

**PREPARED STATEMENT**

**OF**

**MAJOR GENERAL BENNET SACOLICK**

**DIRECTOR, FORCE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**  
**U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND**

**BEFORE THE**

**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE**

**JULY 24, 2013**

Admiral McRaven fully supports the decision to eliminate the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule. Women have been attached to our combat units for several years as members of Cultural Support Teams, Civil Affairs, Military Information Support Teams, Intelligence Support, and a host of other occupational specialties. They have performed magnificently!

The question for USSOCOM and focus of our analysis is whether we can combine women into those Special Operations units whose occupation often requires deploying in small self-contained teams for long periods of time in austere, geographically isolated locations. Many of these units deploy in close proximity to or behind enemy lines as they live and work in very close quarters with each other. Can we achieve this level of integration while preserving our unit readiness, cohesion, and morale?

The scope of our analysis will focus on the special operators in eight SOF-specific occupational specialties ultimately providing a single, consistent procedure for execution throughout the USSOCOM enterprise. Once the studies are complete and the facts and data are collected, the USSOCOM Commander, in conjunction with the Service Chiefs will make a recommendation via the Chairman to the Secretary of Defense.

The eight SOF-specific occupational specialties are:

- Army Special Forces as well as the Infantry positions assigned to the Ranger Regiment
- Navy SEALs and Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewmen
- Marine Critical Skills Operators
- Air Force Special Tactics Officers, Combat Controllers, and Special Operations Weather Personnel.

We will also examine 46 additional occupational specialties that are not SOF-specific, but are assigned to our formations. This analysis will require close coordination with the Services before a decision is made.

Our assessment will focus on three independent, yet mutually supporting efforts:

Our subordinate Components, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Navy Special Warfare Command, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, are in the process of conducting thorough reviews focusing on Organization, Training, Education and Leader Development programs, inclusive of a recommendation to generate sufficient numbers of qualified Officers and Senior NCOs to facilitate and compliment integration. These reviews will include an evaluation of all performance standards.

In the Special Operations community, we maintain that our SOF standards have always been occupationally specific, operationally relevant and gender-neutral. They are just “the standard.” Our review will be a good opportunity to verify this assumption. We will look at every single task in each of our entry-level qualification courses to ensure they are decisively tied to an operational requirement.

We commissioned RAND to survey the social-behavioral aspects of integration and the potential consequences of integration on the effective functioning of small teams. Our concerns about integration generally center upon the impact on unit cohesion. These concerns include both social cohesion, which refers to the extent team members feel emotionally bonded with each other, and task cohesion, which refers to the mutual commitment among the individual team members in achieving the group objective. Unit cohesion is strongly linked to high performing Special Operations Teams.

We have also tasked RAND to provide a non-biased third party analysis of our qualification course standards as well as assistance in designing a comprehensive survey for every single SOF operator in order to assist us in first identifying and then eliminating barriers to integration.

Our implementation plan has only a handful of significant milestones. Our assessment phase will be accomplished by July, 2014. By that date, the Component reviews and RAND studies will be complete. We will then spend the following year examining those results and develop

our strategy. By July 2015, Commander of SOCOM will provide his recommendation, in conjunction with the Service Chiefs, to the Secretary of Defense for a January 1, 2016 implementation. Over the next two years, we will continue to work with the Services to incrementally open enabler and support positions.

I want to reiterate that we are not predisposed to any particular course of action, and at this time absolutely no decisions have been made regarding integration. We are, however, committed to maintaining the highest standards and delivering the most qualified SOF operators in support of our Nation, regardless of gender.