

## Statement for the Record



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## Introduction

Chairman Gallego, Ranking Member Kelly, and other distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on our global posture and the President's Budget Request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 for United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). My remarks will focus on the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ASD) for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (SO/LIC)'s statutory responsibilities for administrative oversight of USSOCOM. I am honored to testify alongside General Clarke and greatly appreciate his decades of leadership and service in protecting our national security interests.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the service, sacrifice, and success of our Special Operations Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and civilians. U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) have played a critical role in every major conflict since the Second World War, and they remain in the fight today – conducting operations against ISIS, al-Qaeda and its affiliates; working alongside partners and allies in a struggle against threats from hostile states; and providing our Nation's leaders with flexible and rapid response options to a wide range of national security emergencies. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, our SOF community has established a remarkable record of achievement. From the overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in December 2001, to the complex operations targeting the world's most notorious terrorist leaders like Osama bin Laden, and to the extraordinary effort to eliminate the ISIS caliphate in Syria and Iraq, we owe our SOF community our deepest gratitude.

Despite recent reductions in deployments, SOF remain at the forefront of U.S. combat operations, often operating in remote and hostile environments. Over the past two years, fifteen members of the SOF formation were killed in combat operations. Although SOF make up only approximately three percent of the Joint Force, they have endured more than half of U.S. combat casualties during that period. Many more have sustained life-altering injuries or suffer from psychological trauma. The service and sacrifice of these men and women challenge us to live up to the high standards they embody.

I would also like to thank Congress for your strong support of the SOF community as well as your predecessors and their foresight in recognizing the need to build and sustain special operations capabilities to respond to an increasingly complex threat environment. The Nunn-Cohen amendment that established USSOCOM and the position of ASD (SO/LIC) in 1986 was prescient in recognizing that future conflicts would be fought by both state and non-state actors and often through unconventional and irregular means. The authors of these reforms rightly understood that dedicated resources for Special Operations-specific purposes would be essential for promoting and sustaining these capabilities within the Department.

My statement this morning will focus on how the SOF community is supporting Secretary Austin's three principal priorities as outlined in his March 3, 2021, "Message to the Force" – 1) Defend the Nation, 2) Take Care of Our People, and 3) Succeed through Teamwork. The Department's \$12.6 billion FY 2022 President's Budget request for USSOCOM supports these priorities as we continue to rebalance the force towards strategic competition and invest in the well-being of our SOF warriors and their families. Representing a four percent decrease from the FY 2021 enacted level, the FY 2022 President's Budget request allows USSOCOM to

accomplish its assigned missions and prepare for current and future challenges, prioritizes SOF crisis response, sustainable counterterrorism (CT), competing effectively below the level of armed conflict, and investments in SOF-unique capabilities to enable operations in contested environments. USSOCOM's budget request also includes approximately \$3 billion in direct war and enduring requirements that are now funded through the base budget.

In the nearly two decades following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, SOF have continued to develop new technologies and capabilities to become the most effective CT force in history. Today, the SOF Enterprise is in the midst of a critical period of transition as the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance (INSSG) and the National Defense Strategy (NDS) challenge us to conduct CT operations more sustainably while we also adapt to the challenges of strategic competition and develop capabilities to deter gray zone actions. At the same time, I am pleased to report that we have continued to improve the readiness of the force and reduce the strain of deployment on our SOF warriors and their families. Your leadership and support have been, and will continue to be, essential in this effort.

### Defend the Nation

Representing approximately two percent of the Department of Defense (DoD) budget, SOF play a crucial role within the Joint Force, and the SOF community continues to make progress in adapting its capabilities to the challenge of great-power *competition* with China and Russia. I emphasize the word "competition" because just as the NDS calls on us to develop traditional military capabilities to deter and respond to threats, we are also called to strengthen our alliances, innovate, and compete more effectively below the level of armed conflict. Revisionist powers, rogue states, and non-state actors are actively pursuing unconventional, irregular, and asymmetric strategies to undermine U.S. strategic interests, erode democratic institutions, and destabilize and reshape the post-WWII world order to their advantage, without provoking a U.S. conventional military response. Indeed, as the Department continues to strengthen our traditional military capabilities, we can expect that our adversaries will increasingly employ indirect approaches to achieve their strategic objectives and capitalize on asymmetries that work to their advantage.

Thus, winning the *competition* is essential to achieving our near and long-term strategic objectives, and to precluding a major conflict. This is not a theoretical battle to prepare for in the future. This is today's fight, and the SOF capabilities we have nurtured over the past 30 years are essential to successfully competing – *and winning* – in today's unconventional and irregular battlespaces. In close coordination with the Joint Staff, Services, and Combatant Commands, including USSOCOM, SO/LIC is leading the Department's efforts to institutionalize irregular warfare (IW) throughout the Joint Force. If successful, the Joint Force will have the necessary tools to operationalize IW in competition, shape conditions and create dilemmas to deter future aggression, and maintain favorable balances of power for us, our allies, and partners.

As we adapt to meet the challenges of strategic competition, we remain focused on ensuring that our CT operations are sustainable and focused on the most relevant threats to U.S. national security interests such as ISIS and al-Qaeda, and their affiliates. Continued U.S., allied,

and partner nation pressure has helped prevent these groups from attacking the homeland and our vital interests.

Within this strategic context, and consistent with the INSSG, we continue to adapt our global posture and develop SOF-unique capabilities that enable our operators to *compete and win* in a wide variety of contingencies, including CT, crisis response, competition below the level of armed conflict, and as a force multiplier to the Joint Force if deterrence fails. Although our adversaries increasingly employ irregular warfare tactics outside of a declared war, SOF support can ensure the Department does not depend only on high-end warfighting and deterrent capabilities. Today, approximately 40 percent of SOF deployed forces are tasked with countering malign influence in strategic competition.

Central to our irregular warfare efforts is a suite of legislative authorities that allow us to address these challenges alongside our international and interagency partners. We appreciate Congress's support for the expansion of "Section 1202" authority to conduct irregular warfare operations, and for the establishment of a new Title 10 U.S. Code (U.S.C.) funding authority for operational preparation of the environment (OPE) activities in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2021. The USSOCOM FY 2022 President's Budget request includes \$15 million for Section 1202 activities, and \$4.5 million for clandestine activities that support operational preparation of the environment under the Title 10 U.S.C. Section 127f authority. Authorities such as these and Title 10 U.S.C. Section 127e (\$68.4 million requested in FY 2022) are cost-effective, agile means to advance U.S. national security interests working by, with, and through partners.

We continue to invest in technologies and capabilities to empower SOF to operate in denied areas and conduct high-risk operations in remote and austere environments, integrate with our general purpose force counterparts, and produce scalable, precision effects. For instance, the FY 2022 President's Budget request includes investments in developing next-generation Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance capabilities to enhance situational awareness for the SOF warfighter, even in contested areas. We are investing in enhanced SOF maritime capabilities such as surface combatant craft, submersibles, and unmanned underwater vehicles. In coordination with the Department of the Navy, we are integrating SOF operational concepts and capability investments in support of strategic competition.

USSOCOM is pursuing technological advancements designed to enhance network interoperability, enable secure communications for command and control, and employ data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) to enable our SOF to operate more effectively. In close collaboration with the Joint Artificial Intelligence Center, USSOCOM is adapting and employing AI to streamline a wide range of activities, such as intelligence analysis and operational functions. For instance, USSOCOM is leveraging AI/ML to optimize preventive maintenance for aircraft of the Army's 160<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) that has demonstrated significant potential for increasing the operational readiness rate of the unit's fleet of aircraft.

USSOCOM has also employed innovative pathways to execute tailored acquisition strategies and streamline capability delivery to the warfighter. Additionally, USSOCOM is

leveraging public-private partnerships and deepening relationships with academic institutions and non-traditional partners, including through its pilot project to expand small business participation in technology development to enhance SOF warfighting capabilities. The Department has submitted a legislative proposal that would extend and expand upon this program that has demonstrated significant results for USSOCOM in accelerating the development and delivery of innovative technologies into the hands of the warfighter. This authority (Sec. 851 of the NDAA for FY 2020) is set to expire at the end of FY 2021 if not extended.

### Take Care of Our People

Consistent with the clear priorities outlined in the INSSG and the NDS, we continue to invest in the readiness of the force and the resiliency of our SOF warriors and their families. Despite the unique challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year, SOF have continued to maintain a high level of operational readiness in support of strategic priorities. COVID-19-related restrictions on CONUS and OCONUS movements have reduced flight hours and training opportunities, particularly alongside our overseas partners. Although the number of forces deployed overseas is down approximately 15 percent over the past year, nearly 5,000 SOF personnel are currently deployed to 62 countries.

In the years following the terrorist attacks of September 11, operational requirements resulted in a near-constant cycle of deployments for some high-demand capabilities. To address the strain caused by that operational tempo, we have taken a hard look at the forces that we can responsibly and sustainably provide to support global demand amid multifaceted and simultaneous mission requirements. Over the past several years, we have made considerable progress toward meeting the Department's requirement of a 1:2 deployment-to-dwell ratio across the force, meaning that a typical service member would expect to spend twice as much time at home station as on deployment. We continue to make progress toward achieving this target with now more than 90 percent of the force at a 1:2 ratio or better.

The additional dwell time spent at home station is not only contributing to increased predictability for the force and improved work-life balance, it is also enabling additional time for training, screening, rest, refit, and reintegration. USSOCOM continues to achieve the Department's goal of fewer than five percent non-deployable military personnel.

In addition to monitoring metrics of SOF readiness, we are closely evaluating how SOF posture relates to our ability to sustain CT and crisis response operations along with high-priority missions. We are also focused on limiting SOF deployments to those that require SOF-specific capabilities and training. For instance, the establishment of the Army's Security Force Assistance Brigade has provided a capable General Purpose Force option for training and mentoring foreign security forces. The combination of these efforts has helped ease the strain of a high and unsustainable rate of overseas deployments for SOF personnel.

The SOF Enterprise is further enhancing readiness by taking a holistic approach to caring for SOF warriors and their families. With the strong support of Congress, USSOCOM has

continued to develop its Preservation of the Force and Families (POTFF) program to address SOF-unique challenges and to optimize physical, psychological, social, and spiritual performance. The POTFF program leverages a combination of USSOCOM, Service, and DoD resources to meet the needs of the various SOF components and individual unit commanders. These programs include injury prevention/strength training, performance nutrition, rehabilitative care, improved access to behavioral health and suicide prevention, family and community programs, promoting healthy living, and reinforcing resiliency and spiritual fitness. The FY 2022 President's Budget request sustains funding for the POTFF program and establishes the Cognitive Performance program category of service to optimize the performance of SOF personnel and their long-term brain health.

Participation in the POTFF neurocognitive baselining are now mandatory for all USSOCOM personnel. Our SOF warriors recognize POTFF as an invaluable resource for their readiness and career longevity, and data collected from our SOF commanders indicates that the program is having a significant and positive impact on the mission readiness of their units. SO/LIC is currently collaborating with the command to develop standardized and quantitative outcome metrics to help inform future resourcing decisions, and we look forward to working closely with the committee to ensure we are achieving a solid return on this investment in our personnel.

Similarly, USSOCOM's Warrior Care program continues to provide SOF members who are physically and/or psychologically wounded, ill, and injured with support through recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration. We have no greater responsibility than to care for our SOF warriors and to provide them with a path to return to service and/or transition to civilian careers following their years of service. We appreciate the strong support of Congress for each of these efforts.

I remain concerned about instances of moral and ethical failings within the SOF community, and I know General Clarke shares this concern. Incidents such as these have no place in the military or our Department, and if not tackled head-on, they can erode morale and undermine trust and our moral authority with our allies and partners. I commend General Clarke for his initiative in directing a comprehensive review of SOF culture and ethics beginning in August 2019. The review was directed to address shortfalls and limitations of multiple previous studies and to build upon them to address enterprise-wide issues and to analyze data from across the SOF Enterprise.

SO/LIC strongly supported this effort, and SO/LIC personnel actively participated in the review, which entailed conducting in-depth interviews with approximately 2,000 personnel of all ranks within more than 50 SOF commands. Although the comprehensive review did not identify evidence of a systemic ethics deficiency, it did note that "in some instances USSOCOM's cultural focus on SOF employment and mission accomplishment is to the detriment of leadership, discipline and accountability," and it outlined concrete recommendations. My office is now helping to guide the Comprehensive Review Implementation Team, established to drive implementation of the review's recommendations that address training and organization of the force, leader development, and the prevention of over-exertion on the force that we believe contributes in part to ethical lapses.

As we address challenges related to SOF culture and ethics, Secretary Austin has placed special emphasis on combatting sexual assault and addressing actions associated with extremist or dissident ideologies within the Department. The men and women who make up the SOF community deserve nothing less than a safe and supportive work environment – free from intimidation, harassment, and bias of any kind. We recognize that extremist ideology exists within our military, and we must ensure that our service members honor the oaths they have taken to uphold and defend our Constitution against all enemies – foreign and domestic. For this reason, Secretary Austin directed a Department-wide stand-down to allow senior leaders to discuss the importance of our oath of office, impermissible behaviors, and procedures for reporting extremist behaviors. I am committed to working hand-in-hand with General Clarke in addressing these challenges on behalf of the SOF community, ensuring that our efforts are closely aligned with top-level guidance and actions and policies taken by the Department and the Military Services.

We recognize that many of the solutions have not yet been fully implemented and that true cultural change will require a sustained and focused effort over many years. I look forward to working with you and your staff as we strengthen the foundation of our culture and ethics throughout the SOF community. SO/LIC will continue to support this effort by focusing on those actions that fall within our administrative role overseeing the organization and training of SOF personnel and ensuring these efforts are adequately resourced. Working closely with USSOCOM and each of the Services, we will continue to develop and sustain a SOF culture of personal accountability that is worthy of the men and women that constitute our force.

We are similarly focused on enhancing the diversity within our SOF formations. As it stands today, our force is not adequately reflective of the American people. In addition to the moral imperative of addressing this challenge, we recognize that a more diverse force makes us more effective operationally by allowing us to draw upon diverse perspectives and talents and new ideas to enable us to prevail in the global contest for influence and legitimacy we are faced with today. Enhancing diversity within the force is increasingly important as the Department places greater emphasis on operations in the information environment against foreign disinformation and malign influence, in particular.

Over the past year, ASD(SO/LIC) played an active role in the DoD's Board on Diversity and Inclusion and creating a truly diverse and inclusive SOF workforce. The ASD (SO/LIC) co-chairs, along with the USSOCOM Vice Commander, the SOF Executive Committee on Diversity and Inclusion to advise the execution of the USSOCOM Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. I look forward to working with the command as we continue to collectively address this challenge.

In addition to addressing diversity and inclusion challenges within the SOF formation, we are also working to ensure that all SOF career fields are open to all who have the desire and meet the rigorous standards. Women have filled vital roles within the SOF community for many years, and we are proud that in the past year, two women have for the first time successfully completed the Special Forces Qualification Course and are currently serving as Green Berets.

Although we recognize that we have much more progress to make in this area, these talented soldiers have blazed a path that we expect many others will follow.

Addressing each of these challenges will require a multifaceted, sustained approach, with a clear strategy, concrete objectives, and measurable benchmarks. Additionally, the continued institutionalization of ASD(SO/LIC)'s role in the administrative chain of command will provide additional avenues to highlight policy and resource issues affecting SOF, including diversity, ethics, and accountability. For instance, regularly occurring readiness briefings from USSOCOM to ASD(SO/LIC) will include more personnel readiness data, such as sexual assault and harassment, domestic violence, suicide, COVID-19 vaccination rates, and accession/promotion by gender and ethnicity. SO/LIC brings unique perspective to these challenges, and you have my commitment that we will remain fully engaged.

### Succeed Through Teamwork

Secretary Austin's Message to the Force challenges us to join forces with our partners and allies; work in partnership across U.S. departments and agencies, with Congress, and with private industry; and to build unity of effort and missions throughout the Department, including strengthening civil-military cooperation. The men and women of the SOF community excel in building strong and lasting partnerships, including with our foreign, interagency, and private industry partners. SO/LIC and USSOCOM continue to deepen our civilian-military collaboration across a wide range of issues, including SOF personnel and readiness, budget and acquisition, special access programs, and legislative affairs.

Civilian control of the military is a bedrock principle of our democracy, and strengthening civilian institutions within the Department is a key priority of Secretary Austin. As the Secretary testified in his confirmation hearing, "the safety and security of our democracy demands competent civilian control of our armed forces ... the subordination of military power to the civil." We also recognize and appreciate the Congress's strong interest in empowering civilian leadership, both within the Special Operations community and throughout the Department.

The continued institutionalization of the ASD(SO/LIC)'s role in the administrative chain of command, as codified in Title 10, is one of many examples where the Department is making progress in empowering civilian leadership, oversight, and advocacy within the Department's decision-making mechanisms. Over the past year, we have made progress in strengthening civilian oversight of SOF, but we recognize that more remains to be done to realize the full intent of recent legislative reforms to strengthen the ASD(SO/LIC)'s role and to establish the Secretariat for Special Operations. Recent actions include designating ASD(SO/LIC) as a Principal Staff Assistant (PSA) to the Secretary of Defense for Special Operations administrative matters and establishing a position of Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense to lead the Secretariat and to assist the ASD with those responsibilities. The ASD(SO/LIC) also has been added to numerous senior Departmental decision-making bodies, in many instances marking the first time the SOF Enterprise has had representation and a voice in these discussions and



decisions. The ASD(SO/LIC) staff worked closely with USSOCOM in the development, justification, approval, and submission of the FY 2022 President's Budget request.

On May 5, 2021, Secretary Austin issued direction that reaffirms the ASD(SO/LIC)'s role as a PSA and a direct report to the Secretary for SOF administrative matters, as specified in Title 10. At the same time, the Deputy Secretary approved an update to the SO/LIC Charter (DoDD 5111.10) that adds new responsibilities for ASD(SO/LIC) including oversight of USSOCOM resources and administrative matters, irregular warfare, and information operations.

Enhanced civilian leadership and oversight are essential to advocating for SOF within the Department and tackling key issues affecting the SOF Enterprise. Civilian oversight also helps ensure an independent and objective assessment of military capabilities and policy issues. Further institutionalization of the ASD(SO/LIC)'s administrative chain of command responsibilities will require continued close coordination with senior DoD leadership, USSOCOM, and Congress. I fully embrace this role, and I also recognize that there is more work ahead as we fulfill Congress's intent. As these efforts mature, I look forward to working with you, General Clarke, and other DoD senior leaders to ensure that these reforms meet the intent of Congress and serve the interests of the Department and the men and women of our SOF community.

### Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, I would like to conclude by thanking the committee again for its strong support for our special operations personnel, who serve as a critical linchpin in safeguarding our national security – in wartime and peacetime. As an integral component of the Joint Force, SOF bring unique capabilities that complement and strengthen those of our general purpose forces as well as our interagency and international partners.

I thank the committee again for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to your questions.