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Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

OPEN/CLOSED: TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE UNITED
STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

Tuesday, May 12, 2026

Washington, D.C.

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1 OPEN/CLOSED: TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE UNITED STATES
2 SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

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4 Tuesday, May 12, 2026

5
6 U.S. Senate
7 Committee on Armed Services
8 Subcommittee on Emerging
9 Threats and Capabilities
10 Washington, D.C.

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12 The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:19
13 p.m., in Room SR-222, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon.
14 Joni Ernst, chairwoman of the subcommittee, presiding.

15 Committee Members Present: Senators Ernst, Sheehy,
16 Budd, Moody, Slotkin, Kaine, and Kelly.

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1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JONI ERNST, U.S. SENATOR
2 FROM IOWA

3 Chairwoman Ernst: Good afternoon, and thanks to all
4 of our witnesses for appearing today.

5 The Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee
6 meets today to receive testimony on the posture of our
7 Special Operations Forces. Gentlemen, thank you all for
8 your continued service to this great country and for being
9 with us today. Your testimony will play an important role
10 in this committee's work to ensure our special operators
11 have what they need to be successful on the battlefields of
12 today and in the future.

13 The global security environment our nation faces is
14 increasingly complicated and dangerous. China's
15 unprecedented military buildup poses a lasting threat to
16 our national security and global stability. Radical
17 Islamic terrorists remain intent on killing Americans. And
18 narco-terrorists operating in our hemisphere control
19 international trafficking networks that poison our
20 communities with deadly drugs.

21 At the forefront of our nation's efforts to combat
22 these threats are the men and women of Special Operations
23 Command, who operate every day, often in distant locations
24 far from their loved ones, to keep America safe. We have
25 also seen the inspiring courage and unmatched skill of our

1 special operators in the daring raid to capture indicted
2 dictator Nicolas Maduro from his heavily fortified compound
3 and the successful rescue of the downed American pilot from
4 a mountaintop in Iran.

5 I look to our witnesses today to provide the committee
6 with their assessment of the challenges facing the Special
7 Operations community and describe how they are training,
8 equipping, and posturing their forces to succeed. Those of
9 us on this committee must match that commitment by
10 providing robust, sustained, and predictable funding, as
11 well as flexible and responsive authorities that reflect an
12 evolving security environment.

13 Lastly, and most importantly, I want to talk about the
14 greatest capability in SOF, our Special Operations men and
15 women. As the first SOF truth says, humans are more
16 important than hardware. That is why I have been so
17 supportive of the Preservation of the Force and Families
18 Initiative. POTFF has been instrumental in taking care of
19 the physical, mental, and spiritual needs of our operators
20 and their families. POTFF truly is a readiness builder for
21 the force. I look to our witnesses to describe how they
22 are using POTFF and other programs to ensure our troops and
23 their families get the support they need.

24 I would like to note for the members, if we need to
25 move into a closed hearing following, we can do that. I do

1 not anticipate that need right now. We will try and keep
2 everything in an open session.

3 So again, thank you so much for being here. And I now
4 turn to Ranking Member Senator Slotkin for her opening
5 comments.

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1 STATEMENT OF HON. ELISSA SLOTKIN, U.S. SENATOR FROM
2 MICHIGAN

3 Senator Slotkin: Thank you, Senator Ernst.

4 I know we shocked you by having two Senators show up
5 early to a hearing, and I will shock you again by having
6 very similar remarks to my chairwoman here. Thank you for
7 what you do every day for the 72,000 folks in SOCOM. I am
8 keenly aware that you are being asked to do more missions
9 than ever and that the missions are requiring us to think
10 differently and more dynamically about what we need,
11 particularly technology.

12 As the chairwoman said, we are in the middle of this
13 war in Iran. We are watching our adversaries use cheaper
14 and more commercially available technology against us that
15 is resulting in the death of U.S. forces, the tracking of
16 U.S. forces in new ways, and asking folks like the
17 Ukrainians to come help us train on things like counter-
18 drone technology.

19 We know that you all often have more flexible
20 authorities. You often have leaders in SOCOM who are
21 thinking differently about acquisition, about the use of
22 new tools. I would love to hear particularly how you are
23 thinking about the future of Special Operations and
24 technology because I think that is a very hot topic for
25 many of us.

1 And lastly, I will just say please pass along our
2 thanks to everyone who works for you. We are aware of the
3 push that is going on right now for you all to be in the
4 lead in many places. We appreciate that work.

5 And I yield back.

6 Chairwoman Ernst: Thank you, Ranking Member.

7 And yes, I want to echo that as well. Thank you again
8 to our witnesses for being here and for your senior
9 enlisted leaders. Thank you for your presence as well and
10 your support. We appreciate all of you and your teams.

11 And we will start now with opening remarks, and you
12 will be recognized for five minutes each. And because I am
13 the chairman, I will take the prerogative of having the
14 Army go first. So Lieutenant General Ferguson, you are
15 recognized for five minutes of remarks.

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1 STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL LAWRENCE G. FERGUSON,
2 USA, COMMANDING GENERAL, UNITED STATES ARMY SPECIAL
3 OPERATIONS COMMAND

4 Lt. Gen. Ferguson: Thank you, ma'am.

5 Chairwoman Ernst, Ranking Member Slotkin, and
6 distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for
7 the opportunity today to represent the remarkable men and
8 women of the United States Army Special Operations Command.
9 I am honored to join my fellow component commanders today
10 as we testify on behalf of the world's premier Special
11 Operations Forces.

12 Our Army Special Operations formation represents less
13 than 10 percent of the Army and is resourced by less than 1
14 percent of the Army budget. Similarly, we constitute about
15 16 percent of U.S. Special Operations Command's budget and
16 roughly half of its people. For such a small investment,
17 Army Special Operations provide an outsized return.

18 Our core mission is to generate combat-credible Army
19 Special Operations soldiers and formations capable of
20 operating in deep and denied areas in support of the Army
21 and the joint force. To do this, we assess, select, train,
22 and equip some of the top talent the Army has to offer and
23 provide them to geographic combatant commands to execute
24 the full range of Special Operations. Our people are
25 creative and audacious by nature, employing and adapting

1 current tools and skills to meet the challenges and
2 missions they face today. Simultaneously, they envision
3 and integrate the advanced capabilities that will define
4 tomorrow's fight.

5 Events over the past five months clearly demonstrate
6 that while Special Operations comprise a small percentage
7 of our military both in size and cost, we continue to play
8 a key role in enabling our joint force partners and allies
9 to deliver strategic effects for the nation.

10 Our global disposition, generational relationships,
11 and regional alignment routinely place us at the tip of the
12 spear, and what we witness there drives my primary concern.
13 Only sustainable, predictable, timely, and consistent
14 funding will allow us to transform and modernize quickly
15 enough to face the rapidly evolving threats we will
16 encounter on tomorrow's battlefields.

17 Our people, the Army's finest, remain our competitive
18 advantage, and it is our mandate to ensure they are
19 organized, trained, and equipped to win both today's and
20 tomorrow's fight. That mandate drives our transformation
21 efforts and further fuels my concern for appropriate
22 resourcing going forward to adapt to the threats our
23 adversaries will present.

24 In closing, I want to assure you that we are dedicated
25 to our core mission. Your Army's Special Operations Forces

1 are strategically ready, generating warfighting
2 capabilities and asymmetric advantages for crisis response,
3 cooperation, competition, and for conflict, both today and
4 in the future.

5 Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your
6 continued support to the Army's Special Operations Forces.
7 I look forward to your questions and working together as we
8 defend our great nation and care for our remarkable
9 soldiers and families. Thank you.

10 [The prepared statement of Lt. Gen. Ferguson follows:]

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1 Chairwoman Ernst: Thank you. Lieutenant General
2 Conley, you are recognized.

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1 STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL E. CONLEY,
2 USAF, COMMANDER, AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND
3 Lt. Gen. Conley: Chairwoman Ernst, Ranking Member
4 Slotkin, distinguished members, thanks for this opportunity
5 for Command Chief Freeman and I to represent the more than
6 21,000 airmen of Air Force Special Operations Command. My
7 thanks to your committee for the continued support. I am
8 honored for the opportunity to be up here today with my
9 SOCOM teammates, and I look forward to your questions in
10 this session and any additional questions if we require a
11 closed session.

12 I will be direct. In the last five months, AFSOC
13 executed the two largest Presidentially directed
14 deployments in our 36-year history, while also maintaining
15 a persistent operational tempo across five other geographic
16 commands. From the First Island Chain to Iran and from
17 South America to the Arctic, air commandos are defending
18 the homeland and fighting for America's interests abroad,
19 alongside our joint teammates and allies.

20 Late last year, from a cold start, we deployed the
21 majority of our CV-22 fleet from our operational squadrons,
22 our schoolhouse, even staff members from my headquarters,
23 along with a large contingent of MC-130s to multiple
24 locations in just days, not weeks. Less than two months
25 later, your air commandos were needed again for another

1 major operation. As the world recently witnessed, AFSOC
2 was instrumental in bringing home our Air Force teammates.
3 As our airmen and SOF partners know, leaving an American
4 behind is nonnegotiable.

5 Simultaneously, our MQ-9 enterprise proved that
6 adaptive airmen can transform any platform mission
7 envelope, destroying hundreds of targets in contested
8 operating areas. I believe recent operations have been the
9 MQ-9 community's finest hour.

10 We delivered all of this while receiving less than a
11 half percent of the Air Force budget and a proportional
12 part of the USSOCOM budget, which collectively represents
13 only about 2 percent of the overall defense budget.
14 Without a doubt, AFSOC provides an outsized return on
15 investment for America.

16 But here is the reality. Over the last five years,
17 flat budgets forced hard choices. We have realized more
18 than a \$1 billion reduction to our budget, which slashed
19 modernization investment by nearly 40 percent. We have
20 divested 84 aircraft, prioritizing the retirement of legacy
21 platforms that couldn't meet future operational demands and
22 have committed to reductions affecting an additional 31
23 combat platforms. These decisions reflect our commitment
24 to fiscal responsibility, retiring what we can't afford to
25 modernize.

1 However, we have now reached an inflection point.
2 More than 1/3 of our fleet has been reduced while demand
3 continues to rise. Further divestments will directly
4 translate into missions we cannot execute.

5 We invest heavily in training our airmen. AFSOC
6 training is difficult, lengthy, and costly. We cannot
7 mass-produce air commandos, nor can we afford to lose their
8 critical combat experience and ingenuity. Broad Air Force
9 manning shortages have created an environment where units
10 manned at 80 percent are considered healthy. For AFSOC,
11 this means our airmen are being asked to achieve 100
12 percent mission success with a 20 percent personnel
13 deficit. And while our air commandos are resilient, they
14 are not invincible. Sustained excellence requires
15 sustainable investment, equipping air commandos to operate
16 at the pace and scale our nation demands.

17 So on behalf of air commando nation and our families,
18 Chief Freeman and I thank you for your continued support.
19 Your commitment to our people enables us to succeed in the
20 most challenging environments and deliver anytime,
21 anyplace, anywhere.

22 [The prepared statement of Lt. Gen. Conley follows:]
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1 Chairwoman Ernst: Thank you, sir.
2 Major General Huntley, you are recognized for five
3 minutes.

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1 STATEMENT OF MAJOR GENERAL PETER D. HUNTLEY, USMC,
2 COMMANDER, UNITED STATES MARINE FORCES SPECIAL OPERATIONS
3 COMMAND

4 Maj. Gen. Huntley: Chairwoman Ernst, Ranking Member
5 Slotkin, distinguished committee members, thank you for
6 this opportunity, and thank you for your enduring support.
7 I am honored to represent MARSOC, especially as we
8 celebrate our 20th anniversary.

9 We meet at a pivotal moment. Today's threat
10 environment is shaped by state adversaries, violent
11 extremists, and criminal networks who are more aligned,
12 capable, and active across all domains than ever before.
13 Against this, MARSOC's mission is clear -- deliver marine
14 soft to defend the homeland, deter aggression, and fortify
15 global networks. We reinforce soft asymmetric value across
16 the spectrum of conflict.

17 For 20 years, we have delivered outsized strategic
18 value. Less than 5 percent of SOCOM, 2 percent of the
19 Marine Corps, we execute nearly 10 percent of SOCOM's
20 operational missions at 2 percent of its budget, an
21 unmatched return on investment.

22 We face three primary challenges going forward.
23 First, deter gray zone adversaries and prepare for large-
24 scale conflict; second, confront blurring lines between
25 state and non-state threats; and third, adapt to the

1 acceleration of autonomy and multi-domain fusion, which are
2 converging and reshaping the character of warfare.

3 To address these challenges, MARSOC ensures readiness,
4 forges and preserves the raider team, and supports
5 enterprise modernization to outpace our adversaries. Our
6 approach is nested within SOCOM's win, people, and
7 transform lines of effort. To win, we employ multi-domain
8 targeting, deploying raider teams that synchronize
9 operations, intelligence, and information effects. We
10 layer multi-discipline capabilities to generate these
11 effects, providing options to solve the toughest joint
12 force key operational problems.

13 We further prioritize joint force integration as part
14 of the stand-in force. Our persistent deployments in the
15 First Island Chain exemplify this approach by concurrently
16 enabling crisis response, counterterrorism, deterrence,
17 and, of course, preparation for conflict.

18 Our posture is most heavily weighted within the
19 INDOPACOM theater in order to deter China and support our
20 regional allies. We also maintain significant investments
21 in CENTCOM and AFRICOM with tailored efforts elsewhere. We
22 adjust these investments based on the strategic priorities
23 and emerging theater requirements.

24 MARSOC's foundation, our foundation is our people, the
25 raider team, forged by the leadership and expertise of our

1 operators, specialists, and Navy corpsmen. Our disciplined
2 force generation process delivers reliable, lethal, and
3 resilient SOF. Our agile teams support enduring campaigns
4 and respond rapidly to emerging threats. Furthermore,
5 their health and resilience are strong and, frankly,
6 getting stronger thanks to your advocacy for programs like
7 Preservation of the Force and Family.

8 Finally, our imperative is to transform at the speed
9 of the evolving operating environment. We accelerate
10 modernization through operator-driven feedback loops,
11 streamlining research, development, and acquisitions. Our
12 approach is to leverage any sensor for any shooter to
13 support joint force fires and maneuver. This includes
14 modernization of command and control and integrating
15 autonomous systems at the tactical edge. And recent
16 INDOPACOM exercises highlight the success and the progress
17 of our systematic approach.

18 MARSOC is purpose-built for the nation's challenges.
19 Leveraging two decades of counterterrorism success, we
20 provide soft advantage in today's competition and in
21 conflict. MARSOC will continue to win by leveraging our
22 people as our platform and to transform through discipline
23 modernization to provide layered effects for the joint
24 force.

25 Our future success requires continued partnership with

1 Congress across force preservation, acquisition reform, and
2 training modernization. Your marine raiders today remain
3 ready to fight, survive, and thrive in any clime and any
4 place.

5 Thank you again for your unwavering support for our
6 marines, our sailors, and our families. I look forward to
7 your questions.

8 [The prepared statement of Maj. Gen. Huntley follows:]

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1 Chairwoman Ernst: Happy 20th anniversary.
2 And Admiral Allman, you are recognized for five
3 minutes.

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1 STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL WALTER H. ALLMAN III, USN,
2 COMMANDER, NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

3 Rear Adm. Allman: Congresswoman Ernst, Ranking Member
4 Slotkin, and distinguished members of the subcommittee,
5 thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the
6 current posture and future of Naval Special Warfare at this
7 critical juncture in our nation's security.

8 Naval Special Warfare's core mission is to deliver
9 maritime-based Special Operations capabilities from the
10 most strategic locations, spanning seabed to space to
11 support the fleet and joint force. We are guided by the
12 National Defense Strategy and priorities set forth by U.S.
13 Special Operations Command and the Chief of Naval
14 Operations.

15 Today, our force is balancing significant operational
16 demands in all theaters while also pursuing an aggressive
17 path of modernization to outpace these evolving threats.
18 Naval Special Warfare's forces are relentlessly driving
19 innovation and experimentation, pairing our experienced
20 operators with engineers in industry and in academia,
21 supported by resourcing specialists to accelerate the
22 fielding of new capabilities.

23 Partnered with SOCOM, we are delivering unmanned
24 surface and undersea systems to generate asymmetric sea
25 denial, challenge our adversaries' capabilities, and

1 improve the joint force's ability to deliver effects. As
2 we have done for the past 25 years, we also stand ready to
3 defeat terrorist networks that threaten our homeland and
4 interests abroad.

5 The reality is that the global security landscape has
6 fundamentally changed. The era of uncontested maritime
7 access is over. We are increasingly challenged by our
8 adversaries' maturing efforts in this domain. We have
9 entered what the CNO calls the Maritime Century,
10 characterized by contested sea lines of communication, the
11 rise of new naval powers, and the need to protect our
12 critical maritime infrastructure. The United States'
13 blockade of the Strait of Hormuz is a reminder of the
14 global commerce, communication, resources, and military
15 advantage are more closely tied to the sea today than at
16 any point in history.

17 Enable Special Warfare is uniquely positioned to
18 project focused effects within contested maritime areas.
19 We are also working hand-in-hand with our generational
20 allies and partners to enhance our capabilities, expand
21 their interoperability within our force, and ultimately
22 capitalize on the proximate access to enable combined
23 operations.

24 Our force, though small in size, delivers outsized
25 strategic impact. Comprising just 2.5 percent of the Navy

1 and 15 percent of SOCOM, we are forward-postured,
2 technologically advanced, and able to rapidly transition
3 from competition to crisis if deterrence fails.

4 Our most decisive advantage remains our people. We
5 continue to make significant investments in our assessment
6 and selection processes, a rigorous basic training
7 pipeline, tactical training cycles, and our commitment to
8 maintaining the highest physical and mental readiness of
9 our operators. We also are stalwart about our family
10 support programs, knowing that resilience at the home
11 translates directly to an operator's effectiveness on the
12 battlefield.

13 In closing, Naval Special Warfare stands ready to
14 compete, deter, and win across the full spectrum of
15 operations. With your continued support, including
16 sustained investments in modernization and flexible
17 acquisition authorities, we will ensure the United States
18 maintains a decisive edge in the maritime domain.

19 Thank you for your support and for the opportunity to
20 testify today.

21 [The prepared statement of Rear Adm. Allman follows:]

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1 Chairwoman Ernst: Yeah, thank you very much,
2 gentlemen.

3 And now we will enter into the Senators' rounds of
4 questions, and I will start the questions with five
5 minutes.

6 And I would like to start with POTFF. This is an
7 issue I have been working with many of your current
8 leaders, former leaders within SOCOM to make sure that we
9 are optimizing and sustaining soft readiness, longevity,
10 and performance through these integrated support programs.
11 As the operational tempo and demands on the force continue,
12 we also have the responsibility to ensure that these
13 services are actually reaching the operators and the
14 families who really need them the most.

15 GAO has previously found that access to POTFF
16 resources can vary significantly depending on the location
17 and the component, and that SOCOM's allocation model does
18 not always align providers with the areas of greatest
19 demand. As component commanders, you have the closest
20 visibility into how these programs are functioning on the
21 ground across your formation. So with that in mind, where
22 do you still see the greatest unmet demand within POTFF,
23 whether that be psychological services, spiritual support,
24 physical rehabilitation, or family care resources?

25 And we will reverse the order, actually, and Admiral

1 Allman, if we could start with you, please.

2 Rear Adm. Allman: Yes, Senator. So I would say that
3 our biggest challenge is probably in the per capita ratio
4 of strength and conditioning and rehabilitation for our
5 operators. That would be number one.

6 And number two, I think we always have a lot of room
7 to make up in our support to the families. I think the
8 biggest challenge for us is probably in our West Coast,
9 southern California teams, somewhat based on the geography
10 and the fact that most families live up to an hour or 90
11 minutes away from the base, and so it makes it more
12 challenging for them to access some of the support.

13 But like I said, the flat line funding, I feel like we
14 just need to be better in supporting our families in
15 general.

16 Maj. Gen. Huntley: Yes, Senator, thank you for the
17 question. Although I would say I feel pretty good about
18 where we are at right now on the physical side, to include
19 not only the performance training but also the physical
20 therapy. The cognitive, I feel pretty strong about.

21 If there is one place that we could use more help,
22 that is on the family side. Our experience going all the
23 way back to the early 2000s through now, through multiple
24 deployments, times where we have had very challenging times
25 for the command, to be able to develop and facilitate those

1 informal networks with the families, not only does it
2 connect the families together, but it connects them to the
3 command and to the command leadership. I would place that
4 as invaluable. When times get hard and people are getting
5 injured or we are losing people, those networks have really
6 carried the day. That is where we could use the most help,
7 ma'am.

8 Chairwoman Ernst: Okay, thank you.

9 General Conley?

10 Lt. Gen. Conley: Thank you for the question,
11 Chairwoman. And I appreciate the continued support of
12 POTFF. It is incredibly important to the AFSOC formation.

13 I would say I am largely aligned with my teammates up
14 here, more with families, but each location is a little
15 different, as you mentioned in your question. I would say
16 we see episodic challenges of manning, some of them, but
17 nothing that concerns me. You know, with a forward-based
18 wing in Mildenhall, which I know you visited recently, and
19 another one over in Okinawa and split into Yokota and
20 Tokyo, sometimes the overseas specialties go through cycles
21 where we have a hard time manning, finding contractors to
22 go over there across all the disciplines, but I think,
23 generally speaking, it is manageable.

24 The one area that I am challenged with at times, just
25 with reduced budgets, is AFSOC is unique from the other

1 components in the sense that we own installations, and so
2 for Hurlburt Field and Cannon Air Force Base, I have a
3 large support population, folks that are running the
4 facilities on base, maintaining what is a small city, and
5 so sometimes that is lost in translation. POTFF is
6 designed for operators, and I fully respect that, but the
7 support people in AFSOC make the machine run, and so trying
8 to thread the needle on making sure our special tactics and
9 our aviators get the level of POTFF support they need from
10 the physical cognitive domains but also not leaving
11 teammates behind that need help in different ways.

12 Chairwoman Ernst: Great, thank you. And if you could
13 just finish up, General Ferguson, that would be wonderful.
14 Thank you.

15 Lt. Gen. Ferguson: Yes, ma'am, very quickly. Very
16 similar challenges for us. The one advantage that we do
17 have as being part of the Army is that we do have access to
18 the Holistic Health and Fitness program, and so the Army
19 partners with us at all of our installations to balance out
20 the challenges we have with POTFF. But small installations
21 are where we are challenged also, yes, ma'am.

22 Chairwoman Ernst: Okay. Thank you, gentlemen.

23 Senator Slotkin.

24 Senator Slotkin: Thanks for being here. A couple of
25 questions. You know, I think what we are watching right

1 now with Iran and sort of always thinking about when it
2 comes to China is the incorporation of new technology, and
3 I really see the AI race as like it is not who can invent
4 the coolest tools. It is who can incorporate the coolest
5 tools the fastest.

6 And, you know, as I said in my opening, I am concerned
7 about some of the ways we have been exposed in recent years
8 and recent months to, you know, an adversary having
9 technology that we are not prepared for and killing us
10 because of it. So can you guys just walk through for me
11 and give me some examples the way that you are
12 incorporating AI into warfare today, not like as a future
13 thing, but what you as leaders do you see actually being
14 incorporated, and give a little meat on the bones so that
15 we have confidence that even with the budget, which we know
16 you would like to be larger, that, you know, it is not just
17 about airframes and old school tools, it is the new stuff.
18 So give me some confidence that we are actually meeting the
19 moment on this.

20 And we can just go down the line if that is okay,
21 keeping it brief.

22 Lt. Gen. Ferguson: Yes, ma'am. Thank you for the
23 question. So we see AI really as a critical tool for
24 queuing human action and then offloading the cognitive
25 burden on human operators and human intelligence

1 professionals that are executing or conducting intelligence
2 assessments based off of the information that is coming in
3 from different systems.

4 So right now, I mean, it is not a replacement for
5 human decision-making. We do not see it as that at all.
6 Right now, the biggest area in which we are using it within
7 U.S. Army Special Operations Command is for predictive
8 maintenance with our rotary wing aviation fleet. So we
9 have been using it there for several years, and it has
10 proven very valuable in that arena, so we will continue to
11 do that. That will continue to get better.

12 With respect to the employment of AI, artificial
13 intelligence, on the battlefield, the first place we are
14 really looking to employ it is within processing of ISR,
15 intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance information.
16 And in that respect, we see it more as a tool for screening
17 out. That is really the offloading the cognitive burden
18 from the human that is on or in the loop.

19 Eventually, I am sure that we will want to apply it
20 broader to some of our unmanned systems. But again, we are
21 going to employ the capability in those systems in a way
22 that will offload that cognitive burden on the operator.

23 Senator Slotkin: Great. Thank you.

24 General Conley?

25 Lt. Gen. Conley: Thank you for the question, Senator.

1 I will give you just two quick real-world vignettes. I
2 think sometimes necessity is the mother of invention. And
3 since the start of hostilities with Iran, I have a small
4 team that was put together to do something completely
5 different. But on the first day, they realized that our
6 MQ-9s and other aircraft were at risk in a very hostile
7 environment. And they were able to take some smart people,
8 use artificial intelligence tools, and put humans on the
9 loop instead of in the process the whole time, and move
10 top-secret, national-level intel collect in a process that
11 would take the humans 20 to 30 minutes to get that to a
12 crew, into a cockpit, or into a ground control station for
13 an MQ-9 crew, automated it using AI bots, put it down to a
14 secret level, put it into the cockpit in two to three
15 seconds from detect. And we have data that indicates that
16 we have saved a lot of aircraft over the last 60 days using
17 that tool just to provide better battlefield situational
18 awareness.

19 The other example I have is our agile process exploit
20 and disseminate tools where our intel analysts that are
21 looking at full-motion video, you know, a very heavy human-
22 intensive process, they have been able to use AI, again,
23 just smart humans getting together, figuring out solutions
24 in order to proliferate that information across the intel
25 community in seconds rather than what could take hours in

1 normal processes.

2 So we are learning every day, and we are getting
3 better every day.

4 Senator Slotkin: Great. General Huntley.

5 Maj. Gen. Huntley: Yes, Senator, thank you for that
6 question. In my opening comments, I talked about any
7 sensor and any shooter. We currently have a commitment
8 with a task force within the First Island Chain. What we
9 are seeing, and what we see as a mission requirement going
10 forward, that if we do go to conflict, that our adversary
11 will have a significant scale advantage. So our ability to
12 leverage a variety of sensors, whether they are coming from
13 national technical means, whether they are top secret,
14 secret, or more than likely something coming from our
15 partners, to be able to ingest the data from all those
16 various TICE models and series of sensing platforms, and
17 then put it on the one pane of glass and able to then push
18 it into the Joint Fires Network at the theater level, that
19 is what we are working on very hard right now.

20 And as we go through a series of exercises that
21 INDOPACOM holds, we are working to progress that. I feel
22 pretty good about the progress we are making. We are not
23 there yet, but we are making progress.

24 Senator Slotkin: Well, am sorry, I have been watching
25 a stopped clock and thinking I just constantly have one

1 minute and 21 seconds left. So I have been alerted the
2 old-fashioned way. So if it is okay, if you just briefly,
3 I am sorry, Madam Chair.

4 Chairwoman Ernst: Keep going. Keep going.

5 Rear Adm. Allman: Yes, ma'am, not to repeat any of
6 that, I think we are finding some benefits to the persona
7 targeting and leveraging AI to have a deeper understanding
8 of linkages and networks and expanding the library of
9 potential associates.

10 And then secondarily, I think in the same respects,
11 our own protection of the force, understanding our own
12 potential risks in digital expression, et cetera,
13 leveraging AI as a red cell tool could be an opportunity
14 for us as well, to deepen the overall protection and
15 preservation of our forces.

16 Senator Slotkin. Great, thank you. I yield back.

17 Chairwoman Ernst: Senator Budd.

18 Senator Budd: Thank you for yielding me the minute 21
19 seconds perpetually.

20 [Laughter.]

21 Senator Budd: Good to see you all again. General
22 Conley, General Ferguson, I want to congratulate you all
23 and thank you all for your work with AFSOC and USASOC's
24 role in recovering the Strike Eagle crew a few weeks back.
25 It was a very significant Easter.

1 Can you talk about the aircraft that you lost in the
2 operation, how critical they are, and how we can replace
3 them? And General Conley, start with you.

4 Lt. Gen. Conley: Thank you, Senator. It is good
5 seeing you again, and thanks for the time and the office
6 call.

7 Yeah, we lost two of our aircraft. In a perfect
8 world, I would like to get two replacements as soon as
9 possible. As we look at my MC-130 fleet globally, we are
10 in high demand. We have permanent aircraft station in
11 Japan, so inside the First Island Chain. We also have our
12 launchpad out of RAF Mildenhall with a squadron over there.
13 They are SOCOM's maneuver force. And so, you know, I owe
14 it to the teammates here and their men and women to be able
15 to get them to the place of need in contested environments,
16 in benign environments, whatever the mission is. We are
17 here to support them.

18 The MC-130s don't exist for their own sake. They
19 exist to support the team, and every loss decrements my
20 ability to support them.

21 Senator Budd: Any sticking points in getting them
22 replaced?

23 Lt. Gen. Conley: It is a little early still. I think
24 it will take time. I think clearly there is a funding
25 requirement that will be needed to be reconciled, and then

1 it is just a matter of if we can get into the production
2 line in a timely matter. But I am confident our
3 relationship with our industry partners will get us to yes
4 if the funding is there.

5 Senator Budd: Very good. Thank you.

6 General?

7 Lt. Gen. Ferguson: Senator, in all seriousness, I
8 would also like to see my friend General Conley get two
9 more airplanes because, as you know, that was the
10 definition of a joint operation. And so the rotary wing
11 aircraft, we lost four on that mission, and the four rotary
12 wing aircraft we lost, we would not have gotten there had
13 we not been able to get them there in the MC-130s.

14 And so, you know, no one else on planet Earth could
15 have executed that operation because they don't have the
16 capabilities. They don't have the people to do it. So it
17 is very important for us to get those aircraft replaced.
18 As Mike said, we know SOCOM is working diligently to sort
19 out the methodology to spend the money and get those
20 aircraft replaced. So there is a plan, but it is not going
21 to happen quickly, no, sir.

22 Senator Budd: Thank you. We have our support on
23 that, and just the efforts in that operation just sent a
24 great signal to the warfighting community, much
25 appreciated.

1 General Huntley, I enjoyed seeing you this morning.
2 Thanks for the time. I know you have talked about
3 multidomain ranges to replicate the modern battlefield.
4 Can you share what you need, where the gap is, where you
5 fall short, sir, and how Congress can help?

6 Maj. Gen. Huntley: Thank you, Senator, for that
7 question, and thank you for the office call this morning.

8 As we look right now, you know, right now, a lot of
9 focus on CENTCOM, but really if you look globally at all
10 the operations that SOF and frankly the joint force is
11 involved in pretty much every theater right now, the
12 operating environment is evolving very quickly. Even if it
13 is a non-state actor in South America or in Eastern Africa,
14 they are going to have capabilities they didn't have just a
15 few years ago, say nothing of a peer adversary.

16 The good news is that we are evolving quickly. We
17 need to move faster, but going forward, what I see is
18 probably one of our primary challenges is the time to
19 train. And what is driving the stress on our time to train
20 is that we still need to be able to shoot, move, and
21 communicate and medicate as we always have. And now we
22 have to employ autonomous systems at the tactical edge and
23 higher. AI is coming on very fast, and the tasks for
24 training are compounding very quickly.

25 Right now, as it stands, to be able to do multidomain

1 training in the collective sense, at least for MARSOC, I
2 have to send our people west of the Mississippi out to the
3 western desert somewhere in order to do that. The time,
4 the resource that that takes puts a significant stress on
5 the force, and it is only getting worse.

6 So right now, if we had ranges that would allow us to
7 do these type of multidomain operations closer to home
8 station or preferably at home station, that would be a
9 significant help for us not only going forward and being
10 able to incorporate these new capabilities but also maybe
11 as important, if not more important, the stress on the
12 force in the future. Thank you.

13 Senator Budd: Thank you, sir. Another question,
14 General Huntley, about MARSOC. You are authorized to have
15 3,337 billets, yet a recent congressional inquiry revealed
16 that only 2,802 positions are filled, so about 500 short.
17 Is this a concern? And how are you addressing it, and how
18 can we help?

19 Maj. Gen. Huntley: It is a concern, Senator, and
20 thank you for that question. And the preponderance of
21 those pieces of structure, the marines that we don't have
22 at this time, are from high-demand, low-density MOSs,
23 mostly within the intel communications. Even the Marine
24 Corps has an unmanned systems MOS now that we are lucky
25 enough to have.

1 We are working very closely with the service as they
2 go through their force structure review to make sure that
3 MARSOC prioritization is at a level that facilitates our
4 getting a peer level of manning to priority units within
5 the Marine Corps.

6 Senator Budd: Thank you, sir. Thank you all.

7 Chairwoman Ernst: Great. We will go ahead and do a
8 second round of questions as well.

9 And I would like to talk a little bit about
10 acquisition as well. And this is near and dear to all of
11 you. SOCOM does use SOFWERX. They have done that since
12 2015, and since then, we have seen the execution of, let's
13 see, 1,600 agreements at a cost of \$460 million. And it is
14 a pretty strong track record for moving innovation faster,
15 so it has been a great model. But even this really
16 successful model, it is still facing friction and
17 particularly as SOCOM shifts more from software-defined
18 capabilities while much of this acquisition system remains
19 built around hardware. So we are seeing growing concerns
20 around vendor lock and proprietary software restrictions.

21 So where do you believe the greatest friction points
22 still exist between identifying an operational need and
23 then actually fielding that capability with your operators?

24 And General Conley, why don't we start with you?

25 Lt. Gen. Conley: Thank you, Senator. I think, if I

1 am candid, the biggest friction point is just the timing on
2 our budgeting processes. So I can operate -- if I want
3 something right now, I have to have money left in my budget
4 for this year to put money towards it, and I probably
5 already have that earmarked against something else. So if
6 it is emerging, it is hard to do.

7 And then, you know, we are building the '28 POM right
8 now, so the next round to get to that consistent funding
9 stream is three years from now, two years from now. We
10 work in the margins in between, and we have a great
11 relationship with SOFWERX. They do a lot of great things
12 for us. So that is one challenge.

13 The other one is how do you get it and scale it across
14 a fleet of aircraft or across a fleet of special tactics
15 teams. So the scaling transition often becomes a sticking
16 point, but we are better because of SOFWERX, you know,
17 SOCOM is.

18 Chairwoman Ernst: Absolutely. General Huntley?

19 Maj. Gen. Huntley: Yes, Senator. Of course, anything
20 that allows us to incorporate new capabilities quicker. As
21 I said before, the characteristics of the operating
22 environment are moving faster than they have in my 37 years
23 of service.

24 Right now, the traditional way of doing it, the lead
25 times are just too long. I would cite as an example is our

1 recent program of records that we have established for
2 three unmanned systems. They are fine and they are doing
3 well, but we started that requirement back in 2019. So
4 right now, we still can, you know, use O&M to purchase
5 equipment, but in order to do the full capability, the
6 doctrine, the operations, the training, the manpower that
7 is required and the sustainment for these programs, it
8 requires our acquisition system to move faster. Anything
9 that can be done on that front would be not only helpful,
10 but I think it would be an imperative.

11 Chairwoman Ernst: Wonderful. Thank you.

12 And Admiral Allman?

13 Rear Adm. Allman: Yes, ma'am, thank you. I would
14 also add to General Huntley's that longer dwell money over
15 the fiscal year to help finish projects and see them
16 through would be advantageous.

17 And then with respect to SOCOM, the SOFWERX experiment
18 has been a good foundation for how we interact with
19 industry. And I think most recently, the way we have
20 divided and conquered and worked together as components for
21 unmanned surface vessels and undersea and unmanned aerial
22 vehicles to rapidly develop some capability, I think, is a
23 highlight for the joint force in terms of how SOCOM can
24 effectively partner with industry, commit our operators who
25 have a depth of combat experience and a very high aptitude

1 and expectation of performance to ensure that the companies
2 that are providing prototypes are actually delivering and
3 making the necessary changes to field something that is
4 operationally fit.

5 Chairwoman Ernst: Thank you.

6 And General Ferguson?

7 Lt. Gen. Ferguson: Ma'am, just to wrap up, every one
8 of us at the table, all of our people need the authority to
9 be able to adapt and evolve technology at the edge,
10 employing commercial off-the-shelf solutions. You touched
11 on this already. Instead of being bound by vendor lock,
12 being bound by proprietary software, you mentioned also
13 that we are getting into more software-defined
14 capabilities. You see that in Ukraine. They have not
15 reached the limit of physics, but there is a line there
16 that physics draws, so to speak. And so software-defined
17 solutions is really what you are seeing and what we have
18 seen for the last couple of years.

19 I would say that in the five weeks of the war with
20 Iran, we probably made about two years of progress based
21 off of our ability to adapt rapidly because of where we
22 were and the lack of restrictions, whether it was from what
23 they could actually do with the systems or the areas that
24 they could train with them overseas.

25 Chairwoman Ernst: So we need to be able to move at

1 the speed of relevance then?

2 Lt. Gen. Ferguson: Yes, ma'am.

3 Chairwoman Ernst: Okay. Thank you so much.

4 Senator Slotkin?

5 Senator Slotkin: General Huntley, I feel like I have
6 paid you to prompt the question, like, where do I train?
7 East of the Mississippi. Michigan, northern Michigan is
8 where you train, east of the Mississippi. We have the
9 largest multi-domain military exercise east of the
10 Mississippi, the most available airspace, the most
11 available spectrum, and the Army just named our facility up
12 north, the NADWC, their very first drone testing site in
13 the country. So you are welcome, sir, to come and test.
14 And you can test it all, drone, counter-drone. You can
15 test SOF boats all in one facility, robotics, the whole
16 thing.

17 And because it is an area where we are very supportive
18 of this kind of stuff, like, you know, we bring industry in
19 to share with us and work with us as we do things, so
20 anyways, you are more than welcome, all of you, to come as
21 you should to Michigan.

22 Chairwoman Ernst: Is that the county called Canada?

23 Senator Slotkin: No.

24 Chairwoman Ernst: Okay. Sorry.

25 [Laughter.]

1 Senator Slotkin: What are you talking about? We were
2 getting along so well up here.

3 [Laughter.]

4 Senator Slotkin: I am interested in all of your
5 responses a year later from this hearing a year ago where
6 the SOCOM commander talked about allies as the pacing item.
7 And I know from my time at the Pentagon that you all work
8 very closely -- I think there is 28-plus allies that you
9 all work with, but it is hard to miss that there are a lot
10 of allies who are not with us in the war in Iran. So I
11 would like you all to testify what has been the operational
12 impact of tensions at the top level, which you are not
13 responsible for. What has that done operationally?

14 I mean, I am very aware, General Conley, that, as I
15 understand it, allies were very important even in just
16 airspace and for the recovery of the pilot, the downed
17 pilot inside of Iran. So tell me operationally, very
18 honestly, what has changed or had to be amended given
19 allied reservations about this conflict? And we can start
20 anywhere we would like.

21 Lt. Gen. Conley: Thanks, Senator, that is a great
22 question. I would say you have kind of hit it a little bit
23 already from an aviation lens where we are often coming
24 from a farther distance, or globally, access basing and
25 overflight. I think we have learned a lot over the last

1 couple months that we rely on our partners for lily pads to
2 get us from the United States into wherever we are going.
3 And I think maybe we have taken that for granted to some
4 degree over the years, that the bases are always going to
5 be open for our use.

6 And we have been able to adapt, and we have been able
7 to get missions complete, but not having the assured access
8 that we are used to with mainly European countries as we
9 transit transatlantic towards CENTCOM has been something we
10 have had to work hard to make happen.

11 Maj. Gen. Huntley: Senator, where we have our most
12 pronounced relationships right now was within the Republic
13 of the Philippines. We have been there, at least from a
14 MARSOC perspective, in force since 2015. We have been
15 through the big counterterrorism fights with them, and
16 recently, we have worked very closely with them as they
17 look to push back against PRC incursion into their
18 territorial waters. And we are currently working very
19 closely with them to help them with deterrence by preparing
20 them for conflict.

21 So right now, I would describe our relationship with
22 the Filipino Government and Filipino SOF, along with the
23 rest of the Filipino military, as very strong. It is just
24 outside of the areas that may be affected.

25 And then likewise, we are also partnered with a

1 variety of both Somali but also Spanish partners within
2 Somalia right now. But right now, at those levels and
3 where we are operating, we have had minimal impact.

4 Senator Slotkin: Okay. Thank you.

5 Rear Adm. Allman: Senator, I would add that we are
6 deployed globally. We are always learning from our
7 partners in trying to seek technological advantage, and so
8 we are doing that in Europe, we are doing that in the
9 Pacific, and really trying to learn and translate those
10 lessons into the current conflict. And I think we have
11 been successful in a few areas, in one-way attack and
12 counter-UAS, to improve our own defenses and ability to
13 operate in the CENTCOM AOR.

14 Senator Slotkin: But just so I am clear for both
15 General Huntley and Admiral Allman, is it your testimony
16 that there has been no operational impacts in your
17 engagement in the Middle East because of kind of political
18 considerations that are happening, you know, way above your
19 level? I want to make sure I understand what you are
20 saying. I heard about overflight and access, particularly
21 in Europe, but are you both testifying that there has been
22 no changes based on concerns and considerations at the
23 political level?

24 Maj. Gen. Huntley: Senator, we do have relationships
25 within the CENTCOM AOR, but right now, they are involved

1 with ongoing operations. So in this setting, I would be
2 hesitant to talk about that, but I would be happy in a
3 closed setting or to submit a post brief.

4 Rear Adm. Allman: And I would say we are still
5 benefiting from the partners who are housing us there in
6 CENTCOM for a good combined relationship.

7 Senator Slotkin: Okay.

8 Lt. Gen. Ferguson: And ma'am, insofar as we operate
9 jointly most of the time, the things that affect Mike's
10 formations as far as access, spacing, and overflight, those
11 do affect us because we are usually along for the ride.
12 But like my teammates here at the table, we are deployed
13 globally, and our generational relationships, especially
14 within our special forces formations, those relationships
15 have been around for so long that I have not seen any
16 impact as far as allies being hesitant to work with us.
17 You know, we have just been on travel to -- we were in
18 Europe just recently, and we are not seeing those kinds of
19 impacts. Thank you.

20 Senator Slotkin: Thank you. I yield back.

21 Chairwoman Ernst: Are you prepared for questions,
22 Senator Sheehy?

23 Senator Sheehy: Take me off.

24 Chairwoman Ernst: Okay. Go ahead, Senator Budd.
25 Thank you.

1 Senator Budd: Right. Thank you.

2 So just to pick up on a question, General Huntley,
3 from an earlier conversation, what additional authorities
4 would you need to better conduct operations against al-
5 Qaida affiliates in Somalia? You know, I am thinking about
6 your advise-and-assist missions that we spoke about with
7 the Somali army. So what else would you need?

8 Maj. Gen. Huntley: Senator, thank you for that
9 question. And in advance, thank you for what the 127 delta
10 and echo authorities that have been granted. Those are
11 incredibly helpful in accomplishing our assigned task for
12 the global combatant commanders. But I will describe it.
13 If we had more freedom of action in that theater, we would
14 be able to suppress counterterrorism threats specifically
15 to the homeland in a quicker manner.

16 Senator Budd: A question for all of you. I asked
17 Admiral Bradley the other day when he was here, I noticed
18 that SOCOM's O&M has only increased from \$9.4 to \$10.9
19 billion. But that is between 2019 and 2027. So it fails
20 to keep pace with inflation, and more importantly, the
21 increased operational tempo that we have seen. So can you
22 talk about some of the top priorities and capabilities if
23 you had a higher top line? What do you not have now, and
24 what would you get with more? We will start with you,
25 Admiral Allman.

1 Rear Adm. Allman: Senator, our top priority right now
2 is providing maritime capabilities so that we can project
3 effects in places that nobody else can get to. So that is
4 both in our surface combatant craft, in which we have a
5 modernization effort happening now. And then most
6 impactfully, probably in the undersea and subsea seabed
7 warfare and how we are seeking to ensure that America
8 retains its asymmetric advantage in the undersea.

9 Our partnership with the submarine force, we have got
10 a new multi-mission dry submersible in the build stages
11 now. These are just expensive platforms that take a
12 significant amount of SOCOM's resources, but yet provide
13 enormous strategic advantage to our nation.

14 Maj. Gen. Huntley: Senator, to be short, I would
15 accelerate our ability to ingest data, sensor-agnostic, and
16 then quickly get to scale. Like I said, we are making good
17 progress right now, but we can't move fast enough.

18 Lt. Gen. Conley: Thank you, Senator. I would put it
19 in modernization efforts, near-term ones that we have
20 already started that I believe are cutting-edge, that are
21 bringing us capabilities that will help us win on future
22 battlefields. But just the stop-start sometimes of the
23 budget, we have just enough to keep it going, but not to
24 scale it and move it at a speed that will get it to our
25 airmen quickly.

1 Lt. Gen. Ferguson: Yes, Senator. Likewise for me, it
2 would be transformation modernization. Just looking at the
3 -- between the Maduro raid and the ongoing operations in
4 Iran, our ability to continue to not keep pace with but
5 outpace our adversaries so that we can continue to conduct
6 operations like that, Special Operations, joint Special
7 Operations raids with impunity, we are only going to be
8 able to do that if we are resourcing, transforming,
9 developing our capabilities for deep and denied area
10 penetration with our rotary platforms, space-enabled
11 operations, cyber-enabled operations, both offensive and
12 defensive, counter-UAS capabilities to protect our forces
13 that we projected into denied territory, our ability to
14 sustain those elements in that territory. That is a big
15 laundry list, but those are the things that allow us right
16 now to be able to execute those types of operations. And
17 so that is what I am interested in investing in across our
18 formation and really across all of the SOCOM formations.

19 Thank you, sir.

20 Chairwoman Ernst: Senator Sheehy, you are recognized.

21 Senator Sheehy: Thanks, gentlemen, for being here
22 today.

23 The core capabilities of our broader SOF formations
24 are never going to change. Obviously, we are never going
25 to get away from the basics, and we are never going to get

1 away from the need for high quality individuals across the
2 force.

3 What will be constantly evolving is our need for
4 technology and platforms that empower those missions, like,
5 you know, the next-generation helicopter, next-generation
6 fixed wing, submersibles for both your formations in our
7 force. So how can we -- budget increase, of course, as
8 Senator Budd said, no question, we do need a massive
9 increase in SOCOMs and the component command's baseline
10 budget, but how can we empower with acquisition authorities
11 all of your components more so that we can make sure we are
12 keeping pace with those platform upgrades, whether it is
13 space, cyber, electronic warfare spectrum, or physical
14 mobility platforms to make sure that your forces are
15 staying at the cutting edge? Well, what other acquisition
16 authorities do you need?

17 Lt. Gen. Ferguson: Yes, sir, thank you for the
18 question. I will start. For us, it is probably smaller
19 scale than it is for my teammate Mike here. But I touched
20 on it earlier in answer to Senator Ernst's question, but
21 our ability to adapt and evolve technology at the edge and
22 not be locked by vendors because of acquisition
23 authorities, not be locked into proprietary software,
24 firmware, sensors, those type things, that will make a
25 tremendous difference.

1 When you look at the capability that our forces are
2 going to need to be able to apply on the battlefield, long
3 range, one-way attack, strike capability, et cetera, that
4 takes a lot of activity at the tactical edge by the
5 operators as they continue to adapt and deal with the
6 threats that those systems are going to encounter on the
7 battlefield. And with the current acquisition authorities
8 as they are, we are stuck with proprietary solutions and
9 vendors providing those capabilities. Thank you.

10 Lt. Gen. Conley: Thank you for that question,
11 Senator. I agree with Gil on this, but I would add it is
12 one of the areas we are leaning hard into in AFSOC as part
13 of the Defense Autonomous Warfare Group is the long-range,
14 one-way capabilities, both air- and ground-launched.

15 It might not be acquisition reform or change, but we
16 need help navigating through a system that is not used to
17 buying attritable things. You know, we buy defense systems
18 for life and then, you know, we go through years and years
19 of sustainment. Future warfare needs more affordable, more
20 attritable things that we can acknowledge that we are going
21 to buy in six months, a year, maybe six weeks, they are
22 going to be outdated. And so our processes are not set up
23 to move fast and acknowledge that, hey, this worked great
24 last week, but next week, it is no longer the thing we
25 need, and we need to off-ramp that and bring new things on.

1 Maj. Gen. Huntley: Senator, thank you for that
2 question. I would describe it as the ability to work with
3 a vendor, whether it is big or whether it is something that
4 is emerging, to harness technology and then be able to
5 spiral develop that very quickly into a capability. And
6 then as new technologies come along, having the freedom of
7 action to upgrade to the next capabilities that come along.

8 The technology is out there. Our ability to get our
9 hands on it from a resourcing and then the time it takes to
10 turn that into a real capability, it is improving, but it
11 is too slow right now.

12 Rear Adm. Allman: Senator, I will just wrap it up by
13 saying I think the top-line increase at SOCOM is
14 responsible because as you are hearing from us, we divide
15 and conquer to rapidly experiment across different domains
16 and ensure we are not being redundant. And then we
17 collaborate and put the tools into a forward evaluation,
18 determine they work, and then share the outcome of that
19 work.

20 Senator Sheehy: Well, I think specifically for you,
21 Admiral, I think obviously I am biased, but, you know, 70
22 percent of the world is water, and the domain under the sea
23 is an area that we have unique capabilities, both within
24 the Special Operations enterprise as well as just military
25 wide. And I think for too long, we have taken for granted

1 the fact that we have that capability, but when that
2 capability is asked to become an enterprise with an op
3 tempo reflective of what GWOT was where the expectation is
4 we can launch operators 24/7/365 and missions wherever we
5 need them, our undersea enterprise doesn't have that yet.
6 And we need to get to that because that is the expectation
7 that Admiral Paparo and others will have if we have to
8 unfortunately fight a conflict in WESTPAC.

9 So as you evaluate the undersea enterprise, which of
10 course is a unique component of this to your command, what
11 is it we can do to make sure you are as prepared as
12 possible for that conflict?

13 Rear Adm. Allman: Yes, sir. While expensive, our
14 undersea systems and our partnership and ability to develop
15 whether it is robotic vehicles or unmanned undersea
16 vehicles that work in concert with the submarine force just
17 provide that tremendous capability that can only be found
18 in naval special warfare and our partnership with the sub
19 force. So investments and then allowing us to iterate at a
20 much faster rate to conduct operations multiple times a
21 month versus what used to be once or twice a year is what
22 will be necessary to get after the challenges in the
23 undersea.

24 Senator Sheehy: Well, thanks, gentlemen. I would
25 just reiterate from our level, you know, no matter what the

1 engagement looks like, no matter who the adversary is,
2 whether it is a navy fight or an aviation fight or a ground
3 war, the SOF button is always being pushed, and it is being
4 pushed faster and more often than it ever has before. So
5 your force, your broader enterprise is going to continue to
6 be called on at a higher op tempo and for the most
7 important missions possible. So be as vocal as you can
8 with us about what you need because we need you guys more
9 than ever, and we need to make sure you have what you need
10 to get the job done. So thanks.

11 Chairwoman Ernst: Yeah. Thank you, Senator Sheehy.

12 Senator Kelly.

13 Senator Kelly: Well, it sounds like you were probably
14 talking about where my question was going to be, Admiral,
15 about, you know, maritime unmanned systems, other advanced
16 platforms that you need. I will just say I have been
17 pushing my Ships for America Act to try to rebuild the
18 maritime industrial base here domestically, you know, so we
19 can improve shipbuilding, but that also extends to the
20 stuff you need, you know, those kind of capabilities we
21 require, you know, that workforce.

22 Could you talk a little bit about, you know, just so I
23 know -- and you may have already said this today -- where
24 are you today in underwater systems and other unmanned
25 systems? And where do you want to be, let's say, 5 or 10

1 years in the future?

2 Rear Adm. Allman: Thank you, Senator. We have been
3 making progress in our undersea assets, but we have a
4 significant build coming up in our multi-mission dry combat
5 submersible, which will partner with the Virginia class and
6 give us access to nearly anywhere on the planet we need to
7 go in the undersea. And so that investment is just
8 beginning. And so that capability will return to a
9 capability we had in the early 2000s that is so
10 strategically important that the investment in both the
11 platforms and the MILCON that will be necessary to launch
12 and recovery of the platform is probably our most
13 significant need, sir.

14 Senator Kelly: Yeah. Have you given any thought
15 to -- this might sound crazy. I have, you know, given a
16 little thought as the cost to launch, to get into orbit
17 continues to go down and might go down significantly enough
18 at some point that if you guys ever wanted to get somewhere
19 really, really fast, you know, if we were willing to commit
20 -- I am talking maybe 10, 15, 20 years from now, commit to
21 keeping something somewhere on a pad and ready to go, you
22 could get somewhere in 20 minutes. You guys ever talk
23 about like these crazy ideas?

24 Rear Adm. Allman: I will defer to my AFSOC colleague
25 here, but --

1 Senator Kelly: Yeah.

2 Lt. Gen. Conley: Senator, thanks for the questions.

3 It is good seeing you again.

4 Senator Kelly: Good to see you.

5 Lt. Gen. Conley: We are looking at it -- you know, we
6 would look at from a rocket cargo --

7 Senator Kelly: Yeah.

8 Lt. Gen. Conley: -- type of a lens. How could we get
9 it across the world in minutes and not days, but not deep
10 thought into it yet. We have dabbled in some CONOP
11 development and trying to figure out what it might look in
12 order to service the other SOF partners, but we are
13 probably a ways away from investing AFSOC money in it.

14 Senator Kelly: Yeah.

15 Lt. Gen. Conley: But I agree with you. It gets
16 cheaper every day.

17 Senator Kelly: Yeah. As it gets cheaper, it is
18 something we could even maybe get people on the other side
19 of the planet very quickly, you know, basically 30, 40
20 minutes anywhere.

21 Senator Budd. Space Marines. We call them Space
22 Marines.

23 Senator Kelly: I was thinking Navy.

24 [Laughter.]

25 Senator Budd: For an alien --

1 Senator Kelly: It is a ship.

2 Senator Budd: [Off mic.]

3 Senator Kelly: It is a spaceship, Ted.

4 Senator Budd: Well, marines ride on ships. From

5 seabed to space --

6 Senator Kelly: I know you would sign up to do this.

7 [Off mic.]

8 Senator Kelly: Yeah.

9 And then, General, you know, just on the conversation
10 we had a couple of weeks ago at the Power Projection Wing,
11 I was talking to Admiral Anderson just today, you know,
12 AFRICOM commander, about the OA-1K and the ability, you
13 know, with that platform to be able to, you know, put some
14 effects on a target. And it seems like it is well suited,
15 obviously, for special ops. That is why it is in the Power
16 Projection Wing here. Could you give me a little update on
17 where we are with standing up the wing at Davis-Monthan?

18 Lt. Gen. Conley: Yes, Senator, I certainly can. So
19 we just took possession of our 18th OA-1K. And I think
20 from an operational perspective, you are right. We have
21 yet to put into combat. We are still building out the
22 initial cadre and training crews. I think it will provide
23 combatant commanders a Swiss Army knife capability where
24 one day it could do exquisite SIGINT, collect intel, ISR
25 things, and also be armed with up to 6,000 pounds of

1 payload, whether that is Hellfires, rockets, maybe some
2 small cruise missiles that we are working on. So I think,
3 again, it provides the ground force commander lots of
4 options at a very affordable price point, flight hours that
5 are roughly 50 percent less cost per hour than an MQ-9
6 even.

7 As far as Davis-Monthan, we have already planted some
8 seed corn out there with our personnel to build it out next
9 summer. Our wing commander will take command of the wing
10 out at Davis-Monthan. We will get our first OA-1K
11 delivered out there later this fall. Our first two
12 operational OA-1K squadrons will be at Davis-Monthan. And
13 then we are working through the environmental analysis with
14 the recommendation to move a CV-22 squadron out there.

15 Senator Kelly: Great. I was in Jordan a couple years
16 ago, and they had some sitting on the ramp, some of the air
17 tractors, and they had a lot of stuff hanging off of it.
18 Thank you.

19 Chairwoman Ernst: Thank you. Senator Moody.

20 Senator Moody: Thank you so much. Great to see you,
21 gentlemen.

22 I will just note that I was born and raised in
23 Hillsborough County, Florida, where SOCOM has been
24 headquartered since 1987, since its inception. Great
25 things come out of Hillsborough County, Florida. It is

1 great to see you again.

2 I was really interested in some of the comments that
3 you made regarding the way we approach procurement of
4 weapons resources for the military and the way we look at
5 that. It might not be something we get and we maintain for
6 years and years and years. It is a totally different
7 mindset, and you said we need to address that.

8 And then I think there was also this understanding
9 that we need to have some more real-time -- once we get
10 these assets, we need to have some more real-time
11 interaction with maybe the manufacturers as we are tweaking
12 or maintaining or, you know, dealing with the technology or
13 the actual hardware. And so I am kind of going a little
14 bit off what I intended to ask. And I would like to hear
15 from all of you, really, but specifically the two that made
16 those comments.

17 Is it something that in our statutes we need to
18 address regarding procurement? Is it something within the
19 military itself and how you go about doing those things?
20 Like what is it that we can do to help with that? You just
21 talked about those issues that we need to kind of reframe
22 how we approach it and we need to have more engagement with
23 the manufacturers. So how do we help you build on that?
24 As opposed to just commenting that it is a problem, what
25 can we do tangibly to help you solve that?

1 And we will just start down and work --

2 Lt. Gen. Ferguson: Yes, ma'am. Without diving into
3 statutory authorities that I will be unfamiliar with, the
4 biggest challenge that we face, at least within the
5 majority of our formations, is the inability of the
6 operator at the edge to have the authority to tinker. I
7 would use that word, to tinker with the system. If a
8 system is employed and it fails, we don't have the ability
9 to apply the know-how that our individuals have, the
10 expertise that they have both for their craft and
11 potentially even that particular system, to develop
12 solutions to potentially resolve whatever challenge that
13 system is having.

14 And specifically, I am thinking of, you know, unmanned
15 systems right now, mainly unmanned aerial systems. And so
16 we are bound right now to the actual vendor of that system
17 that has the proprietary capability. And so what we are
18 looking for is an ability for our people at the edge to
19 have the right to repair. I know the Secretary of the Army
20 spoke about that earlier today. That is really what we are
21 driving at with most of our formation, ma'am.

22 Lt. Gen. Conley: Thanks, Senator. It is good to see
23 you again.

24 I would expand on that. So from an Air Force lens --
25 like I don't know if it's -- I could speak to statutory

1 changes, but from an Air Force lens, we tend to buy things
2 for many years. So if you look at the Air Force fleet
3 right now, not just the AFSOC fleet, which is relatively
4 healthy compared to the rest of the Air Force, we are
5 flying planes that are 50, 60, 70 years old.

6 And what I have in my large fleet of -- I will just
7 use C-130s as an example. I have got two exquisite
8 variants of that that I can do a lot of things with. I
9 want to be able to use untapped capacity within those
10 airframes to do new things. So if I want to put a long-
11 range small cruise missile on one of those aircraft that
12 can fire at a target 500, 600, 700 miles away, I want to be
13 able to iterate quickly on the software within that. And
14 as General Ferguson mentioned, often working with the large
15 vendors, there is proprietary information to get into the
16 mission computers. We hit walls that small vendors that
17 are trying to move fast and give us those capabilities
18 sometimes get out-muscled by the bigger vendors, and they
19 can't break through. So that doesn't mean the bigger
20 vendors aren't great partners. It is just the business
21 model that they use. And so any help we could get
22 encouraging, again, the ability to partner with smaller
23 companies on the --

24 Senator Moody: Offline, that would be really helpful.
25 I think I would really like to know, I think my colleagues

1 would like to know, which big vendors you are speaking of
2 that are making it harder for our military men and women to
3 do their jobs because they cannot address what we have
4 spent so much money acquiring to make it work for what we
5 need in a particular mission or in a modification. I would
6 be very interested to know who are the top folks that are
7 giving us a hard time.

8 Lt. Gen. Conley: Okay.

9 Maj. Gen. Huntley: Senator, thank you for the
10 question. As I talked about before, you know, having the
11 ability to be able to acquire new technologies quickly,
12 whether it is from a small vendor, whether it is from a
13 more traditional vendor, and then be able to incorporate
14 that into an operational capability, the quicker we can do
15 that, the better it would be.

16 A great example would be, I talked about before, our
17 ability to do targeting at scale, leveraging a variety of
18 sensors to be able to put it onto one pane of glass and
19 interface with the Joint Fires Network. You know, our
20 partnership with that was with a relatively small company
21 that was unknown that was just really an emerging name in
22 the AI field, so it is really a software thing. You know,
23 they had basically a capability, not necessarily purpose-
24 built for what we needed it for, but the partnership that
25 we had with them has allowed us to be able to move forward

1 in the development of that. In a perfect world, or in a
2 better world, we would be able to do that and move it
3 quicker to a real capability.

4 Same thing could be said at the tactical side. You
5 know, for where there are people fighting in the future,
6 you know, the folks across the field from them are going to
7 have capabilities at the tactical edge that we haven't seen
8 before. You know, when you see some of the stuff that the
9 cartels have or the things that we see, al-Shabaab or some
10 of the other people of that ilk having, a great example
11 would be small UASs, right? They are out there. I can buy
12 them right now. I can put them in the hands of our
13 operators, but the ability to kind of adapt them and make
14 them a real military capability at some form of scale is
15 very challenging right now. So anything that we can do, of
16 course, on the military side, we will do our part, but
17 anything that allows us to move faster from a statutory
18 perspective would be very helpful.

19 Senator Moody: Thank you. They are telling me my
20 time has expired, so I am trying to be mindful, not that I
21 don't want to hear all that you have to say.

22 Chairwoman Ernst: No, actually, Admiral, if you would
23 respond, please. Thank you.

24 Rear Adm. Allman: I think the team covered it. It is
25 challenging because we have a high expectation. We are

1 forcing, whether it is a small company or a mid-grade
2 company, to iterate with us with no true commitment to a
3 number of platforms until they deliver, so a little bit of
4 a paradigm shift from a requirement through a long-dwell
5 program where whoever the business or company is has a
6 multi-year expectation of payment.

7 Chairwoman Ernst: Wonderful. And I will turn to the
8 ranking member for any closing comments.

9 Senator Slotkin: Thank you for being here. Thank you
10 for all you are doing. I know you are incredibly busy. I
11 appreciate your time and what you do every day.

12 Chairwoman Ernst: Absolutely. Very quickly. Very
13 quickly, Senator Sheehy.

14 Senator Sheehy: You have a cocktail hour to be at?

15 [Laughter.]

16 Chairwoman Ernst: We have an Ag Committee.

17 Senator Sheehy: All right. What year of car do you
18 drive, General Conley?

19 Lt. Gen. Conley: Depends on the day.

20 Senator Sheehy: What is your daily driver?

21 Lt. Gen. Conley: Sometimes it is a 1998 Jeep
22 Wrangler.

23 Senator Sheehy: Okay.

24 Lt. Gen. Conley: Other times, it is a 2025 Telluride.

25 Senator Sheehy: How about you, Gil?

1 Lt. Gen. Ferguson: I got a 2004 Chevy Suburban and a
2 2016 Chevy SS.

3 Senator Sheehy: What is the average age of the little
4 birds, helicopters that are under your purview?

5 Lt. Gen. Ferguson: Much older than that.

6 Senator Sheehy: What is the average age of your C-130
7 airframes?

8 Lt. Gen. Conley: We are blessed on the C-130 side
9 because we have recapped our entire fleet, so most of them
10 are less than 10 years old. All of them are less than 10
11 years old, so we are blessed there. I can't complain when
12 I look across to my Air Force teammates.

13 Senator Sheehy: When was the last time you got an
14 iPhone, a new iPhone?

15 Lt. Gen. Conley: Two years ago.

16 Senator Sheehy: Right. Yeah. So we upgrade our --
17 the average age of a U.S. airliner is 15 years. That
18 carries passengers. Most of us probably get a new
19 smartphone every other year, and most of us probably drive
20 cars less than 10 years old. Yet we send our best troops
21 into combat in helicopters that are a half century old
22 sometimes, maybe a little less. We wouldn't drive to work
23 every day in a car that old, but we send our guys down
24 range in helicopters that old. And we drive minisubs that
25 were around when Nixon was President. So I think we make

1 do, a lot of amazing things, with little stuff. It is time
2 we get the force they need. Thanks.

3 Chairwoman Ernst: Yes. Thank you, gentlemen.

4 This is my 12th year in the Senate. All 12 years I
5 have served on the Emerging Threats and Capabilities
6 Subcommittee. And as I close out this year in my time in
7 the United States Senate, I just want to say thank you so
8 much. I have served as a Member of the Senate alongside
9 some of the most incredible leaders that SOCOM has offered
10 up to our nation and truly appreciate each one of you. To
11 your senior enlisted members, to all of your teammates,
12 your support personnel, the civilians that work across the
13 force, you know, our deepest thanks to all of them.

14 We often think in terms of actions in conflict, you
15 know, how many enemy killed and so forth, but I would love
16 to know someday the statistic on how many lives have been
17 saved through the actions of SOCOM and your members because
18 we truly don't focus on that enough. We ask a lot of you.
19 And, God willing, you always produce. And thank you so
20 much for your time and service, for being here with us
21 today, and it has been such a privilege to be with all of
22 you.

23 And if I can ask a Chairman's favor, it is a tradition
24 that we take a photo with all of our commanders in SOCOM,
25 as well as their senior enlisted members. If you brought

1 chiefs, if you brought whoever with you, let's include them
2 in a final photo as well.

3 But God bless you all and to your entire teams. We
4 truly appreciate you. Thank you.

5 And that concludes the subcommittee hearing.

6 [Whereupon, at 4:46 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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