

Prepared Remarks for the Hon. Michael Lumpkin, ASD (SO/LIC)

**Counterterrorism Hearing for Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee,
Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities**

Tuesday, April 21, 2:30-3:30 PM

Russell Senate Office Building, Room SR-222

Introduction

Chairman Fischer, Ranking Member Nelson, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today. As I speak, U.S. Special Operations Forces – known as SOF - are deployed across the globe in support of our broader Counterterrorism Mission to defend America, our friends, and our partners, from the threat posed by extremist terrorist organizations. The current security environment is rapidly evolving with new threats and challenging dynamics. In this complex environment, U.S. SOF continue to successfully undertake operations against terrorist organizations. Many of those forces are also doing critical work associated with building the capacity of our partners to conduct their own operations. Of critical importance, but often less visible, the relationships that U.S. SOF develop with partners through persistent engagement over many years are among the most valuable counter-terrorism tools available to the United States.

Additionally, some SOF are poised to take direct action, including strikes against high-value targets, when required. I will provide an overview here and provide you with details on that specific element of SOF efforts, and answer any questions you may have in our closed session. I look forward to describing for you some of the actions conducted recently and answering your questions, both here and in the closed session. But before I do, I want to stress that direct action counter-terrorism operations are only a small part of a larger U.S. counter-

terrorism effort. As I mentioned earlier, beyond direct action, we put great effort into building partner capacity. These efforts are a vital component of the whole-of-government approach to counter-terrorism, complementing the work of the State Department, the Justice Department, Treasury, Homeland Security, and our Intelligence Community, just to name a few. These efforts take time to mature, but our strategy is having positive impacts.

One example of our successful whole-of-government approach is Colombia. In just over a decade, and thanks in large part to U.S. Government assistance and engagement, Colombia has been transformed from a near-failed state into a major regional player with significant political influence, the continent's most professional security forces, and a dynamic economy. Colombia has set the standard for law enforcement and counter-narcotics cooperation. Colombia now exports their security expertise to other countries. The number and effectiveness of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and National Liberation Army guerrillas have been dramatically reduced. These developments are making possible President Santos' deliberate steps to achieve a negotiated peace. Efforts to reach a peace agreement are ongoing, and continued robust U.S. Government engagement is necessary to ensure that lasting success is achieved. Colombia's case highlights what targeted SOF employment, intelligence, and sustained U.S. Government engagement can accomplish.

As you are keenly aware, our Special Operations Forces are unique assets. They benefit from a very rigorous selection process, realistic training, as well as specialized education and equipment. These assets are only effective when the Department of Defense has the authority to employ them properly. While the 2001 AUMF and the 2002 Iraq AUMF provide statutory authority for the current operations I am going to discuss with you in our closed session, I fully

support the President's proposed AUMF to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL. This proposed legislation provides adequate agility to conduct operations necessary to counter ISIL today, while signaling to our friends and enemies that we are serious about addressing future permutations of this very real threat. I urge you to favorably consider it.

I will now take a brief moment to address the counter-terrorism situation in several regions around the world.

Counterterrorism in Iraq and Syria

Since August 2014, U.S. SOF have aggressively pursued ISIL and al-Qa'ida-associated forces operating in Iraq and Syria. U.S. SOF have deployed more than 3,000 personnel to the region and conducted more than 10,000 hours of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions, which have enabled thousands of strikes against ISIL and al-Qa'ida forces in Iraq and Syria.

In Syria, U.S. SOF have taken a simultaneously top-down and bottom-up approach. That is, they are focused on concurrently destroying ISIL's leadership and forces, in order to weaken ISIL's ability to exert territorial control, and to challenge the foundation of its expansionist narrative. Operations against ISIL in Northern Syria are focused on ISIL's network along the border with Turkey. These operations are now expanding beyond the towns immediately around Kobani. In addition, U.S. SOF continue to conduct operations against key members of al-Qa'ida's Syria-based affiliate.

In Iraq, U.S. SOF are engaged in multiple operations to degrade ISIL, while increasing our partner's capabilities. U.S. SOF in Northern Iraq, in coordination with the central

government in Baghdad, have worked with Kurdish Peshmerga forces to great effect. With U.S. SOF-provided training, equipment, and assistance, Peshmerga forces have conducted multiple, complex operations against ISIL in Iraq. These U.S. SOF-led efforts are only a small component of the U.S. Government's broader strategy to train, equip, and advise Iraqi Security Forces.

Counterterrorism in Yemen

In Yemen, I remain deeply troubled by the ongoing military aggression perpetuated by the Houthis and the resulting wide-spread, unstable security conditions. Before the Houthis' destabilizing military actions against the legitimate government of Yemen, U.S. SOF provided critical support to Yemen's security forces to develop their ability to counter the threat of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). AQAP remains al-Qa'ida's most dangerous regional affiliate, and I am concerned by its ability to exploit the current security vacuum in Yemen. U.S. SOF will continue to contribute to the broader U.S. Government's efforts to develop opportunities to restore stability in Yemen and degrade AQAP's operational capabilities.

Counterterrorism in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, U.S. SOF efforts are critical to U.S. Government efforts of solidifying the security gains made over the last decade, and contributing to robust, enduring counterterrorism partnerships. Preventing al-Qa'ida from regenerating in Afghanistan, monitoring potential emerging threats, and preventing attacks on our forces remain our top priorities.

U.S. SOF, in partnership with the Afghans, continue to pressure al-Qa'ida and other groups, such as the Haqqani network, that pose a threat to U.S. and Coalition personnel serving in Afghanistan. U.S. SOF provide critical support to train, advise, and assist the Afghans, in

addition to conducting counterterrorism operations against the remnants of al-Qa'ida. U.S. SOF are building the capacity of the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces, particularly Afghan SOF, so they can serve as the legitimate and capable first line of defense against terrorists seeking to destabilize Afghanistan.

Counterterrorism in Africa

In Africa, the threat environment is varied and evolving with terrorist organizations, such as al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, able to exploit corruption, instability, and popular grievances in order to mobilize support, establish sanctuaries, and carry out attacks. In coordination with broader U.S. Government efforts in Africa, U.S. SOF are deployed across the continent and are working closely with partners to disrupt these threats and support efforts to improve security and stability. U.S. SOF have been cultivating relationships with our local partners in this region for years. We are now starting to see the returns on those early investments, but it is critical that we continue to sufficiently resource these operations.

The recent, high-profile attacks by al-Shabaab in Garissa, Kenya and against the Higher Education Ministry in Somalia serve as reminders of the serious threat posed by this group. U.S. SOF are partnering with African Union forces operating in Somalia, in addition to undertaking unilateral operations against al-Shabaab high-value targets who are part of al-Qa'ida. These efforts have had a significant impact on al-Shabaab's leadership and have forced it to shift personnel and resources out of traditional safe havens along the Somali coast. The coast had been the main source of revenue for the organization, and finances are the lifeblood of terrorist organizations. U.S. SOF continue to work with our regional partners on the ground to maintain

military pressure on al-Shabaab and support other U.S. Government efforts to improve governance and sustain security gains in Somalia.

In West Africa, U.S. SOF are partnering with local and European allies to degrade Boko Haram. With a relatively modest investment of personnel and resources, U.S. SOF have been able to support our allies who are exerting significant pressure on extremists and the facilitation networks that support them. Although Boko Haram continues to pose a significant threat to the Lake Chad Basin region, our local partners are now in a better position to conduct offensive operations against Boko Haram, while safeguarding their respective populations.

Across the Trans-Sahel region, U.S. SOF are partnering with local and European allies to degrade al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb. Taking advantage of multiple programs and authorities, U.S. SOF are supporting our allies to significantly degrade the ability of these groups to operate in the Mali-Niger-Algeria tri-border region. The relationship and cooperation between U.S. SOF and French forces has been particularly important as we work collaboratively to meet shared counterterrorism objectives.

Counterterrorism in Libya

As with Yemen, I am deeply concerned about the political and security situation in Libya. The lack of a unity government that is representative of all of Libya's people has created an environment where militias and terrorist organizations can take hold. ISIL's increased popularity and presence in Libya highlight the need to quickly achieve a lasting political solution. As I mentioned earlier, the President's draft AUMF would provide the appropriate flexibility to confront ISIL elements and threats where conditions merit.

Global Threats

We are also taking steps to understand and address multiple global threats, including: the challenges associated with the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and malign activities undertaken or sponsored by other states. Although these threats cross multiple Geographic Combatant Command boundaries, U.S. SOF are well-postured to mitigate them. U.S. SOF are deployed around the world and are working closely with our allies and partners to leverage our respective strengths and capabilities against these common threats. These long-term partnerships are critical, given that these transnational challenges will take years to effectively address.

Conclusion

Forward deployed U.S. SOF personnel are leveraging unique capabilities and working with partners to address some of the most significant and complex threats that face our country, our allies, and our partners. U.S. SOF represents a relatively small slice of the U.S. Government's efforts against these threats, however, they are achieving significant and meaningful positive effects. I look forward to detailing for you some of our recent activities and answering your questions. Thank you.