

Senate Armed Services Committee
Advance Policy Questions for Mr. Derrick Anderson
Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for
Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict

Duties and Qualifications

Section 138(b)(2) of title 10, U.S. Code, establishes the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD(SOLIC)) as one of 15 Assistant Secretaries of Defense in the Department of Defense (DOD).

1. What is your understanding of the duties and responsibilities of the ASD(SOLIC) as prescribed in current law, DOD issuances, and by practice?

It is my understanding this office carries both statutory and strategic weight for the Department. The law charges the Assistant Secretary of War for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (ASW(SO/LIC)) with the responsibility to oversee and provide direction, authority, and control over special operations—peculiar activities—from organizing, training, and equipping Special Operation Forces (SOF), to providing policy guidance and civilian oversight for sensitive activities. In practice, that has meant ensuring SOF capabilities and investments are aligned with the Secretary’s priorities and the Interim National Defense Strategy; leading oversight of United States Special Operations Command’s (USSOCOM’s) budget and programs; advancing policy initiatives in irregular warfare, counterterrorism, and emerging domains; and building the Secretariat for Special Operations to deliver rigorous civilian oversight. I view the ASW(SO/LIC) as key to strengthening relationships with the military departments, USSOCOM, and Congress, so that SOF priorities are integrated and understood across the Department and beyond. This position is critical to ensuring SOF remains a unique, credible, and sustainable part of the Joint Force with the intent of positioning SOF for future success while upholding the Secretary’s direction and maintaining the trust of our operators, our partners, and the American people.

2. What background and experience do you possess that qualify you to perform the duties and responsibilities of the ASD(SOLIC)?

As a former Green Beret who led two Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha (SFOD-A) teams and as an Executive Officer for two Special Forces Operational Detachment-Bravo (SFOD-B) companies over the course of five deployments, I bring a unique combination of operational experience, strategic perspective, and leadership within both the SOF community and the Department of War. Having served across the spectrum of SOF missions, I understand the demands placed on our operators and the capabilities required to sustain them. That operational foundation is complemented by my Pentagon and policy experience, where I have worked to translate those requirements into resourcing, oversight, and strategy that support the Secretary’s priorities. Equally important, I bring strong, trusted relationships with USSOCOM, the military

departments, OSW leadership, interagency partners, and Congress. These connections allow me to bridge perspectives, anticipate challenges, and build consensus around the initiatives necessary to keep SOF ready, relevant, and aligned to national defense objectives. In this role, my focus will be ensuring SOF remains a highly capable and integrated part of the Joint Force supported by the right authorities, resources, and oversight to deliver on its unique missions. I have the operational credibility, policy expertise, and leadership experience to advance that mission and to serve the Secretary and Department effectively.

3. What leadership and management experience do you possess that you would apply to your service as ASD(SOLIC), if confirmed?

Throughout my career, I have led at every level, from tactical formations in combat to senior staff roles at the enterprise level, and that leadership experience directly applies to the role of ASD(SO/LIC). Operationally, I commanded special operations units in complex environments where success depended on building cohesive teams, setting clear priorities, and managing risk under pressure. Those experiences gave me a deep understanding of what it takes to organize, train, and equip a force that can deliver in crisis. At the strategic level, I have managed large organizations and programs, working across the Pentagon and interagency and with Congress to align resources, policies, and capabilities to national defense priorities. I have led diverse teams of military, civilian, and contractor personnel, and I understand how to build collaboration across cultures and organizations to achieve outcomes that no single office can deliver alone. That blend of operational credibility and strategic leadership equips me to oversee SOF effectively, ensure accountability, and advocate for the force at the highest levels of the Department.

4. If confirmed, what recommendations, if any, would you make regarding changes to the organization, management, and resourcing of the Office of the ASD(SOLIC), so as better to execute its responsibilities for oversight of and advocacy for Special Operations Forces?

If confirmed, I will prioritize a comprehensive review of the organization, management, and resourcing of the OASW(SO/LIC) to assess and ensure it is optimally structured, has the requisite staffing capacity and capability, and resources needed to provide rigorous oversight and effective advocacy for SOF in alignment with the statutory roles and responsibilities of the office while advancing the Secretary's priorities. I would prioritize the analytical capacity to ensure decisions are grounded in data, clarifying roles with USSOCOM and the military departments to keep the oversight constructive, and ensuring the OASW(SO/LIC) is resourced to fully meet its statutory responsibilities.

5. Are there any additional authorities or resources that, in your view, would enhance your ability to perform the duties and functions of the ASD(SOLIC), if confirmed?

If confirmed, I will work closely with the Secretary of War and Congress to ensure that I have the appropriate authorities and resources necessary for effective execution of all

statutory and other assigned responsibilities.

Conflicts of Interest

Federal ethics laws, to include 18 U.S.C. §208, prohibit government employees from participating in matters where they, or certain family members or organizations with which they have certain relationships, have a financial interest.

- 6. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to disclose any potential conflicts of interest, including investments, business ties, family relationships, or other connections that could be perceived as influencing your decision making?**

I agree to comply with all conflicts of interest disclosure requirements set forth in the Ethics in Government Act and implementing regulations.

- 7. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, that if a conflict of interest arises, you will recuse yourself from participating in any relevant decisions regarding that specific matter?**

I agree to comply with all recusal requirements under 18 U.S.C. § 208 and implementing regulations.

- 8. Do you commit, without qualification, if confirmed, to decision-making on the merits and exclusively in the public interest, without regard to private gain or personal benefit?**

I commit to deciding matters on the merits based on the public interest, without regard to any private gain or personal benefit

Relationships

- 9. If confirmed, what would be your relationship with, and on what issues would you expect to engage with:**

- a. The Secretary of Defense**

If confirmed, my relationship with the Secretary of War would be one of candor, trust, and support. I would ensure the Secretary has independent, fact-based assessments of SOF readiness, capabilities, and resources, while faithfully executing the Secretary's guidance and priorities. My role would be to serve as both a trusted advisor and a

responsible steward providing civilian oversight of SOF on the Secretary's behalf and ensuring that USSOCOM and the Services are aligned to his direction.

b. The Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

If confirmed, my relationship with the Under Secretary of War for Policy would be one of close alignment and support. I would ensure that SOF-related policy is integrated into the Department's broader defense strategy and that the ASW(SO/LIC) contributes effectively to USW(P)'s work with allies, partners, and interagency counterparts. At the same time, I would keep the Under Secretary fully informed on the ASW(SO/LIC)'s Title 10 responsibilities, ensuring transparency and unity of effort while carrying out my oversight role for SOF.

c. The Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security (USD(I&S))

If confirmed, I would work in close partnership with the Under Secretary of War for Intelligence and Security to ensure SOF activities are aligned with Department-wide intelligence, surveillance, and security policies. The ASW(SO/LIC) has a distinct oversight role for sensitive activities and special access programs, and I would make it a priority to keep USW(I&S) fully informed and engaged in those processes. My goal would be to ensure unity of effort, avoid duplication, and strengthen the integration of SOF capabilities within the broader defense intelligence enterprise.

d. The Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering

If confirmed, my working relationship with the Under Secretary of War for Research and Engineering (USW(R&E)) would be highly collaborative and mutually supportive. Given USW(R&E)'s responsibility as DoW's chief technology officer overseeing science and technology, prototyping, testing and transition of new capabilities, and innovation programs across the Services, I would coordinate closely to ensure SOF's unique requirements are actively considered into emerging technologies and that our readiness, equipment, and capability gaps are visible. I'll keep USW(R&E) informed when SOF has technical or modernization needs, advocate for SOF inclusion in programs under development, and use their analytic and engineering insights to help refine requirements, accelerate technology transition, and mitigate risk. A strong relationship between the ASW(SO/LIC) and the Under Secretary will ensure the SOF enterprise has superior technologies in all warfighting domains.

e. The Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment

If confirmed, I would engage the Under Secretary of War for Acquisition and Sustainment (USW(A&S)) in a tightly coordinated way to ensure that SOF's acquire-and-maintain lifecycle needs are fully accounted for in the Department's acquisition, procurement, and sustainment policies. I would push for greater visibility by USW(A&S) in SOF-peculiar programs at key acquisition milestones, ensure sustainment costs and logistics considerations are built into requirements from the outset, and advocate for

quicker transitions of prototyped solutions into production and deployment. This relationship would balance respect for USW(A&S)'s authorities and ensure special operations acquisition and sustainment programs and projects are delivered on time, within budget, meet special operations prioritized capability requirements, and support execution of Department national security objectives.

f. The Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness

If confirmed, I would work in close partnership with the Under Secretary of War for Personnel and Readiness (USW(P&R)) to ensure SOF's readiness, training, and personnel policies are fully integrated with DoW-wide standards and priorities. By keeping USW(P&R) informed about SOF's unique requirements and challenges, I would help align resources, policy guidance, and readiness assessments so SOF is sustainable, capable, and resilient. If confirmed, I will work closely with this team on SOF personnel programs and policies that best achieve the special operations forces recruitment, training, promotion, talent management, and readiness objectives.

g. The Secretaries of the Military Departments and the Service Chiefs

If confirmed, I would maintain a close, collaborative, and respectful relationship with the Secretaries of the military departments and the Service chiefs, focused on ensuring SOF's pace, capabilities, and readiness are harmonized with Service policies, resources, and personnel systems. I would engage regularly with the Service secretaries and chiefs to ensure that SOF-peculiar requirements (training, unique equipment, readiness reporting, force posture) are integrated into Service planning, budgeting, and force structure decisions. I would also seek to resolve any friction points by establishing clear channels of communication, well-defined roles, and joint processes so that the ASW(SO/LIC) is a partner. I would also aim to foster transparency and accountability: ensuring that the Services understand when SOF-peculiar equities are involved, that the ASW(SO/LIC) is part of the approval / oversight process for those equities, and that there is mutual respect for both the unique aspects of SOF and the broader Service missions. The relationship is one of cooperation, shared responsibility, and mutual respect, with the ASW(SO/LIC) acting both as an advocate for SOF and a steward of the Department's expectations for readiness and performance.

10. If confirmed, specifically what actions would you take to develop and sustain an open, transparent, and productive relationship between your office and Congress, and the Senate Armed Services Committee, in particular?

I consider my relationship with the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Congress critically important to establishing the roles, responsibilities, and authorities of ASW(SO/LIC) for oversight of and advocacy for the SOF enterprise. If confirmed, I would ensure Congressional committees receive regular, accurate, and data-driven updates on SOF readiness, capability gaps, and risk areas. I would prioritize clear, honest communication about trade-offs, assumptions, and costs so there are no surprises. I would

make the office of the ASW(SO/LIC) responsive to Congressional staff requests, invite site visits or exercise attendance when possible, and make complex data accessible and actionable. I would work with the ASW for Legislative Affairs to ensure a transparent and effective relationship through regular engagements and transparency on all issues within the purview of the ASW(SO/LIC), including testimony, briefings, reports, and other information to help the committee fulfill its oversight and legislative responsibilities.

Major Challenges and Priorities

11. In your view, what are the major challenges that you would expect to confront if confirmed to be the ASD(SOLIC)?

The ASW(SO/LIC) and SOF enterprise must work simultaneously to deter China, counter enduring threats from violent extremists and rogue states, and respond to crisis situations around the world. If confirmed, I will work to increase SOF's alignment with the Joint Force's efforts to deter China through modernizing the force to fill capability gaps and serve as a force multiplier. Additionally, if confirmed, I will ensure SOF is manned, trained, and equipped to assist the Department's larger efforts to protect the homeland. ASW(SO/LIC) and USSOCOM must enable SOF to remain ahead of our adversaries and competitors in both quality of operators and critical support personnel and in technological advancements.

12. If confirmed, specifically what management actions would you take to address each of these challenges?

The SOF enterprise is a high-performing critical formation; however, strong civilian oversight is imperative to ensure its modernization efforts remain aligned with Department and national priorities. If confirmed, I look forward to working with senior Department leadership, the interagency, and Congress to advance SOF's capability to support the Joint Force and prioritize the well-being of its operators and critical support personnel. Additionally, if confirmed, I will work closely with the Commander of USSOCOM to ensure SOF has the necessary authorities, capabilities, and resources to effectively fulfill its role as our nation's tip of the spear. Finally, if confirmed, I look forward to working across the Department, interagency, and with international partners to identify and present options for SOF to advance our nation's security.

Nature of the Global Security Environment

13. What do you view as the most concerning near, mid, and long-term challenges to U.S. national security?

I believe some of the most concerning national security challenges ahead are the aggressive expansions of peer and near-peer powers in military capability and geopolitical influence, which threaten to erode U.S. strategic advantage. The rapid pace

of technological change—e.g., AI, cyber, space, unmanned systems—where adversaries may exploit gaps in policy, defenses, or norms, is another challenge. Persistent and evolving threats from state and non-state actors in the asymmetric space including terrorism, illicit supply chains, foreign interference, and how they affect U.S. infrastructure, public trust, and global stability also need to be addressed. This all needs to be balanced with challenges in retaining readiness under constrained resources and stretched operational and training demand, plus the need to strengthen our alliance networks, industrial base, and resilience in long-term domains.

In light of this challenging global security environment, we are committed to restoring peace through strength now and into the future. We will prioritize homeland defense, deter China, increase burden-sharing with allies and partners, and rebuild the U.S. defense industrial base. SOF is a critical element of this strategy. These forces are ready, lethal, and able to deliver unique capabilities to address the Department's top priorities and to win the nation's wars.

Civilian Oversight of the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM)

Section 922 of the FY 2017 NDAA, as modified by subsequent NDAA's, empowered the ASD(SOLIC) to serve as the "service secretary-like" civilian official with responsibility for the oversight of and advocacy for Special Operations Forces. Among other reforms, the law defined the administrative chain of command for USSOCOM as running through the ASD(SOLIC) to the Secretary of Defense for issues impacting the readiness and organization of Special Operations Forces, special operations-peculiar resources and equipment, and civilian personnel management, mirroring the relationship between the Secretaries of the Military Departments and their service chiefs, and placing ASD(SOLIC) immediately subordinate to the Secretary of Defense in such "service secretary-like" matters.

14. If confirmed, how would you distinguish between and balance the duties and responsibilities associated with the ASD(SOLIC)'s "service secretary-like" role with the ASD(SOLIC)'s duties and responsibilities related to special operations policy and operational issues?

If confirmed, I would balance these dual responsibilities by ensuring each role has its own dedicated framework, staff, and processes, while driving strong integration at the leadership level. For the "service-secretary-like" duties, I would maintain frequent, direct involvement in oversight of USSOCOM's organize-train-equip and civilian personnel matters using readiness metrics, structured reviews, budget/program inputs, and working closely with the Service Components to ensure compliance and performance. Simultaneously for policy responsibilities, I would ensure early engagement in strategic planning, formulation of low-intensity conflict/irregular warfare policy, and coordination with USW(P) and the interagency. To avoid conflict or duplication, I would establish clear decision gates and delineated authorities so that policy and administrative/organizational actions are aligned, mutually reinforcing, and transparently communicated. In practice, that means triaging issues by urgency/risk and

setting priorities for the two teams. Balancing the dual responsibilities of the ASW(SO/LIC) requires a cooperative and integrated approach. In a resource-constrained environment, this balance becomes even more critical ensuring that SOF maintains its qualitative advantage while staying strategically aligned with national defense objectives.

15. What is your understanding of the relationship between the ASD(SOLIC) and the Commander, USSOCOM?

The relationship between the ASW(SO/LIC) and the Commander, USSOCOM, is a vital civilian-military partnership based on collaboration and clear lines of authority. The ASW(SO/LIC) is a civilian leadership position with “service-secretary-like” administrative authority over USSOCOM for special operations-peculiar matters, namely the organization, training, equipping, resourcing, readiness, and civilian personnel of SOF. While the ASW(SO/LIC) exercises authority, direction, and control in these administrative domains, USSOCOM remains responsible for executing SOF missions, operations, and deployments under the operational chain of command. The two offices must coordinate closely on budget, readiness, capability requirements, and policy inputs to ensure SOF is prepared, sustainable, and aligned with Department of War priorities. The dynamic is built on constant communication and a shared vision, integrating civilian guidance and military experience to ensure SOF remains a highly capable, ready, and accountable force for present and future challenges. This ensures a comprehensive approach to special operations, where collaborative policy, resource, and administrative oversight strengthen the entire enterprise.

16. What is your understanding of the role of the ASD(SOLIC) in:

a. The formulation and submission of USSOCOM’s annual budget request.

I understand that the ASW(SO/LIC) receives fiscal guidance from the Deputy Secretary of War (DSW) based on the recommendation of Director, Cost Analysis and Program Evaluation (CAPE)). The ASW(SO/LIC) provides the fiscal guidance and direction to the Commander of USSOCOM. In addition, the ASW(SO/LIC) reviews and approves the USSOCOM Program Objective Memorandum (POM) and President’s Budget submissions.

b. Approving programs of record and the acquisition of special operations-peculiar capabilities by USSOCOM.

It is my understanding that the ASW(SO/LIC) partners in the development and approval of two documents that define programs of record: the Special Operations Command Requirements Evaluation Board (SOCREB) and the Program Objective Memorandum (POM).

c. Overseeing the organization of USSOCOM headquarters and service components.

If confirmed, oversight should include regular readiness reviews using standardized SOF metrics and independent analytic capabilities within the OASW(SO/LIC) to assess risk, performance, and resource needs, periodic audits/evaluations of high-risk training, acquisition, and sustainment, clear policy and process documentation defining roles and responsibilities between the ASW(SO/LIC) and USSOCOM, and active participation in governing bodies to ensure synchronized policy, budgeting, and performance. Oversight involves monitoring and evaluating USSOCOM activities, plans, and policies to ensure compliance with laws, regulations, and ethical standards, ensuring they achieve expected results, and offer optimized value for the allotted resources.

d. Ensuring the readiness of Special Operations Forces.

If confirmed, I would oversee USSOCOM's readiness posture by reviewing and approving budget/program proposals (including the POM), setting readiness standards, staffing the Secretariat for Special Operations to monitor performance, and ensuring SOF's capabilities align with overall Defense policy and resources. This includes ensuring policy and resource are aligned with the INDSG and departmental priorities. Overseeing the allocation of resources and advocating for SOF capabilities within the Department of War ensures our SOF formations are properly resourced and mission ready.

e. Actions relating to the culture, ethics, and accountability of Special Operations Forces.

If confirmed, I would establish and enforce a culture in SOF that places professionalism, dignity, and accountability at its core. I would implement it with effective leadership that visibly holds subordinates responsible for misconduct, ensuring robust, accessible reporting mechanisms so misconduct is reported without fear. I would mandate transparent investigation and resolution of incidents with learning and corrective actions, collaborating with the Department's Inspector General, legal, and policy offices to ensure oversight is meaningful. I would also lean in to integrate culture and ethics metrics into how readiness and performance are assessed so that ethical lapses are seen and treated as readiness risks. I would ensure adherence to the highest standards of professionalism and ethical conduct. This includes ensuring USSOCOM policies and actions cultivate an environment and reinforce a culture that holds commanders accountable for upholding these standards within the force.

17. In your view, does the administrative chain of command pursuant to section 138 of Title 10, U.S. Code, allow for any official below the Secretary of Defense to exercise authority, direction, and control over the ASD(SOLIC) with regard to his/her "service secretary-like" responsibilities?

Pursuant to section 138 of Title 10, U.S. Code, "the Assistant Secretary is immediately subordinate to the Secretary of Defense. Unless otherwise directed by the President, no officer below the Secretary may intervene to exercise authority, direction, or control over the Assistant Secretary in the discharge of such responsibilities." I understand the law

explicitly defined this to ensure direct accountability and civilian oversight for these specific duties.

Use of Military Force

18. If confirmed, what factors would you consider in making recommendations to the Secretary of Defense and the USD(P) on the operational use of Special Operations Forces?

If confirmed, I will focus on ensuring the capabilities and authorities necessary for SOF to confront our global challenges remain at the cutting edge. It is my belief we need to be proactive with our SOF, positioning them to support the Department's strategic priorities, including disrupting threats to the U.S. homeland and deterring China. SOF plays an important role in providing the Secretary and President with options to protect the nation that enable flexibility, manage escalation, and provide high return on investment.

SOF's most important asset is its people. If confirmed, I will work with USSOCOM on efforts to maintain the resilience of our force by mitigating the impact of sustained combat deployments on our warfighters and their families.

If confirmed, I look forward to working across the U.S. Government, and particularly with USSOCOM and our international partners to ensure the SOF enterprise is postured and able to execute our national defense strategy, to include our nation's most challenging military missions.

19. Do you believe that current legal authorities, including the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force, enable the Department to carry out counterterrorism operations and activities at a level you believe to be necessary and appropriate?

The 2001 AUMF remains the key legal authority for countering al-Qa'ida, its affiliates and its successors, including the Islamic State Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), that pose a threat to the United States homeland and our people around the globe.

The United States has been highly successful in degrading the terrorist groups responsible for attacking our nation on September 11, 2001. Since February of this year, it is my understanding that the Department has conducted numerous successful strikes targeting a variety of terrorist organizations in the Middle East and Africa. We have seen our operations put ISIS on the defensive and cease planning for attacks outside the regions it operates.

If confirmed, I expect to work closely with counterparts in other departments and agencies, and with Congress, to ensure our authorities are appropriate to continue protecting the homeland from terrorist threats.

20. What groups are currently assessed to be associated forces of al Qaeda for purposes of the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force, and in what countries are U.S. military direct action operations against such groups authorized?

I understand that the 2001 AUMF is the legal basis for operations against the following groups or individuals: al-Qa'ida; the Taliban; certain other terrorist or insurgent groups affiliated with al-Qa'ida and the Taliban in Afghanistan; al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula; al-Shabaab; al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM); al-Qa'ida in Syria; and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

It is my understanding that the United States has used military force for counterterrorism direct action operations under the 2001 AUMF in areas such as Afghanistan, the Middle East, and Africa.

21. What factors would you consider, if confirmed, in recommending to the Secretary of Defense and USD(P) which forces of other nations should be eligible for collective self-defense by U.S. Special Operations Forces, and under what conditions?

If confirmed, I would consider the degree to which collective self-defense would support achieving U.S. national security and specific mission objectives when operating by, with, and through our partners. The use of collective self-defense should also seek to bolster the protection of U.S. forces and facilities abroad and maintain the resolve of our partners. Rules of engagement authorizing U.S. forces to defend foreign partner forces should clearly identify the particular partners eligible for such protection and whether limits exist on the groups or individuals against which such force may be used. Any use of force in defense of foreign partner forces must adhere to the law of armed conflict and be necessary and proportionate to address the particular attack or threat of imminent attack against the partner force.

Special Operations Missions

22. Do you believe the special operations activities identified in section 167 of title 10, U.S. Code, remain relevant and appropriate?

Yes, the activities in section 167 of title 10, U.S. Code remain relevant and appropriate, and SOF are uniquely manned, trained, and equipped to undertake these activities.

23. What changes, if any, would you recommend?

I would not recommend any changes to Section 167 of Title 10 at this time.

Future of Special Operations Forces

24. In your view, what are the major challenges facing U.S. Special Operations Forces in the near-, mid-, and long-term?

I believe that in the near term, maintaining a competitive advantage over China as well as other competitors, will dominate our challenges. We must continue to focus our SOF on deterrence and preparing for conflict in a highly contested operational environment while maintaining sufficient capabilities and capacities to respond swiftly and effectively to crisis, in addition to continuing to diminish terrorist threats. This is a difficult balance for special operations forces to achieve when persistent, global demand for SOF remains high, strains resources, and day-to-day commitments compete with preparing for high end conflict. Leveraging our most capable partners, especially for counterterrorism and competition in the gray zone, could reduce some of the pressure on U.S. personnel to solve regional problems.

In the mid-term, I believe that adapting to the rapidly changing technology landscape and shifting geopolitical and geoeconomic conditions will be a focus for SOF. Potential adversaries are rapidly developing advanced technologies at an unprecedented pace. SOF must adapt to operate with and against these technologies. Integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into special operations forces is both a challenge and opportunity. SOF must leverage AI, especially for intelligence analysis, targeting, and autonomous and unmanned systems, but must mitigate potential vulnerabilities, and be mindful of ethical concerns. Another area of concern is the proliferation of advanced weapon systems not only to previously less capable states but also to non-state actors. SOF must develop sufficient capabilities and capacities to counter these threats, including in remote and austere situations where there is insufficient support available from the remainder of the Joint Force. Moreover, the fluid nature of the geopolitical and geoeconomic landscape demands that special operations forces must be prepared to work by, with, and through a range of multiple partners with widely ranging capabilities and disparate political objectives that may be at odds with U.S. objectives.

The biggest challenge to SOF in the long run will be maintaining a decisive edge in the evolving nature of conflict. The trajectory of future conflicts is toward increased complexity, ambiguity, and imprecise distinction between conflict and peace. Special operators via their selection, training, experience, and adept agility are particularly suited to this ill-defined future environment of known unknowns and unknown unknowns. In particular, the clandestine nature of many special operations activities will be much more difficult to maintain with the proliferation of surveillance technologies, both government and privately owned, and the interconnection of all things via the internet into a near seamless web of knowable data. SOF must develop advanced anti-detection and deception techniques and technologies to defeat this threat. In addition, the ubiquitous use of autonomous systems and swarming technologies will fundamentally change the operating landscape. SOF must adopt and develop counter capabilities to these

technologies. Finally, the emerging nature of space-based capabilities is both crucial to special operations forces' capabilities and a vulnerability. Space-based assets such for communications, navigation, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance enable the operational precision we expect and demand from SOF. However, over-reliance on space-based capabilities becomes an immediate impediment to that precision if access is lost and there is no equally capable replacement modality. Effective redundancy that enables operational precision will be a developmental and investment challenge for SOF.

25. In your assessment, are U.S. Special Operations Forces appropriately organized, trained, and equipped to address these challenges? What changes, if any, would you recommend to the organization, training, and equipping of U.S. Special Operations Forces?

If confirmed, I look forward to working with my partners inside and outside the Department to review and assess the present and future challenges and how special operations forces can adapt, organize, train, be equipped, and ready for those challenges.

26. In your view, what should be the role of the ASD(SOLIC) in identifying and implementing efforts regarding the organization, training, and equipping of U.S. Special Operations Forces?

If confirmed, I would use the statutory and policy authorities to, in coordination with Commander, USSOCOM, to ensure SOF are organized, trained, and equipped to meet emerging threats. This means leading efforts to identify gaps via readiness reviews, threat forecasting, and requirements validation, setting standards and policies for training, equipment and force structure, aligning budget and resourcing (through oversight of USSOCOM's POM and related processes) to ensure that SOF-peculiar capabilities are delivered and sustained. This also means ensuring robust coordination with the Military Departments, USW(P), A&S, R&E, and others so that SOF readiness, operations, and modernization are fully resourced, executable missions.

27. What technology areas do you believe pose the greatest opportunities for Special Operations Forces?

In my view, the technology areas that offer the greatest opportunity for SOF are those that will accelerate the force to maintain battlefield superiority in an increasingly technologically advanced, contested, and congested multi-domain environment. Augmenting cognitive decision space force-multiplication via AI and machine learning, robotics and autonomous systems, and human performance focused area. These technologies serve as force multipliers enabling small, agile teams to operate more effectively by improving situational awareness, speeding up decision-making, and enhancing both physical and cognitive capabilities in an area where large amounts of data must inform decision and actions quickly – predicting threats, optimizing, mission-planning, and creating a shared real-time operational picture from the tactical edge to strategic echelons. Robotics and autonomous systems—like drones, ground robots, and underwater vehicles—expand operational reach, reduce risk, and extend the reach of SOF

to support larger joint force objectives. Cyber and information warfare capabilities also play a critical role, allowing SOF to shape information environments, protect communications, and conduct digital operations in contested spaces. Altogether, these emerging technologies are redefining how SOF can operate in the most complex and denied environments, which support both the core missions of SOF and enable SOF to integrate more effectively into overall strategic objectives.

Combatting Terrorism

28. What is your view of the U.S. counterterrorism strategy and the role of USSOCOM in supporting that strategy?

My understanding is this Administration has not yet completed drafting a new counterterrorism strategy. If confirmed, I will work with the Administration on its approach to developing a counterterrorism strategy that integrates military and non-military efforts to combat the threat of terrorism at home and abroad. Given the other strategic threats facing our country, our approach to counterterrorism must be done in a sustainable and cost-effective way. The United States must be adaptive in its approach in countering and preventing terrorism, recognizing that today's terrorist landscape is more fluid and complex than ever.

I understand that USSOCOM plays a key role in this process as the Department's Coordinating Authority to unify counterterrorism planning across DoW. If confirmed, I will work to ensure we are focusing on the appropriate lines of effort and are aligned with the whole-of-government approach.

29. How would you assess the effectiveness of the U.S. counterterrorism strategy in addressing the threat posed by Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs)?

If confirmed, I would assess the effectiveness of our counterterrorism operations based on how we disrupt the threats posed by terrorist groups and the sustainability of our operations. Our goal must be to evolve to more cost-effective approaches to degrade the terrorist threats to the United States and our citizens.

If confirmed, I would advocate for establishing clear policy objectives and effective assessment metrics that make it easier to review progress and measure success, in close consultation with interagency partners. Furthermore, I would seek to empower our allies to provide for their own defenses to counter these organizations so we can reinforce the Administration's priority of defending the homeland and countering China in the Indo-Pacific.

30. What changes, if any, would you recommend to the strategy or associated measures of effectiveness?

If confirmed, I would focus on oversight mechanisms for understanding the implementation of the strategy, and whether the existing measures of effectiveness

are precise and being used in adjusting our CT approaches across the DoW. A standardized assessment methodology and metrics could enable a more proactive and deliberate approach to CT, which could enable the DoW to put in place more cost-effective and sustainable approaches to counter enduring terrorism threats.

31. What is your assessment of the threat posed by Al Qaeda, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and other VEOs, to the U.S. homeland, and western interests, more broadly? Which group or groups, in your view, currently present the greatest threat to the United States?

The ideologies and past actions of al-Qa'ida and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) demonstrate that they continue to pose a threat to U.S. citizens at home and abroad, as well as to our allies and interests. Both organizations have global reach through their affiliates (e.g., Africa and Middle East) that gives them strength and resilience. I am particularly concerned about the threats posed by ISIS-Khorosan, ISIS in Syria, al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, and al-Shabaab. If confirmed, I will consult with others in the DoW and the intelligence community to seek greater understanding on which al-Qa'ida and ISIS groups pose the greatest threats to the U.S. homeland.

Section 127e of title 10, United States Code, authorizes the provision of support (including training, funding, and equipment) by U.S. Special Operations Forces to regular forces, irregular forces, and individuals supporting or facilitating military operations to combat terrorism.

32. What is your assessment of this authority and its role in supporting U.S. counterterrorism objectives?

The Section 127e authority is a valuable and tested mechanism enabling SOF to conduct counterterrorism operations with an array of foreign regular and irregular partners. If confirmed, I intend to maintain the effectiveness and efficiency of existing programs supported by Section 127e. Section 127e offers a cost-effective path for the United States to bolster its security interests by enabling partners and allies to pursue shared goals against high-threat terrorist organizations. If confirmed, I will look to identify areas for improvement in the authority itself, or its implementation, to better support U.S. strategic objectives, and ensure all activities funded through it are aligned with the INDSG.

Intelligence Operations

33. How are responsibilities for the oversight of the intelligence activities and programs of Special Operations Forces delineated between the Office of the USD(I&S) and the Office of the ASD(SOLIC)?

I understand that ASW(SO/LIC), USW (I&S), and the DoW Senior Intelligence Oversight Official (SIOO) acting together are the primary oversight officials for all

U.S. Special Operations Forces intelligence and intelligence-related activities and programs. A strong partnership between the ASW(SO/LIC), the USW(I&S), and their respective Deputies is critical in the development and effectiveness of many DoW activities in the “gray zone,” which will enable DoW’s ability to deter adversaries short of armed conflict and reestablish deterrence. If confirmed, we will work closely together with the SIOO, who I understand provides independent oversight within the DoW of intelligence and intelligence-related activities. I will continue this close partnership to ensure that the United States is best postured to maximize effects. In doing so, I will ensure defense intelligence activities adhere to appropriate coordination processes within the Office of the Secretary of War.

34. In your view, how are intelligence operations carried out by Special Operations Forces different from those carried out by others in the Intelligence Community?

I understand that SOF intelligence operations are focused on DoW requirements and priorities. These priorities may differ from those of the Intelligence Community (IC) in that they are sometimes more tactical, focused on support to military operations or preparation of military operations. This intelligence enables a commander to make decisions that reduces risk to force and can create opportunities for further collection and exploitation. SOF missions require accurate, detailed, and timely intelligence that only integrated, multi-disciplinary collection and analysis can provide. It is essential that SOF intelligence operations are conducted pursuant to applicable law and policy, and subject to the requisite intelligence oversight rules, consistent with all DoW intelligence activities.

35. If confirmed, how would you ensure that intelligence activities carried out by Special Operations Forces are properly coordinated with activities carried out by the Intelligence Community?

If confirmed, I would ensure SOF activities are coordinated with broader IC by anchoring everything to the governing framework. To ensure SOF intelligence activities are properly coordinated with the IC, I will adhere to all existing IC Directives and DoW Directives prescribing the methods and frequency of communication with the IC. In the service-secretary-like role of the ASW(SO/LIC), these policies and processes are critical to maintaining proper civilian oversight of SOF as directed by Congress.

Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

36. What is your assessment of the threat posed by WMD to the United States?

Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) continue to pose a significant threat to the Homeland and U.S. forces, allies, partners, and U.S. interests globally. The threat to the United States is dynamic, as China continues its nuclear buildup, and threats posed by Russia, Iran, North Korea, terrorist organizations pursuing WMD-related

activities remain. Nations will continue to seek chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons to try to gain an advantage over the United States. Violent extremist organizations with the intent to acquire, develop, and use WMDs against the United States and its allies also remain a threat.

37. What is your understanding of USSOCOM's responsibilities under the Unified Campaign Plan for synchronizing the Department's efforts to counter weapons of mass destruction?

I understand the responsibilities of the Commander, USSOCOM, include providing the Secretary with recommendations on priorities and the allocation of resources to counter weapons of mass destruction. I also understand that USSOCOM serves as the Coordinating Authority for DoW's efforts to support CWMD activities. In this role, USSOCOM works within DoW, the interagency, and with international partners to share a common understanding of the United States' WMD concerns, develop plans to mitigate threats, and advocate for capabilities needed to fight through WMD-contaminated environments. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Commander, USSOCOM, to support him in meeting those responsibilities and ensure he receives the support and resources needed to undertake this no-fail mission.

Irregular Warfare

Nation states are becoming more aggressive in challenging U.S. interests through the use of asymmetric means that often fall below the threshold of conventional conflict, commonly referred to as irregular warfare and "gray zone operations." Section 1092 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024 expressed the Sense of Congress that "the Secretary of Defense has the authority to conduct irregular warfare operations, to defend the United States, allies of the United States, and interests of the United States, when such operations have been appropriately authorized."

38. What is your understanding of the threat to U.S. interests posed by adversaries in the irregular warfare domain?

China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran challenge us daily in the space between routine statecraft and open warfare as part of an increasingly coordinated campaign to achieve their objectives below the threshold of armed conflict and reshape the balance of power against the interests of the American people. In this space, our adversaries use their instruments of national power in a warlike fashion to undermine our national security interests but at a level they assess will not warrant a response from the United States. There is a military component to this approach that is commonly referred to as asymmetric, hybrid, or irregular warfare. It falls upon the DoW to address these activities as a part of a broader, whole-of-government approach.

39. What should be the guiding principles of any DOD strategy to counter the use of irregular warfare by adversaries?

To counter our adversaries' use of irregular warfare, the Department of War must be able to conduct a range of military activities below the threshold of armed conflict that allow the United States to maintain warfighting advantage vis-a-vis our adversaries. Doing this as part of a whole of government approach that combines such military actions with non-military tools will maximize U.S. influence and access abroad and illuminate and expose malign activity, deterring adversaries from actions most detrimental to our national security, and shaping the environment in ways necessary to prevail in conflict, should deterrence fail.

40. In your view, is the Department of Defense specifically, and the United States Government more broadly, organized to effectively operate in the irregular warfare domain?

Absent the institutionalization of irregular warfare as a core competency, we will remain underprepared for the enduring requirements across the spectrum of conflict from peace to war, the latter of which is no longer exclusively traditional or irregular but almost always a fusion of both. The DoW must be postured to employ our own irregular warfare capabilities proactively to compete, deter, and win. If confirmed, I will work to ensure irregular warfare is a core competency that enables us to do just that.

41. What do you perceive to be the appropriate role for Special Operations Forces in executing such a strategy?

SOF must remain at the forefront of America's defense strategy, providing unique and asymmetric advantages to the Joint Force and the nation. With an annual investment of less than 2% of the Department's budget and only 3% of its forces, SOF provide an outsized return by providing scalable and tailorable options for our senior leaders to defend against and respond to threats from our adversaries to protect and preserve the American people and their interests.

SOF do this by (1) shaping the environment to prevent conflict, (2) preparing through partnerships, (3) enabling the Joint Force to prevail, and (4) preserving strategic focus.

42. Do you believe that Special Operations Forces have the appropriate authorities and capabilities to operate effectively in this domain of warfare? Please explain your answer.

SOF authorities allow the Department to conduct irregular warfare activities by, with, and through foreign forces, irregular forces, groups, or individuals since SOF often have access and placement to adversary operating areas that other U.S. forces lack. The efforts of these local forces ultimately protect the U.S. homeland and Americans abroad by maintaining continuous pressure on strategic competitors and terrorists. If confirmed, I will examine existing authorities in line with the National Defense Strategy to evaluate whether additional authorities are needed achieve our objectives.

43. In your view, do Special Operations Forces require additional authorities and capabilities to provide support of irregular warfare? Please explain your answer.

If confirmed, I will examine existing authorities in line with the National Defense Strategy to evaluate whether additional authorities are needed achieve our objectives. If gaps in authorities are identified, I will work with Congress to develop and pass new legislation to overcome them. By imposing costs on our adversaries, irregular warfare helps prevent conflict and manage escalation—however, should conflict become necessary, IW allows us to begin with a strategic advantage.

Section 127d of title 10, United States Code, authorizes the provision of support (including training, funding, and equipment) by U.S. Special Operations Forces to regular forces, irregular forces, and individuals supporting or facilitating irregular warfare operations.

44. What is your assessment of this authority and its role in supporting irregular warfare objectives?

Congress acted in 2024 to codify, expand, and clarify the intent for the former Section 1202—now 10 U.S.C. § 127d—irregular warfare authority. Your efforts resulted in increased Combatant Command interest in irregular warfare activities as they look for more opportunities to employ SOF to counter adversaries. By ensuring SOF’s ability to train, communicate with, and support partners and allies under a variety of conditions across the spectrum of conflict and competition, our SOF deliver an unparalleled asymmetric advantage to the Joint Force and Nation.

If confirmed, I will work with Congress to sustain and adapt the Department’s operational and fiscal authorities at pace with mission needs to ensure we are providing the Secretary and the President with the appropriate irregular warfare options across the spectrum of conflict.

Size, Structure, and Posture of Special Operations Forces

Section 908 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025 requires that as part of the annual Defense Planning Guidance, the Secretary of Defense include guidance with respect to the size, structure, posture, and other force development planning priorities specific to special operations forces.

45. In your view, what role should the ASD SOLIC play in supporting implementation of the requirements under section 908?

My understanding of the intent of section 908 is to ensure that SOF size, structure, and posture requirements are adequately and explicitly captured in Defense Planning Guidance and any other pertinent Department-wide strategic documents. This is

critical to SOF, and as the ASW(SO/LIC), I would work with key Department stakeholders to ensure the implementation of this requirement. I would also ensure that the SOF contributions are adequately and explicitly captured in the Joint Warfighting Concept, the Joint Concept for Competing, and the Strategy for Operations in the Information Environment—all key drivers for future SOF force development and design.

If confirmed, I would ensure annual progress reports to Congress on the status of the implementation of this requirement. I would exercise proactive leadership, diligent commitment, and strong commitment to SOF advocacy to refine, reassess, and monitor implementation of the annual section 908 recommendations. I would also lead the development and publication of any pertinent guidance or resourcing shortfalls within their Title 10 authorities, roles, and responsibilities.

46. In your view, what role should Special Operations Forces play in supporting the Joint Force?

In my view, SOF has a significant, critical, and outsized role in enabling the Joint Force. SOF provides warfighter advantage through unique capabilities, access and placement, and attributable and non-attributable kinetic and non-kinetic effects. SOF also prepares for and conducts unique mission sets left of conflict, in crisis response, countering violent extremist organizations, and building partnerships with allies and partners, all of which create increased options for senior leadership and the Joint Force in deterrence and conflict.

47. In your view, is the size, structure, and posture of Special Operations Forces appropriate to effectively fulfill its statutorily assigned missions pursuant to section 167 of Title 10, U.S. Code and support the Joint Force in implementing the National Defense Strategy?

If confirmed, I will review the size, structure, and posture of SOF in the context of the Administration's priorities and the National Defense Strategy and make recommendations for change, if needed.

Special Operations Enabling Capabilities

Special Operations Forces rely extensively on enabling capabilities provided by Military Service general purpose forces to ensure mission success.

48. What is the role of the ASD(SOLIC) in ensuring that the special operations requirements for enabling capabilities are properly articulated to and provided by the Military Services?

The ASW(SO/LIC) is responsible for advocating on behalf of SOF at the DoW level to ensure these requirements are not only well understood, but also integrated into service planning, programming, and resourcing processes. This involves working

closely with the services, the Joint Staff, and USSOCOM to make sure SOF-unique needs are clearly articulated and prioritized within broader defense efforts. Ultimately, the ASW(SO/LIC) helps ensure that SOF can access the right capabilities, at the right time, to accomplish the mission that often have strategic implications well beyond their tactical execution that align to the overall National Defense Strategy.

49. In your view, should Special Operations Forces further develop organic enabling capabilities, in addition or in place of those currently provided by general purpose forces?

Although I believe SOF should look for efficiencies in service-supplied capabilities, SOF's unique mission requires capabilities that are tailored and specific to the environments, schemes of maneuver, and overall mission spaces to execute those tasks. In my view, SOF continues to be in need of unique funding and authority to develop and optimize equipment uniquely tailored to satisfy their needs at operational demand speeds.

Information Operations

50. In your view, are the Department of Defense and the broader interagency appropriately organized to compete with state and non-state adversaries in the information environment? If not, what recommendations would you make?

In my view, the Department has been appropriately organized to compete with state and non-state adversaries in the information environment, but I believe there is certainly room for continued improvement. I believe enhanced interagency coordination, cooperation, and information sharing is paramount. If I am confirmed, I will look for opportunities to improve how the Department is organized to compete in information operations. I will work to ensure clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, improved information sharing protocols, and regular joint exercises to foster a common approach to shared challenges. Furthermore, if confirmed, I will consider technological investments and innovative strategies to counter foreign information operations and propaganda campaigns more effectively.

51. What is the appropriate role of the Department of Defense and, specifically, Special Operations Forces, in the broader information operations and strategic communications efforts of the U.S. Government?

From my understanding, the Department of War's role in information operations is appropriately supportive of broader U.S. government efforts, particularly where those efforts intersect with the DoW mission. Historically, SOF have been well-positioned to contribute because of their unique skills, global presence, placement, and access, deep cultural understanding, and the ability to operate in complex and contested environments. If confirmed, I will look for ways to improve the integration of these capabilities further into Department activities and, where appropriate, in support of our interagency partners, fostering burden sharing amongst foreign allies as well.

Counternarcotics

The ASD(SOLIC) is responsible for coordinating and overseeing plans, programs and policies pertaining to counternarcotics (CN).

52. What is your assessment of the threat posed to the United States by drug trafficking and related activities of transnational criminal organizations?

The number of drug overdose deaths remains unacceptable. The flow of drugs into the country continues to pose a dire threat to Americans. Transnational criminal organizations remain a significant threat to the United States and a destabilizing force both in the region and worldwide.

53. What do you view as the proper role of the Department in supporting interagency partners tasked with counternarcotics missions, such as the Department of State, Department of the Treasury, Department of Justice, and Department of Homeland Security?

The Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance directs the DoW to defend the homeland, including by sealing our borders and repelling forms of invasion including illegal immigration and narcotics trafficking. I understand that the DoW has the lead for detecting and monitoring of illicit drugs headed toward the United States by air or sea, and supporting the counterdrug efforts of our interagency partners with military capabilities and expertise, when requested. I view this cooperation as essential to countering drug trafficking and other illicit activities.

Special Operations Command Acquisition Authorities

Section 167(e)(4) assigns to the Commander, USSOCOM the authority to develop and acquire special operations-peculiar equipment, and to acquire special operations-peculiar material, supplies, and services. The Commander, USSOCOM is advised and assisted in these matters by a command acquisition executive.

54. If confirmed, what criteria would you apply in validating a determination that a particular requirement for equipment, materiel, supplies, or services is “special operations-peculiar”?

My understanding is that “special operations-peculiar” is applicable to any equipment, material, supplies, or services funded by Major Force Program 11 and required by and unique to SOF to accomplish their missions or activities.

If confirmed as the ASD(SOLIC)—

55. What actions would you take to improve each of the three aspects of the special operations-peculiar acquisition process—requirements, acquisition, and

budgeting?

If confirmed, I will work closely with USW(A&S), USW Comptroller, CFO, the Office of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation (CAPE), and USSOCOM to improve special operations-peculiar acquisition, requirements, and budgeting processes.

For example, I would advocate for stronger validation of requirements with clear performance trade-spaces. I would maximize the use of flexible acquisition pathways and related actions to accelerate delivery and innovation. I would also support PPBE reform to more efficiently align strategy, capability needs, and resources. I would ensure the acquisition workforce is equipped with training and tools to enforce best practices to guard against cost overruns and requirement creep.

56. What actions would you propose, if any, to ensure that special operations-peculiar requirements are realistic, technically achievable, and prioritized?

If confirmed, I will work closely with the Commander, USSOCOM to ensure there is a vigorous, disciplined, and systematic review process to prioritize special operations-peculiar requirements in alignment with the Department's strategic objectives and continue to deliver capabilities to the warfighter at the speed of relevance.

57. Are there other roles or responsibilities in the acquisition process that should be assigned to the ASD(SOLIC) or the Commander, USSOCOM, in your view?

10 U.S.C. Section 138 authorizes the ASW(SO/LIC) to "exercise authority, direction, and control of all special-operations peculiar administrative matters relating to the organization, training, and equipping of special operations forces." If confirmed, should I identify any changes to authorities or processes that would improve the functions of the office, I will engage within the Department and with Congress to make appropriate recommendations.

A natural tension exists between the objectives to ensure that acquisition programs reduce cost and accelerate schedule, and the need to ensure performance meets requirements and specifications—the objective of the test and evaluation function.

58. What are the respective roles of the ASD(SOLIC) and the Commander, USSOCOM in the test and evaluation of special operations-peculiar acquisition programs? How would you exercise the responsibilities of the ASD(SOLIC) in this regard, if confirmed?

I understand USSOCOM has a number of test and evaluation programs that support special operations-peculiar acquisitions and evaluation. If confirmed, I will ensure USSOCOM appropriately develops test and evaluation strategies to support the acquisition process, as well as ensure speed of delivery to the warfighter. I will also

work closely with the USW(A&S), Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation, the Services, and the USSOCOM Acquisition Executive.

Civilian Casualties

Section 936 of the NDAA for FY 2019 required the Secretary of Defense to develop a comprehensive policy for accounting for and responding to allegations of civilian casualties resulting from U.S. military operations.

59. If confirmed, what would be your role in developing and implementing the policies resulting from Section 936?

My understanding is that Section 936 designates a senior civilian official to oversee the Department's policy on civilian casualties from U.S. military operations. This official is currently housed within the office of ASW(SO/LIC). This official ensures the Department disseminates best practices on preventing casualties, establishes public means for reporting civilian casualties and offers, where appropriate, and *ex gratia* payments to survivors.

60. What role do you believe public transparency plays with respect to accounting for, and responding to, allegations of civilian casualties resulting from U.S. military operations?

The USW(P), relying on data from the ASW(SO/LIC), publishes annual public reports detailing civilian casualties associated with U.S. military operations. If confirmed, I commit that my office would continue to address these incidents of civilian harm, utilize *ex gratia* payments and other appropriate mitigation measures.

Section 184 of title 10, United States Code, directs the Secretary of Defense to operate a Civilian Protection Center of Excellence.

61. What is your understanding of the mission and purpose of the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence?

My understanding is that the Department is required to operate the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence (CPCoE) consistent with law (10 U.S.C. § 184). The CPCoE's mission is to assist military and civilian personnel on civilian harm-related matters at strategic, operational and tactical levels. This support informs military planning before, during and after military operations.

62. If confirmed, what would be your role in supporting the activities of the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence?

If confirmed, I commit to ensuring the Department continues to operate the CPCoE as required by statute. The Department will sustain the CPCoE in a way that enhances effectiveness and does not constrain commanders or diminish lethality.

Detention Operations

63. If confirmed, what role would you expect to play in addressing matters regarding detention under the law of armed conflict?

If confirmed, I anticipate taking an active role in developing and implementing policies and guidance related to detention under the law of armed conflict.

64. Do you support the standards for detainee treatment specified in the revised Army Field Manual on Interrogations, FM 2-22.3, issued in September 2006, and in DOD Directive 2310.01E, *The Department of Defense Detainee Program*, dated August 19, 2014?

Yes, I support the current standards for detainee treatment specified in the Army Field Manual on interrogations, FM 2-22.3 and in DoD Directive 2310.01E, the Department of Defense Detainee Program. Individuals in the custody or control of the U.S. Government may not be subjected to any interrogation technique or approach, or any treatment related to interrogation, that is not authorized by and listed in the Army Field Manual. All detainees must be treated humanely in accordance with applicable U.S. law and policy and the law of war.

Ethics and Accountability

In January 2020, USSOCOM completed a Comprehensive Review of Special Operations Forces Culture and Ethics. Among other things, the Comprehensive Review found that “selective implementation” of recommendations from four previous reviews related to the culture and ethics of Special Operations Forces since 2011, including two such reviews mandated by Congress, have resulted in continued challenges related to the assessment and selection of Special Operations Forces, leader development, and force structure and employment.

65. What are your views on the current culture of ethics and accountability in U.S. Special Operations Forces?

The 2020 Comprehensive Review found that over-focus on mission completion compromised SOF ethics and accountability. Past recommendations were inconsistently implemented, highlighting vulnerabilities in leader development, selection, and accountability across the chain of command. While USSOCOM is self-correcting with new initiatives, civilian oversight must ensure these changes are sustained. If confirmed, I would ensure ethical leadership is emphasized at all levels, personnel processes rigorously assess character, and ethical training is continuous. The goal is to embed a culture where accountability is constant, and ethical conduct is a core competency alongside tactical excellence.

66. If confirmed, what would be your role in implementing the recommendations of

the USSOCOM Comprehensive Review?

If confirmed, my role in implementing the recommendations of the USSOCOM Comprehensive Review would be defined by robust civilian oversight, active collaboration with the Commander of USSOCOM, and targeted policy and resource alignment. I would use my “service secretary-like” authorities to ensure the review's findings translate into tangible, sustainable changes in force development and resource allocation. My focus would be on reinforcing ethical conduct as a core competency, strengthening accountability at all levels, and ensuring that improvements in assessment, selection, and leader development are fully and effectively implemented across the SOF enterprise. This oversight is critical to rebuilding trust and ensuring ethical behavior is consistently prioritized alongside tactical excellence.

67. What is your understanding of the actions required to complete full implementation of the 16 recommendations provided by the Comprehensive Review?

Full implementation of the Comprehensive Review’s recommendations require a multi-faceted and sustained effort across the SOF enterprise, moving from identifying issues to embedding permanent cultural change. The necessary actions involve USSOCOM proactively managing the institutional bias toward high-tempo deployment, which had disrupted force generation and leader development. This requires a disciplined and accountable approach to force employment processes and reclaiming resources to invest in other critical areas like assessment, selection, and training. A key component is reinvesting in leader development to cultivate individuals with a robust balance of character and competence, moving away from an overemphasis on physical prowess alone. Furthermore, full implementation requires institutionalizing these cultural and procedural shifts, integrating them into the entire SOF lifecycle, from recruitment and selection to training and professional development. This is not a one-time fix but a continuous process of self-correction, requiring strong leadership, constant oversight, and a steadfast commitment to reinforcing ethical conduct and accountability at every level.

The USSOCOM Comprehensive Review found that “a USSOCOM culture overly focused on force employment and mission accomplishment creates the contexts or situations allowing for misconduct and unethical behavior to develop within the SOF enterprise.”

68. What role, if any, should past mission accomplishment play in decisions relating to misconduct by Special Operations Forces?

Past mission accomplishment should have no role in mitigating accountability for misconduct by SOF. The Comprehensive Review found that over-focusing on mission accomplishment enabled ethical failures. Allowing past success to excuse misconduct would directly contradict the very cultural and ethical changes the review

was designed to address.

Decisions regarding misconduct must be based solely on the facts of the incident and the ethical and legal standards that all service members are bound by. The military justice system and its administrative processes are designed to weigh the circumstances of specific misconduct, not to provide a “moral credit” for past performance.

Prioritizing accountability over achievement in cases of misconduct sends a clear signal that ethical and professional standards are non-negotiable. This is essential for rebuilding and maintaining the trust of the American public, the joint force, and allies, which was damaged by previous ethical lapses. It is the responsibility of leadership to create a culture where accountability is constant and consistent, reinforcing that ethical conduct is a core component of tactical excellence, not secondary to it.

Health of Special Operations Forces

High operational tempo and demand for special operations capabilities have contributed to enormous strain on Special Operations Forces, which is challenging readiness, resilience, and retention.

69. What is your assessment of the health and readiness of Special Operations Forces?

Despite the extraordinary capability and continuous demand for SOF, a relentless operational tempo has placed significant strain on the enterprise, challenging its long-term health and readiness. This sustained pace creates a high-stress environment that strains the physical and mental well-being of operators, compromises family resilience, and risks driving experienced personnel out of the force. While programs like Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) and initiatives from the Comprehensive Review exist to mitigate these challenges, the over-focus on mission accomplishment can also sideline critical ethical standards and accountability. Therefore, the health of SOF is not just an administrative concern but a strategic imperative that requires constant, vigilant civilian oversight to ensure a balanced, resilient, and effective force for the future.

70. If confirmed, what will be your priorities in addressing the stress on Special Operations Forces?

If confirmed, my priorities for addressing the stress on SOF will focus on three key areas: managing the demand, reinvesting in the force, and reinforcing resilience. First, I will work with senior leadership to strategically manage the demand signal for SOF capabilities, ensuring deployment tempo is sustainable and aligned with national security priorities. Second, I will focus on reinvesting in the force by advocating for resources that prioritize SOF-specific selection, training, and leader development, moving away from a sole emphasis on mission accomplishment. Finally, I will ensure robust support for resilience programs like POTFF, providing comprehensive care

that addresses the physical, mental, and ethical well-being of operators and their families. This approach is essential to maintaining a healthy, ready, and resilient SOF enterprise for the future.

71. If confirmed, what steps will you undertake to address suicides in Special Operations Forces?

If confirmed, I will lead the effort to combat suicide within USSOCOM by driving critical policy and resource changes. My approach will begin with assessing the holistic resiliency program for gaps and continue modernizing suicide prevention training to focus on skill-building and destigmatizing mental health support. A cornerstone of this strategy will be instituting career protections for those seeking help. These actions will directly address the systemic and cultural factors contributing to the suicide crisis.

With strong policy guidance to cultivate a supportive command climate that normalizes help-seeking, and implementing comprehensive postvention protocols to learn from tragedies, we can foster a culture of trust and proactive support. This two-pronged effort—tackling policy and resources while increasing oversight—will be foundational to a renewed, more effective approach to SOF operator mental health.

72. What is your understanding of the USSOCOM's Preservation of the Force and Families program?

The USSOCOM POTFF program is not merely a support service, but a strategic imperative designed to ensure the long-term viability and readiness of our Nation's most elite fighting force. It operates on the fundamental truth that humans are more important than hardware, recognizing that the extraordinary demands placed on Special Operations personnel and their families require a comprehensive, holistic approach to sustain their well-being and performance. My understanding of POTFF extends beyond its individual components—such as embedded physical trainers, mental health professionals, and spiritual advisors—to the integrated philosophy that underpins them. It is a system that proactively addresses the pressures of high operational tempo by focusing on five key domains: physical, psychological, cognitive, spiritual, and social/family health. This integrated approach is critical for mitigating career-ending injuries, burnout, and mental health issues, ensuring that SOF operators can maintain peak performance throughout their careers.

Ultimately, POTFF is about optimizing and sustaining the force by investing in its people, both the operators and their families, who are the bedrock of the SOF community. I recognize that the program provides essential continuity of care that is tailored to the unique mission requirements of SOF, delivering resources and support that are often inaccessible through conventional military channels. The true value of POTFF lies in its ability to foster a culture of resilience and proactive care, minimizing the stigma associated with seeking help and ensuring our warriors and their loved ones have the tools they need to thrive. This understanding informs my perspective that the health of the force and its families is directly proportional to

operational effectiveness and readiness, making POTFF a critical investment in our national security.

Congressional Oversight

In order to exercise its legislative and oversight responsibilities, it is important that this Committee and other appropriate committees of Congress are able to receive testimony, briefings, reports, records (including documents and electronic communications) and other information from the Department.

73. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, and on request, to appear and testify before this committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate committees of Congress? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Yes.

74. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to provide this committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate committees of Congress, and their respective staffs such witnesses and briefers, briefings, reports, records (including documents and electronic communications), and other information as may be requested of you, and to do so in a timely manner? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Yes.

75. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to consult with this committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate committees of Congress, and their respective staffs, regarding your basis for any delay or denial in providing testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information requested of you? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Yes.

76. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to keep this committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate committees of Congress, and their respective staffs apprised of new information that materially impacts the accuracy of testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information you or your organization previously provided? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Yes.

77. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, and on request, to provide this committee and its subcommittees with records and other information within their oversight jurisdiction, even absent a formal Committee request? Please

answer with a simple yes or no.

Yes.

78. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to respond timely to letters to, and/or inquiries and other requests of you or your organization from individual Senators who are members of this committee? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Yes.

79. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to ensure that you and other members of your organization protect from retaliation any military member, federal employee, or contractor employee who testifies before, or communicates with this committee, its subcommittees, and any other appropriate committee of Congress? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Yes.