operations capabilities—now and into the future. I have divided my testimony into three sections addressing current operating environment, SO/LIC's policy priorities, and oversight activities.

Evolving Threats and Special Operations Forces

As our nation's security challenges become increasingly complex, maintaining and improving our SOF capabilities must happen at a rate that can meet these challenges. Today, the domains of global conflict have expanded beyond the physical to dimensions such as cyberspace, the social media sphere, and bio-warfare. These domains are increasingly accessible to non-state actors. With advanced technology at their fingertips, individuals, illicit networks, and terrorist groups—such as Daesh—can disrupt economies, interrupt the flow of information, and perpetrate significant violence, destabilizing countries and entire regions. Additionally, we are seeing other nations—our peers and near-peers—making use of these same new technologies to enhance aggressive asymmetric tactics creating new levels of disruption and instability.

In the face of today's evolving strategic landscape, the ability of SOF to operate unobtrusively with a small footprint in contested environments is becoming ever more crucial. The defining characteristics of SOF—agility, precision, and effective use of intelligence are widely-acknowledged capabilities that are necessary to confront the unconventional threats that face our country and our

allies. As we witnessed during the last 15 years, our Commanders in Chief will increasingly turn to SOF when instability requires a U.S. military response to address the asymmetric and unconventional threats that characterize our future security environment.

SOLIC's Policy Priorities

In developing strategies and implementing policy, my office's main focus is investing in SOF people, capabilities, and partnerships, in order to prevent our nation's enemies from effectively attacking the homeland, U.S. citizens, and U.S. interests. Success means matching the right capabilities, enabled by new technologies, with the right highly-trained people to address our most pressing challenges.

Our People

First and foremost, we are about people; investing in the health, welfare, training and education of our people, and where we can, their families, is SO/LIC's number one priority. It is the duty and responsibility of the ASD for SO/LIC to advise and coordinate on personnel issues related to the SOF community. We are grateful for the continuing support that Congress has given in this area. It is not cliché to say humans are more important than hardware – it is a fundamental truth - and our special operations forces prove the rule.

The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines of USSOCOM sustain incredible deployment rates. After nearly a decade and half of continual combat deployments, it is not surprising that stress has taken a toll on both the force and their families. To address that issue, our office has been working with USSOCOM as it stands up a network of holistic support services for each tactical unit. These services include family counseling, physical training, rehabilitation, and behavioral healthcare. From a policy perspective, there should be a team of professionals ready to guide and care for every special operator and family member in need. General Votel's testimony will cover this in depth, but the benefits cannot be overstated. Although SOF suicide rates have seen a modest decline in recent years, one is too many, and there is still more we can learn about effective prevention. We thank you for your continued support of these crucial initiatives.

Another personnel issue that relates to readiness is implementation of Secretary Carter's recent decision open up all military positions—including special operations specialties—to women. Special operations demand a wide range of perspectives and skills, and we will steadfastly maintain the high standards that

make our Special Operators superior now, while seeking excellence wherever it resides. This recent change in policy will help us do that.

Develop Cutting Edge Technology

To keep our capabilities at the cutting edge requires constant improvement of existing technology platforms, equipment, and gear. It also requires investing in new, innovative technology through a sustained focus on research, development, testing and evaluation (RDT&E). For decades, the United States and its military maintained a significant advantage over our peer competitors through leap-ahead technologies and innovation. Today, the ubiquity of advanced technology allows our near-peer and non-peer competitors to erode that advantage and even—at times—operate on a level playing field. From a policy and strategy perspective, that reality highlights the importance of investing in technology and gear that can make our special operations forces cheaper, lighter, faster, and more lethal.

SOF technology and capabilities are also significantly intertwined with the decisions made by the Army, Navy, and Air Force. It is worth noting because we must remain alert to the second- and third-order effects of budget cuts to the Services. Depending on those reductions, USSOCOM may be forced to slow or halt certain modernization and recapitalization programs, reducing SOF's capability and/or capacity in vital areas. In the meantime, however, we will continue making the smart investments that will keep our SOF at the cutting-edge of technology and equipment.

We support and encourage USSOCOM's leveraging and testing of Service developed Directed Energy technologies to increase future SOF capabilities. Similarly, we note how the Services have leveraged the pioneering efforts USSOCOM conducted in the test and procurement of its ground mobility system.

ASD(SOLIC) also has the Combating Terrorism Technical Support Office, which provides rapid R&D prototyping and a robust, off the shelf equipment demonstration capability. Its products are widely shared and enhance DoD, inter-agency, and international partner efforts to combat terrorism

International Partnerships

Another important policy priority is building strong working relationships with SOF of allied and partner nations. In the future, we will likely see SOF called upon more frequently to address instability. By helping boost other nations' SOF capabilities, we can leverage those forces in the future. Our special operators are the best force for leveraging organizations and networks, and working on the

ground with local partners. They are well-positioned to build these SOF relationships. Ultimately, in a future of globally-dispersed and irregular threats, employing SOF in contested environments will only become more important. By working closely with our partners and allies to enhance SOF around the globe, we can have them with us in the fight tomorrow.

Fortunately, our oversight committees in Congress understand the importance of these activities and have provided us authorities to undertake them. We appreciate the continuing support for these programs.

In particular, the Counterterrorism Partnership Fund (CTPF) allows us the flexibility to build and support capable partners at a much greater scale than ever before. CTPF significantly boosted our most important tool, Section 2282, the Global Train and Equip authority. This program came online at a critical junction in our CT campaigns across the Middle East and Africa. Additionally, CTPF allows us to invest in non-train and equip activities such as defense institution building programs, exercises and enabling functions, all of which are fundamental to sustaining successful SOF capabilities. As a result of CTPF's flexibility, we are able to conduct the right activities, with the right partners, at the right time, thus decreasing risk in programs failing long-term by taking a full-spectrum approach to building partner capacity.

When Assistant Secretary Lumpkin spoke here last year, he noted the importance of having the right governance in place to effectively manage the resources and ensure that we have measures of effectiveness for the CT partnership program as we build it. We take our responsibility to be good stewards of these programs very seriously, especially with such a significant increase in our building partner capacity programs. To that end, we are now standing up a counterterrorism partnerships program office to ensure effective oversight of these critical investments.

Section 1208 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005 provides the Secretary of Defense with authority to provide support to foreign forces engaged in 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. With it, we are able to very effectively enable select regular and irregular forces, groups, or individuals involved in counterterrorism efforts at relatively low cost for the significant operational effects we achieve. I very much appreciate Congress' continued support for this authority since 2005, to include the recent increase in authority from \$75 to \$85 million and its extension

through 2017. These programs and others are a testament to our ongoing efforts to successfully combat violent extremism globally.

In addition to counterterrorism authorities and programs, SO/LIC also provides policy guidance and oversight of DoD's efforts to counter drug trafficking and other forms of transnational organized crime. Illicit trafficking serves as a significant source of funding for terrorists, insurgents, and other threat networks. We know transnational criminal networks move a range of illicit goods, including drugs, people, weapons, wildlife products, natural resources, and money. In some cases, those same networks facilitate the activities of violent extremists, terrorists, and other adversaries who threaten our security. ISIL is a case in point. DoD's counter-threat finance capability supports military operations and other U.S. government efforts to disrupt ISIL's finances and revenue sources. Our counterdrug authorities permit SOF and other DoD components to work with U.S. partner nation law enforcement to help counter these illicit trafficking activities. These are important efforts, and we appreciate Congress's continuing support for these authorities.

Effective Oversight

The oversight my office conducts takes many other forms as well. For example, we routinely conduct assessment visits abroad to evaluate our train and equip programs, to ensure they are as effective and efficient as possible. We use those visits to gather lessons learned to be used to inform future proposals. Daily we interact with the Joint Staff to help develop and refine proposals for counter terrorism operations to insure they meet the President's and Secretary of Defense's rigorous policy standard.

But, above all, the principal duty of the ASD(SO/LIC) is overall supervision of SO and LIC activities within DoD. In this capacity, the ASD(SO/LIC) advises and coordinates with the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisitions, Technology & Logistics USD(AT&L) on acquisition priorities and requirements for SO- and LIC-related material and equipment; ensures compliance with the law as well as DoD policies and priorities; participates in the Defense Acquisition Board and other appropriate boards and committees as the proponent for SO and LIC issues; and maintains liaison to monitor progress in achieving milestones.

SO/LIC works closely with USD(AT&L), USSOCOM, and the Services on the oversight of various programs to ensure adequate acquisition strategy and funding are in place to meet validated SOF requirements. This includes precision guided munitions, unmanned aerial vehicles, submersibles, aircraft recapitalizations, individual operator equipment, and technology programs.

The special operations acquisition process adheres to the same DoD policies, regulations, and instructions that govern all of the Department's acquisition activities. USSOCOM coordinates its acquisition activities with USD(AT&L) and ASD(SO/LIC) and hosts semi-annual Acquisition Summits to ensure full coordination and transparency of acquisition activities within the Department.

As the nature of our security environment rapidly changes, our task is to sustain SOF's comparative capability advantage in a time of tight budgets. SOF amounts to roughly 1.8% of the overall Defense budget, and we continue strengthening our budget management to maximize taxpayers' return on investment in SOF. By leveraging the expertise of the OSD staff, the Joint Staff, and USSOCOM, we have been enhancing our oversight to guarantee the best use of resources. We will continue to work closely with Congress as we allocate resources and implement programs.

However, even as we practice careful oversight of taxpayer dollars, the increasing demands on SOF programs and capabilities may begin stressing our budget. If we receive funding levels below the President's Fiscal Year 2017 request, providing enough SOF capability to respond to the range of global security threats will become a challenge. This is especially true considering SOF's interdependence with, and in some cases, dependence on Service-provided capabilities.

Fortunately, the partnership between conventional and special operations forces is stronger than ever. The Services continue supporting SOF's capabilities by providing combat enablers that are either not organic to or adequately sized in SOF units. These capabilities provided by the Services, including intelligence and combat service support, are vital to both special operations mission success and to the readiness of the SOF community.

Conclusion

The emphasis on increasing our comparative advantage in special operations capabilities that began around the start of Operation Enduring Freedom, in 2001, will not abate any time soon. SOF are the force of choice for missions in non-permissive conditions and politically-sensitive areas. In addition to engaging in the current areas of active combat, we must prepare for emerging areas of instability and conflict around the globe, as well as the persistent risk of attacks on the Homeland. Such preparation includes strategic planning for our nation's future SOF requirements.

As the senior policy advisor to the Secretary of Defense on special operations and counterterrorism, the responsibility for much of that planning falls to the

ASD for SOLIC supported by an outstanding civilian and military staff. Moving forward this year, and as we transition to a new Administration next year, as long as I am entrusted with the responsibility to perform the duties of the ASD, I will work daily to ensure that our special operations force is ready to face future challenges. This testimony has highlighted a few of the critical policy priorities and oversight functions that we in SO/LIC emphasize; the list is illustrative, but by no means exhaustive.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have demanded the focus of defense policy and operations for almost fifteen years. We have asked much of the men and women assigned to our SOF units and their families during that time, and we will continue to ask much of them in the future. They have never let us down. Our solemn contract with them, therefore, is to remain 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.