

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE ROLE OF SPECIAL
OPERATIONS FORCES IN SUPPORTING THE NATIONAL
DEFENSE STRATEGY, INCLUDING ACTIVITIES THAT
CONTRIBUTE TO LONG-TERM STRATEGIC COMPETITION
WITH CHINA AND RUSSIA

Wednesday, May 17, 2023

Washington, D.C.

ALDERSON COURT REPORTING
1111 14TH STREET NW
SUITE 1050
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-2260
www.aldersonreporting.com

1 TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE ROLE OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS
2 FORCES IN SUPPORTING THE NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY,
3 INCLUDING ACTIVITIES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO LONG-TERM STRATEGIC
4 COMPETITION WITH CHINA AND RUSSIA

5
6 Wednesday, May 17, 2023

7
8 U.S. Senate

9 Subcommittee on Emerging

10 Threats and Capabilities

11 Committee on Armed Services,

12 Washington, D.C.

13
14 The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:31
15 a.m., in Room 222, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon.
16 Kirsten Gillibrand, chairman of the subcommittee,
17 presiding.

18 Subcommittee Members Present: Senators Gillibrand
19 [presiding], Peters, Rosen, Kelly, Ernst, Budd, and
20 Schmitt.

1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND, U.S.
2 SENATOR FROM NEW YORK

3 Senator Gillibrand: [Technical problems] -- committee
4 meets this morning for a hearing with the outside experts
5 on the role of our Special Operations Forces in supporting
6 the national defense strategy. This includes activities
7 that contribute to long term strategic competition with
8 China and Russia.

9 I would like to welcome our witnesses, Dr. Jonathan
10 Schroden, the Research Program Director for the Countering
11 Threats and Challenges Program at the Center for Naval
12 Analysis, and retired Lieutenant General Kevin -- Kenneth
13 Tovo, former Commanding General of the United States Army
14 Special Operations Command.

15 For more than 20 years, after 9/11, our military and
16 especially our Special Operations Forces, were heavily
17 committed to counterterrorism and stabilization missions
18 around the world. However, changing global security
19 dynamics, as reflected in the 2018 and 2022 national
20 defense strategies, have required the Joint Forces to
21 refocus on long term strategic competition with China and
22 Russia.

23 For our Special Operations Forces, this change in
24 focus has required a more resource-efficient approach to
25 counterterrorism and increased investment in capabilities

1 necessary to operate in contested environments.

2 The focus on competition has also provided an
3 opportunity for our Special Operations Forces to leverage
4 the network of allies and partners forged in recent decades
5 to collectively address challenges posed by China and
6 Russia. As a Defense Department's new joint concept for
7 competing puts it, our adversaries intend to, "win without
8 fighting."

9 This strategy warns that if we do not adapt our
10 approach to compete more effectively, "the United States
11 risks ceding strategic influence, advantage, and leverage
12 while preparing for a war that never occurs." Special
13 Operations Forces, enabled by their unique skills and small
14 footprint approach, have a central role to play in
15 strategic competition.

16 That being said, U.S. Special Operations Command, or
17 SOCOM, will need to adapt new -- will need to adopt new
18 operational approaches, field new capabilities, and develop
19 new organizational structures to adequately support the
20 National Defense Strategy.

21 Civilian oversight and advocacy by Assistant Secretary
22 of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity
23 Conflict, as the Service Secretary like individual for
24 SOCOM, will also be critical to facilitating this
25 transition.

1 I hope you will both provide your candid views on
2 these issues this morning, including areas where you
3 believe policy resourcing and legislative changes may be
4 necessary. I would like to welcome our Ranking Member,
5 Senator Ernst.

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

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

2 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you
3 to our witnesses for appearing before the subcommittee.

4 I have sat on the Emerging Threats and Capabilities
5 subcommittee my entire tenure in Congress, governing our
6 nation's Special Forces operations, ensuring they have the
7 authorities and resources they need to carry out their role
8 in our nation's defense. For over eight years, I have
9 gotten to know this community at every echelon.

10 I know a community expertly operating at the tip of
11 the spear, dismantling terror networks, disrupting plots
12 against the homeland, and removing jihadist leaders from
13 the battlefield. Our nation is more secure because of
14 their skill and sacrifice.

15 But the threats imposed by China require our Special
16 Operations enterprise to adapt to the demands of great
17 power competition. Deterring and defeating China means
18 optimizing the joint force to win. The terms and progress
19 of those efforts remain undecided, especially concerning
20 our Special Operations Forces.

21 I have engaged with the SOF community at every level.
22 They are being told across the Command, service components,
23 and teams that the counterterrorism mission is a no fail
24 mission set that SOF must continue to own.

25 Executing the shift to great power competition while

1 continuing to shoulder the counterterrorism burden, coupled
2 with projected manpower cuts and a frozen budget, is beyond
3 daunting. As threats increase, ongoing discussions in the
4 Department about cutting SOF's budget and force structure
5 is out of step with the threats and SOF's growing
6 requirements.

7 The numbers don't add up. Today, I worry clarity and
8 task, mission and purpose is lacking. We need to figure
9 out how to shape the SOF enterprise to best fulfill its
10 missions across the spectrum of competition and conflict.
11 This committee must push the Department to clarify
12 requirements, clearly task the Command, and give our
13 Special Operations Forces opportunities to shape and
14 contribute to future fights.

15 I believe SOF must reactivate its muscle memory as a
16 force born in great power competition. Skills in
17 conducting irregular warfare, foreign internal defense, and
18 sensitive activities must be rediscovered and cultivated.
19 A budget that gives funds and space for the training,
20 operations, and equipment required in the relevant theaters
21 of conflict is an imperative.

22 For the SOF community, outside perspectives are
23 necessary to inform this change. Gentlemen, I look forward
24 to your testimony. Thank you for being here. I yield,
25 Madam Chair.

1 Senator Gillibrand: I will now turn to our witnesses
2 for any opening remarks they may wish to make. Let's start
3 with Dr. Schroden, followed by General Tovo.

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 STATEMENT OF JONATHAN SCHRODEN, RESEARCH PROGRAM
2 DIRECTOR, COUNTERING THREATS AND CHALLENGES, CENTER FOR
3 NAVAL ANALYSES

4 Dr. Schrodin: Chair Gillibrand, Ranking Member Ernst,
5 members of the subcommittee, thank you for having me here
6 to discuss this important topic today.

7 I am speaking to you as a military analyst with CNA,
8 which is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, independent research and
9 analysis organization. For the past 17 years, I have
10 worked with U.S. special operators in various capacities.
11 For the past seven of those, I have directed CNA's Special
12 Operations Program.

13 As you are aware, the 2018 National Defense Strategy
14 marked an inflection point for the U.S. military, and by
15 extension, our Special Operations Forces. The NDS's
16 statement that, "inter-state strategic competition, not
17 terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. National
18 Security" sent a shockwave through the Department of
19 Defense that is still generating ripple effects today.

20 In that regard, the current environment to me
21 surrounding the idea of competition is reminiscent of the
22 immediate aftermath of 9/11. At that time, there was a
23 strong impetus to get after the problem of terrorism, but
24 minimal strategic guidance regarding how to do so.

25 The net result was some overarching strategic

1 principles and a lot of good ideas and activities generated
2 at the tactical level, with little in the way of
3 operational art to translate principles into action.

4 Conversely, there was little in the way of
5 understanding an assessment of how tactical actions summed
6 over time to achieve or potentially undermine our strategic
7 goals. It took well over a decade of sustained
8 counterterrorism operations before the messy middle between
9 policy and action was crystallized in the form of campaign
10 plans, operations, orders, enduring authorities, and
11 routine assessments.

12 While the 2022 NDS took the idea of competition a step
13 further by advancing the concepts of integrated deterrence
14 and campaigning, we are still lacking a translation of
15 these ideas to tactical actions via a clear framework of
16 activities and associated authorities, policies,
17 permissions, and oversight.

18 This situation is especially challenging for SOF, as
19 they have been tasked to remain the nation's premiere force
20 for crisis response and counterterrorism, while being
21 pressured to do more in support of competition. In our
22 work at CNA, we have sought to help the SOF enterprise
23 bridge this gap between policy and action.

24 This has included the conduct of detailed studies such
25 as the Independent Assessment of Special Operations Force

1 structure that Congress mandated in the 2020 NDAA, as well
2 as a series of force design war games that we have
3 conducted for multiple SOF commands.

4 Much of that work cannot be discussed in detail here,
5 but one of my own efforts in this vein is a framework for
6 competition campaigning that I published via the Modern War
7 Institute in January.

8 This framework contains 15 campaign elements, 8 of
9 which are operational aspects designed to compete for
10 global influence today. You would recognize many of these
11 subjects -- many of these mission areas as ones for which
12 SOF already have substantial capability, intelligence
13 operations, working with foreign militaries and irregular
14 forces, and information operations are some examples.

15 SOF have a strong value proposition to make for near-
16 term competition campaigning in these areas, if they can
17 evolve their capabilities to be relevant in semi or non-
18 permissive environments against adversaries with
19 capabilities that far exceed those of terrorist groups.

20 The other seven components of the campaigning
21 framework, however, are designed to compete for influence
22 in the decades to come. These include strategic planning,
23 force design and development, posturing, exercises, and
24 strategic assessment, elements that were not often integral
25 to counterterrorism operations.

1 These institutional or service like areas are ones for
2 which the skills and capabilities of SOCOM and other SOF
3 commands have atrophied over the last 20 years. Thus, for
4 SOF to develop capabilities that are relevant for future
5 campaigning, SOCOM, in partnership with ASD SO/LIC needs to
6 dramatically reinvigorate its service like role.

7 SOCOM's What Winning Looks Like Initiative, and some
8 newly created analytic efforts at ASD SO/LIC are positive
9 steps towards addressing these intellectual challenges,
10 though much work remains to be done in this area. At the
11 same time, a host of other issue areas need to be
12 addressed.

13 These include technical ones, like how to overcome
14 persistent surveillance and anti-access technologies.
15 Structural ones, like how to divide resources between the
16 TSOC and other SOF headquarters. And cultural ones such as
17 how to pivot a kinetically oriented force to a future that
18 increasingly calls for non-kinetic activities and
19 engagement.

20 Make no mistake, we are asking a lot of SOF today.
21 Effectively, to respond to crises at a moment's notice, to
22 hold the line on terrorist threats, and now, to lead the
23 way in competition. As they have for decades, SOF are
24 evolving their capabilities to meet that challenge.

25 A lesson learned from the past 20 years, though, is

1 that writing big checks with minimal guidance and oversight
2 for an aggressive and creative force can create unintended
3 and counterproductive consequences.

4 For SOF to become the nation's premier and trusted
5 crisis response, counterterrorism, and competition force
6 will require sustained resourcing, clear guidance, and
7 strong oversight. I look forward to your questions toward
8 that end and thank you again for your time today.

9 [The prepared statement of Dr. Schroden follows:]

10 [SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 STATEMENT OF LTG KENNETH E. TOVO, USA (RET.), FORMER
2 COMMANDING GENERAL, UNITED STATES ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS
3 COMMAND

4 General Tovo: Madam Chair Gillibrand, Ranking Member
5 Ernst, and distinguished Senators of the committee, thank
6 you for the opportunity to appear before you today to
7 discuss the role of Special Operations Forces in supporting
8 the National Defense Strategy, particularly how SOF
9 contributes to the strategic competition with China and
10 Russia.

11 I last appeared before this subcommittee as a
12 Commander of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command five
13 years ago, several months before I retired from active
14 service. While I have remained involved and close to the
15 SOF community in my civilian professional pursuits,
16 nonprofit volunteer work, and personal relationships, I am
17 no longer, to paraphrase President Teddy Roosevelt, in the
18 arena.

19 I testify today as a private citizen. My comments are
20 purely my own judgments and opinions. As a nation, we are
21 faced with an incredibly complex and dangerous global
22 security environment.

23 The rules based international order created after
24 World War II is under significant attack, at best
25 faltering, at worst crumbling. China and Russia, supported

1 by like-minded regional actors such as Iran, are
2 aggressively challenging international norms to pursue
3 their aims at the expense of U.S. and allied interests.

4 While our adversaries prefer to employ coercive
5 measures below the threshold of armed conflict, Russia's
6 invasion of Georgia in 2008, Crimea, and Eastern Ukraine in
7 2014, and today's ongoing conflict in the Ukraine
8 demonstrate that they have no reluctance to resort to war.
9 Each invasion was preceded by a period ripe with indication
10 and warnings.

11 In each case, the U.S. and its allies and partners
12 endeavored to deter war, and in each case, deterrence
13 failed. You can be assured the Chinese are drawing lessons
14 from this history. Adding to this complex environment are
15 continuing conflicts and instability, enflamed and in some
16 cases caused by the activities of violent extremist
17 organizations. Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Lebanon,
18 Tran Sahel, now the Sudan, may head the list, but there are
19 many others.

20 As we saw routinely in the Cold War and are witnessing
21 today, our adversaries seize on these conflicts as an
22 opportunity to further their aims, providing arms, money,
23 and support on the ground. Russia's actions in the Sudan
24 are just the most recent example.

25 In this period of strategic competition, we should

1 expect a near continual parade of challenges, spanning
2 everything from active information operations to degrade
3 our will and disrupt national and allied cohesion,
4 cyberattacks to undermine our competitive advantage, state
5 and non-state sponsored acts of terror with the potential
6 to diffuse our focus from the existential threats, proxy
7 conflicts that threaten regional stability, and of course,
8 up to a traditional conflict with one or both of our peer
9 adversaries.

10 U.S. Special Operations Forces are uniquely suited to
11 operate and contribute to the interagency and joint force
12 in this turbulent environment, whether in strategic
13 competition or conflict. In the interest of brevity, I
14 will focus on the role in competition.

15 SOF enterprise provides the nation a multilayered
16 capability to respond to crises that will be essential for
17 navigating the emergency strewn landscape of the
18 competitive space. Primarily developed through the
19 engagement activities of its regionally aligned forces, SOF
20 has a global network of allied and partner forces that are
21 often able to respond rapidly and effectively. In some
22 cases, our partners obviate the need for U.S. forces.

23 In others, they are effective teammates in the
24 response, providing both tactical capabilities and a deeper
25 understanding of the situation on the ground. At any given

1 time, SOCOM's global footprint of approximately 6,000
2 personnel in 80 to 90 countries, provides another layer of
3 crisis response capability.

4 On numerous occasions, SOF elements and individuals
5 deployed abroad for campaigning, training, or other
6 activities have been re-missioned on short notice to
7 respond to everything from humanitarian disasters,
8 terrorist incidents, and the outbreak of conflict. And of
9 course, as you know, SOF provides a variety of highly
10 capable alert forces, rapidly deployable on little to no
11 notice anywhere in the world.

12 The key ingredient to all these crisis response
13 capabilities are the specially assessed and selected
14 special operators who possess the mental agility, complex
15 problem-solving skills, and high state of readiness and
16 training to rapidly adapt to dynamic crisis situations.

17 They are adeptly enabled by an irreplaceable team of
18 assigned intelligence professionals, logisticians, comms
19 specialists, and medical personnel. The NDS highlights the
20 concept of campaigning as a key way to successfully gain
21 military advantage, deter adversaries, and address grey
22 zone challenges in an environment of strategic competition.
23 SOF is well-versed in this campaign approach.

24 Under the design of the geographic Combatant Commands,
25 and the direction of the Theater Special Operations

1 Commands, SOF have played an integral role in theater
2 campaign plans for decades. They are primarily conducted
3 by the regionally aligned, culturally attuned, and local
4 language capable forces who have an unparalleled ability to
5 operate in austere and complex environments, with a small
6 footprint, low resource requirements, and in
7 synchronization with the U.S. country team.

8 Often executed as continual persistent presence
9 missions, these activities have been essential to
10 developing our partners' capability, signaling U.S.
11 commitment to the relationship, developing influence, and
12 providing unique insights and understanding into local and
13 regional dynamics.

14 SOF campaign activities are long term investments that
15 often take years or even decades of patience, persistence,
16 and presence to fully mature. Classic examples are SF
17 deployments under Partnership for Peace in Eastern Europe
18 in the 90s and Plan Colombia since 1999.

19 In the case of PFP, these activities and relationships
20 helped pave the way for a session of our Eastern European
21 counterparts into NATO, and directly contributed to helping
22 them build their own credible special operations forces.
23 We reaped the return on that investment a decade later, as
24 they fought alongside us in Iraq and Afghanistan.

25 In Colombia, SOF was a significant component of the

1 decade and a half investment in Plan Colombia that
2 eventually brought the FARC to the negotiating table. SOF
3 helped build and improve the ability of Colombian forces to
4 combat the FARC, while also improving its professionalism
5 and its human rights approach.

6 Despite the myth that SOF did nothing but direct
7 action in counterterrorism for 20 years, this is one
8 example of myriad SOF campaign activities that continued
9 around the globe, despite heavy commitments in Iraq and
10 Afghanistan. Campaign in an era of strategic competition
11 will be more challenging than it was in the post-Cold War
12 era and during the GWOT.

13 For one, China and Russia have been aggressive in
14 spreading influence globally. To some extent, we have been
15 absent from the field. In other instances, our efforts
16 have been reactive and defensive. The recent diplomatic
17 effort in Solomon Islands comes to mind. We have
18 significant ground to regain in the competition for
19 influence.

20 Another challenge to effective campaign in this era is
21 the trend of decreasing willingness to accept calculated
22 risk. The U.S. fairly routinely shuts embassies, ceases
23 ongoing programs in support of a host nation, and withdraws
24 personnel, to include deployed SOF personnel, in the face
25 of developing crises.

1 We lose access to the environment, situational
2 awareness and understanding, the ability to impact events,
3 and undermine the relationship and influence with our
4 partners. During GWOT, SOF actions outside of declared
5 combat theaters generally had to each be approved
6 individually, often at the highest levels of our
7 Government.

8 This CONOP process applied to both kinetic and non-
9 kinetic operations. Indeed, the comment that it is easier
10 to get permission to drop a bomb than gain approval for an
11 information operation was heard as frequently in combat
12 theaters as elsewhere. It is a bureaucratic process that
13 can't scale to the volume of a global campaign against
14 multiple aggressive adversaries, and where many in the
15 approval process can say no and few can say yes.

16 It is a process that focuses on all the risks that can
17 be imagined in regard to proposed operations, but rarely
18 assesses the risk of taking no action. It is a process
19 that will stymie initiative, fail to match the pace and
20 volume of our adversaries' activities, and result in an
21 arthritic campaign that neither deters our adversaries nor
22 sets the necessary conditions to prevail in competition or
23 conflict.

24 Finally, to be effective, any campaign approach must
25 be nested within a coherent national strategy. While the

1 recent unclassified National Security and defense
2 strategies are useful aspirational statements of purpose
3 and intent, one hopes that there is a classified NSC 68
4 like document to drive unified action across U.S.
5 Government and Departments.

6 I would offer a cautionary quote from Sun Tzu,
7 strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory.
8 Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat. Some
9 of our current SOF organizations were created to meet the
10 requirements of the last period of strategic competition,
11 the Cold War with the Soviet Union.

12 In some ways, this is a return to our roots.
13 Regardless, all our nation's SOF have a history of
14 successful adaptation to meeting changing demands. SOCOM
15 and its components are well on their way in this journey.
16 I am confident they will meet the challenge.

17 In my view, SOF is a critical capability for strategic
18 competition, but it is not sufficient. It must be
19 incorporated in an ecosystem that promotes action to
20 advance our strategic games. Senator, thank you for your
21 time and attention. I look forward to your questions.

22 [The prepared statement of General Tovo follows:]
23
24
25

1 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you. Can you just continue
2 along that line of thinking? What ways would you change
3 the ecosystem?

4 General Tovo: Senator, there are a variety of
5 tactical actions that, is my understanding, the force is
6 already starting to develop and propose that would be more
7 aggressive in pushing back on Chinese and Russian
8 influence.

9 The challenge is twofold. One, it is very hard to get
10 those actions through a system, as I described, that is,
11 you know, one campaign or one CONOP at a time in its
12 approval process. But the other challenge, and this is
13 part of the challenge of the approval process, is that
14 lacking a strategic vision -- it is hard for decision
15 makers at any level to view these CONOPS and say, yes, this
16 supports the national strategy.

17 This is an effective tactical action or series of
18 tactical actions that are appropriate to achieving these
19 strategic objectives within a framework that has been
20 approved. And some of this will have to mean pushing
21 authorities and approval processes down lower in the chain
22 of command.

23 Certainly, information operations is one of those
24 where clearly we need to push things a little further down
25 the chain, all within a pre-approved national level set of

1 themes and campaigns.

2 Senator Gillibrand: I want to talk to you both about
3 irregular warfare. As I mentioned in my opening statement,
4 our adversaries are becoming more aggressive in challenging
5 U.S. interests through the use of asymmetric means that
6 often fall below the threshold of conventional conflict,
7 commonly referred to as irregular warfare gray zone
8 operations.

9 In your view, what role does Special Operations Forces
10 encountering these challenges -- do you believe that
11 Special Operations Forces have the appropriate authorities
12 and capabilities to operate effectively in this domain of
13 warfare? Dr. Schroden.

14 Dr. Schroden: It is a great question. I think
15 irregular warfare has to some extent come back in vogue
16 after having fallen out of, you know, fashion as a term for
17 a period of time.

18 And I think it is good that we are having this
19 conversation again and that Congress has taken actions to,
20 you know, compel the Department of Defense to stand up
21 things like the irregular warfare center to draw more, you
22 know, sustained attention and focus on this.

23 I would agree with General Tovo, though, that the
24 incorporation of that more fulsomely into things like the
25 national defense strategy still isn't there, right. The

1 2018 NDS didn't talk about irregular warfare.

2 There was an annex that was written separately that
3 was largely ignored by most of the people, except those who
4 wrote it. There is not such a -- you know, there is no
5 annex like that for the 2022 NDS, nor do I look at the NDS
6 and see irregular warfare, part and parcel of what it
7 advances.

8 So, I think that is still a missing aspect of this.
9 To your point about specific capabilities, I think SOF are
10 well placed to do a lot with respect to irregular warfare
11 in a competition setting based on extant authorities, like
12 127 Echo, 1202, etcetera, 333. Where I see the biggest
13 gaps residing are in the information operations space.

14 You know, if you look at DOD's IO capabilities, their
15 organization, their doctrine, their use of terminology, it
16 is about as big a mess as you could imagine. None of the
17 services use the same terms. When they say information
18 warfare or information operations, they are all talking
19 about different things.

20 They are developing different capabilities in those
21 areas. There is no synchronicity across the Department
22 when it comes to the use of information or how -- or even
23 how to think about the use of information. So, I would
24 highlight that.

25 Senator Gillibrand: Okay. Lieutenant General.

1 General Tovo: Yes. Just to add, Senator, first of
2 all, my -- I would offer there is a challenge with
3 definitions. Everybody has got a different view of what
4 irregular warfare means. In plain English, I would offer
5 that conventional warfare is very enemy force focused,
6 whereas the suite of capabilities and activities we call
7 irregular warfare are more often focused on the human
8 terrain.

9 The -- a population or a nation or a partner or an
10 ally force that we are working to help develop, or a
11 resistance force that we are working with to overthrow an
12 occupying power. So that essence, I would say, it is
13 important to understand that SOF is purpose built for those
14 environments.

15 That is what we designed. Particularly our regionally
16 aligned SOF, your Green Berets, Civil Affairs, PSYOPS.
17 They were purpose built for this irregular warfare or
18 unconventional warfare environment and are adapted very
19 well for that.

20 And over the last decade, the component particularly,
21 but also SOCOM has endeavored to build capabilities within
22 those forces that update to operate in today's irregular
23 warfare environment, as well as field capability gaps that
24 we have really had for a long time.

25 Senator Gillibrand: Well, let me just give you -- so

1 Section 1202, which you mentioned, Dr. Schrodin, in the
2 2018 NDAA authorizes the provision of support to regular
3 forces -- irregular forces and individuals supporting or
4 facilitating irregular warfare operations by U.S. Special
5 Operations Forces.

6 So just what is your assessment of that authority? Is
7 that sufficient to be able to create more investment in
8 this space? And what is your response to critics that, or
9 to critiques to the authority that would draw us into
10 conflict with strategic competitors? You can start,
11 General.

12 General Tovo: [Technical problems] -- sorry. I think
13 the authorities have -- are pretty well drawn. I think our
14 challenge is often moving from authorities to permission,
15 to actually taking the authority and being able to conduct
16 an activity under it, on the ground. You know, there are
17 some quirks, right.

18 The -- we had some programs that were, according to
19 open source, being executed in the Ukraine under some of
20 these authorities that had to cease when war started. I
21 don't think that was ever the intent of Congress, but that
22 is what the Office of General Counsel has inferred from it.

23 And as a result, we stopped programs for a partner in
24 the Ukraine at the very moment they needed it the most.

25 [Technical problems.]

1 Senator Ernst: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. And
2 General Tovo, I want to say thank you as well. I do
3 remember the last time you were in front of our committee
4 and certainly appreciate your candor. And this discussion
5 today comes from a valuable background of time on the
6 ground.

7 So, thank you. So, gentlemen, we have to balance the
8 future force development with day-to-day employment across
9 our joint force. And so, General Tovo, I will start with
10 you, and then we will go to Dr. Schroden.

11 Is the SOF enterprise presently striking the right
12 balance with their requirements to fulfill missions across
13 the spectrum of competition and conflict?

14 General Tovo: Senator, I think right now they are.
15 As currently built in the force structure they have
16 available, I think they have got adequate forces to balance
17 both this need for crisis response, counterterrorism, as
18 well as competition force.

19 Certainly, if some of the service plans to reduce SOF
20 in one case up to 10 to 20 percent of the current
21 authorized strength will impact that capability,
22 particularly if it reduces some of those enabling
23 capabilities, such as intelligence personnel.

24 That will be very difficult. And I think just the
25 last thing I would say is that it is important to recognize

1 that these are not three stovepipes that are mutually
2 exclusive. In many ways, our efforts on the ground to help
3 a partner in a counterterrorism problem they have is
4 actually part of how we get access and placement in a
5 country that then allows us to compete and gain influence
6 at the expense of our adversaries.

7 So often counterterrorism may be the vehicle we ride,
8 so to speak, in order to have a means to compete with our
9 adversaries.

10 Senator Ernst: Very good. Thanks, General. Dr.
11 Schroden.

12 Dr. Schroden: Yes, ma'am. So, I agree with what
13 General Tovo said. I would add a few things to that. So,
14 when we did the force structure assessment that was
15 mandated in the 2020 NDAA, which I had the honor of
16 leading.

17 One of the things we did was to look very closely at
18 what is the demand signal for SOF coming from the
19 geographic combatant commands, as well as from the
20 services, and how does that compare to the extent force
21 structure that they have today? We ran a bunch of
22 different, you know, calculations, scenarios, etcetera.

23 One of the common themes in terms of, you know, force
24 structure requirements that emerged from those is in almost
25 every scenario we looked at, there was a higher demand for

1 PSYOP forces, for Civil Affairs forces, for undersea
2 warfare and maritime capabilities than what the force has
3 today.

4 So, I think there is, you know, there is a lot of
5 capacity for counterterrorism that still exists, that
6 hasn't been fully repurposed yet, in my view. And I think
7 there is still room for a rebalancing of some entities that
8 were dedicated to counterterrorism for a long time that
9 could be repurposed towards other areas.

10 But there is, I think, room for additional development
11 and expansion of capabilities of the types that I mentioned
12 that, again, our calculations seem to indicate an
13 increasing demand for those, and yet the supply has
14 remained roughly static for a very long time.

15 Senator Ernst: So, let's continue with that. I think
16 that is really important, Dr. Schrodin. Then, how can the
17 DOD rebalance that demand signal from the global combatant
18 commanders then when it varies theater to theater? What
19 would you recommend -- if you were sitting down at the
20 Pentagon, what would you say? How do we balance that?

21 Dr. Schrodin: I think that is the million-dollar
22 question, Senator. You know, when we are talking about
23 campaigning, as you well know, there is no single entity
24 that you could point to in the Department of Defense and
25 say that entity is in charge or is fully in the lead for a

1 global competition campaign against the likes of China, for
2 example.

3 Notionally, INDOPACOM is supposed to be the global
4 integrator or global synchronizer for that type of thing.
5 But I think it is pretty clear to anyone who looks at
6 INDOPACOM's capabilities and where its focus areas are that
7 that mission exceeds its ability to conduct, right. That
8 mandate is just not something that INDOPACOM can reasonably
9 fulfill.

10 And so there is a lot of debates that then emerge
11 about, well should the Joint Staff play that role? Joint
12 Staff isn't really an operational entity. It is an
13 advisory entity for the most part. So, it may not be
14 appropriate for the Joint Staff to play that role. If not
15 the Joint Staff, then who? And there is -- right, there is
16 a bunch of different options.

17 At CNA, we are currently in the midst of the
18 independent assessment of the unified command plan that
19 Congress mandated last year. So that will lay out some
20 options to look at this, but that is not complete yet. I
21 wish I had a firmer answer to give you, but I think there
22 is not one to be had at this point in time.

23 Senator Ernst: I do, too. And I think that is really
24 important. General Tovo and I visited about this a little
25 bit in my office yesterday as well. And just the fact that

1 there is no single entity, no single entity, and we have to
2 have the right path forward and we don't have that right,
3 right now.

4 A cohesive strategy in any one of these silos, I
5 guess, or the three different buckets that we have with SOF
6 currently. So, we will delve into that a little bit more.
7 My time has expired. We will come back to that in a
8 moment. But Senator Rosen, please.

9 Senator Rosen: Well, thank you, Senator Ernst. I
10 really appreciate you, and of course, Senator Gillibrand
11 holding this hearing. Thank you for the two of you for
12 service to our country and for being here today.

13 And I really want to build a little bit on what some
14 of the things Senator Ernst is talking about. We are in an
15 era of great power competition, right. And Russia's brutal
16 invasion of Ukraine and China's increasing assertiveness in
17 the Indo-Pacific, they both confirm the National Defense
18 Strategy's classification of Russia and China as strategic
19 competitors who threaten the rules based international
20 order.

21 So, General Tovo, given that these theaters pose far
22 greater challenges for the U.S. to operate than where our
23 counterterrorism operations of the past 20 years have taken
24 place, how are the Special Operations Forces evolving to
25 confront this great power competition, and how does this

1 impact SOF's ability to operate effectively in denied areas
2 for extended periods of time?

3 General Tovo: Yes. Thank you, Senator. I would
4 offer that the SOF community has actually been evolving for
5 about a decade now.

6 Within USASOC, back in about 2013, my predecessor as
7 the Commander of USASOC retook -- took the opportunity
8 afforded by some force cuts driven by sequestration to
9 reorganize what we call a line battalion, a traditional
10 battalion of the Special Forces of eight teams into a more
11 sensitive activities and irregular warfare focused
12 capability.

13 And that was just one of a series of actions that has
14 continued for the last decade. Changes in, for example, in
15 how we train and organize our psychological operations
16 forces to bring them a little bit more into the digital
17 age, if you will.

18 And that continues to today. For example, within
19 -- for Special Forces Command, a component of the -- of
20 USASOC, they have stood up an integrating headquarters to
21 try and do what Dr. Schroden identified as a gap, which is
22 just global view of these campaigns with Russia and China.

23 And so, they are focused obviously on the SOF that
24 they control and deploy, Civil Affairs, PSYOP, and Green
25 Berets. But they have created this headquarters to try and

1 first sense and see what the environment and what our
2 adversaries are doing, particularly in the information
3 domain, as well as synchronize our operations through the
4 TSOC, and then leveraging close connections with CYBERCOM
5 and SPACECOM to understand potential tools that could be
6 used to push back on our adversaries.

7 So, I would say the evolution has been ongoing for
8 quite some time. You specifically talk about the ability
9 to do it in non-permissive environments, which is going to
10 be a huge challenge, frankly.

11 The, you know, ubiquitous technical surveillance
12 environment that is being created around the world in many
13 places, so called smart cities, will make it increasingly
14 challenging for, particularly in urban areas, for SOF to
15 operate in those places or anybody else to operate,
16 intelligence agencies.

17 Which I think is really going to drive us much more
18 towards what is a core our SOF capability, the Army SOF
19 capability, which is working through partners and others
20 who do have natural access and placement to these
21 environments in order to fulfill our objectives.

22 However, we will never lose the ability, I think, to
23 for, in the right place, right time, right circumstances to
24 penetrate into permissive -- or non-permissive environments
25 with our high-end capabilities, both Air Force, Army

1 helicopters, and other means, to put folks on the ground.

2 Senator Rosen: Thank you. And I want to turn now to
3 you, Dr. Schroden, because we have to work in countries all
4 around the world, multi-domain environments and missions,
5 and the U.S. simply can't abandon.

6 We may recognize Russia and China are the leading
7 threats, but we can't abandon the Middle East, for example,
8 and our ongoing terrorism -- counterterrorism operations
9 there. And so, do you think that SOCOM has the capacity to
10 manage both of these missions at once?

11 And are there tradeoffs? What are these tradeoffs
12 that could be involved from balancing these two very
13 distinct missions and maintaining the security and
14 stability that we need?

15 Dr. Schroden: It is an excellent question, ma'am. I
16 think the, a key development over the last couple of years
17 that has helped SOCOM in that regard has been a sort of
18 downgrading of our national objectives with respect to
19 various terrorist groups.

20 So, the Department of Defense has made quite clear
21 that we are not -- we are no longer trying to defeat most
22 of these terrorist groups around the world, right. We have
23 downgraded our objectives to monitor, disrupt, and degrade,
24 you know, those groups that are specifically able or have
25 capabilities or intend to target the U.S. homeland.

1 That sort of reduction of ambitions, if you will, has
2 then translated into a reduction in requirements for
3 counterterrorism, which has then freed up some degree of
4 SOF capacity to focus on other challenges.

5 So, there is some amount of ability to repurpose now,
6 and SOCOM is in the midst of trying to do that.

7 Senator Rosen: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

8 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Senator Rosen. Senator
9 Budd.

10 Senator Budd: Thank you, Ranking Member Ernst. Good
11 morning, gentlemen. Again, thank you both for being here.
12 General Tovo, thank you for your many years of service at
13 Fort Bragg. And thanks for staying a North Carolinian as
14 well.

15 So, I want to follow up on Ranking Member Ernst's
16 remarks regarding planned force structure cuts,
17 specifically the administration's plans to cut 10 percent
18 of U.S. Army Special Operations Forces.

19 General Tovo, given your experience as a former
20 commander, how do you assess such cuts would impact use of
21 SOF's ability to provide combatant commanders with options
22 for great power competition, counterterrorism, and crisis
23 response? And then if we did lose that capacity, how long
24 would it take to rebuild it?

25 General Tovo: Thank you, Senator. Appreciate the

1 question. Yes, I mean, in a word, I think that it will be
2 crippling, right. 10 percent of the force is going to be a
3 significant -- and there have been -- the higher end is
4 even 20 percent.

5 So, and a lot of the cuts, I believe -- once again, I
6 know I am not living in the process anymore, but are
7 focused not just on SOF, but on SOF enabling capabilities.
8 So, we are a force that is very much driven by our
9 intelligence community. And if the cuts are taken there,
10 and that is one of the places that the service, I believe,
11 wants to take the cuts, that will be devastating.

12 Without the intelligence capability, our operational
13 capability is hobbled at best. It is also likely that many
14 of the cuts will affect proportionately the regionally
15 forces much more, the Green Berets, PSYOP, and CA areas
16 where we really can't afford. They are the prime forces
17 for competition.

18 They are the persistent present forces out in the
19 crisis parts of the world who are working with partners and
20 have the ability to do all the things that are last two
21 NDSs have said we want to be able to do to leverage
22 partners and allies. And if we take cuts in those, we will
23 certainly have less capability.

24 As to how long it will take to rebuild them, hard to
25 say, but it will be measured in years.

1 Senator Budd: Years, wow. Thank you. Dr. Schroden,
2 I would like talk about information, both as an instrument
3 of national power, as well as information operations as, of
4 course, SOF activity. Successful information operations
5 can have significant deterrent value. How do you assess
6 U.S. strength in the information domain?

7 Dr. Schroden: I don't think we are very strong in the
8 information environment right now, and I don't think we are
9 likely to get stronger any time soon, if only because, in
10 my view, we are not putting the right degree of emphasis on
11 that. I think you could start with the National Security
12 strategy.

13 If you pull up that document, you will see clearly,
14 you know, sections that are clearly dedicated and labeled
15 as dedicated to diplomacy, military, and economic levers of
16 U.S. military might. A glaring absence in that document is
17 any discussion of information as a tool of U.S. national
18 power.

19 So even at the most senior strategic levels, we have
20 effectively ignored information as an instrument of U.S.
21 national power. And it just flows downward from there.
22 The further down you go, the messier it gets, because there
23 is no strategic direction about how we intend to use
24 information as a nation.

25 Senator Budd: You know, in Fiscal Year 2020, the

1 NDAA, in addition to creating a new principal information
2 operations advisory, calls for -- called for a holistic
3 strategy and posture review of information operations
4 within the DOD.

5 Now, it is my understanding that your organization,
6 the Center for Naval Analysis, completed that study and
7 submitted it to the Department. Is that correct?

8 Dr. Schroden: That is correct, sir.

9 Senator Budd: I don't think we have seen it here in
10 committee, yet despite being more than a year late. Do you
11 know the current status of the report?

12 Dr. Schroden: As I understand it, it is with the
13 senior most officials in the Defense Department for their
14 review, and they will transmit it whenever their review is
15 complete. But I don't have any more detail on when that
16 might happen, sir.

17 Senator Budd: Okay, thank you. In the brief time
18 that I have remaining, sticking with you, Dr. Schroden, you
19 recently wrote a piece for the Modern War Institute on SOF
20 competition campaigning.

21 Now, from an oversight perspective, some have argued
22 that campaigning against nation state competitors carries
23 significant more risks than campaigning against terrorist
24 networks. On the flip side, properly planned irregular
25 warfare campaigns could increase deterrence and provide

1 additional tools for de-escalation.

2 How should we think about this as we craft authorities
3 and conduct oversight of the SOF and great power
4 competition?

5 Dr. Schroden: That is a great question. Certainly,
6 irregular warfare against the likes of China and Russia
7 carry much higher degrees of escalatory risk than
8 counterterrorism operations. And we have seen this in the
9 war games that we have conducted for SOF and for other
10 entities as well.

11 That as a military, we are still in some ways
12 relearning how to think about escalation dynamics in these
13 types of operations, especially irregular warfare ones.
14 So, I wouldn't be able to look you straight in the face and
15 say we have a good understanding right now of what those
16 escalation ladders look like and how to effectively manage
17 them.

18 I think we are learning that as we work through these
19 analyzes and war games now. And that is something, I
20 think, that the Congress will want to keep a close eye on
21 going forward. Is how are -- how is the Department
22 assessing risk of escalation?

23 How is it mapping out what escalation ladders look
24 like under various scenarios? And how do irregular warfare
25 and activities and authorities play into those types of

1 escalatory ladders and scenarios? That we have that that
2 fulsome understanding, or that we develop it.

3 Senator Budd: Thank you both for your time.

4 Senator Ernst: Okay. Thank you, Senator Budd.

5 Senator Schmitt.

6 Senator Schmitt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wanted to
7 ask a couple of questions. I made clear in a bunch of
8 committees so far this year that the threat that China
9 poses is as paramount, I think, to our -- and not only our
10 -- the National Security of our friends and allies, but of
11 the United States.

12 And I know that Senator Rosen, I think, asked a
13 question or two about the, you know, the different terrain
14 and training in places like Afghanistan to sort of island
15 hopping in Southeast Asia, or in the Indo-Pacific.

16 And I am pleased to see the growing relationship
17 between the Philippines and the United States. Could -- I
18 guess I will direct this to you, Lieutenant General, on the
19 Philippines. Could you just discuss what those recent
20 agreements mean, how they can help our special forces?

21 And do you think that activity there can help
22 discourage or dissuade China from moving on some of their
23 grander designs?

24 General Tovo: Senator, thanks for the question. I
25 think-- and thanks for turning the attention to the

1 Philippines, because it is a classic example of how we can
2 campaign over the long term with SOF to great effect, not
3 only at a tactical level, but a strategic level.

4 So, the engagement in the Philippines began under the
5 GWOT in 2002. It was largely to help the Philippine
6 military combat terrorist problems they had in some of
7 their Southern islands.

8 And that relationship, the bond that has been built,
9 carried the U.S. and Filipino relationship through some
10 hard times under the past President, who was somewhat
11 leaning towards China, to a position now where we have got
12 a new administration in the Philippines who is, you know,
13 kind of turning back to the U.S., if you will.

14 But what a lot of that rides, I would offer, on the
15 fact that we demonstrated we were a committed ally when
16 they needed it. We had presence on the ground, we built
17 relationships, etcetera. And so, it highlights the long-
18 term investment of some of these SOF campaigns in an
19 irregular warfare environment.

20 To the specific question on the PI and its importance,
21 I think the, you know, the INDOPACOM Commander is on record
22 and open sourced basically saying that without basing in
23 the Philippines, it is almost impossible to orchestrate a
24 campaign in defense of Taiwan, if called to.

25 So, you can't underestimate the value of those bases.

1 And I think, you also can't underestimate the strategic
2 value that it sends to the rest of the region, that the
3 U.S. is still committed to its partners and allies
4 throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

5 Senator Schmitt: Yes. Thank you. And Dr. Schroden,
6 I do want to ask a couple of questions on Taiwan. Can you
7 briefly touch on foreign, or military sales to Taiwan? I
8 think they have a, you know, a laundry list of things that
9 they have ordered that they have not gotten, and I think
10 this is critical.

11 I mean, obviously, the deterrence here is making sure
12 that they have what they need. Could you just speak to
13 sort of what they are asking for, what they have got, what
14 they don't have?

15 Dr. Schroden: So, I will say, thanks for the
16 question. It exceeds my subject matter expertise at a
17 grand level.

18 I can say, though, from a Special Operations specific
19 perspective, right, a lot of what the Taiwanese, at least
20 my understanding, are asking for is more training, more
21 engagement with Special Operations Forces on the ground in
22 Taiwan to help them prepare to become more resilient, to
23 develop, you know, capabilities that would be useful in the
24 contingency of a Chinese move on Taiwan.

25 So those types of capabilities are at least what I

1 have seen, it appears that they are asking for from our
2 Special Operations Force.

3 Senator Schmitt: Are there certain types of actions
4 that the United States could be taking to further
5 strengthen Taiwan's asymmetrical capabilities? I mean,
6 clearly, China has a much larger population, but that isn't
7 always how these things go down. Is there anything that we
8 can be doing to help strengthen their asymmetrical
9 capabilities?

10 Dr. Schroden: I think there is. And there is a lot
11 of lessons to be drawn on the, what was called the
12 resistance operating concept, that SOCEUR has been
13 employing in the Baltics and other parts of Eastern Europe,
14 right.

15 The idea, the colloquial idea is to turn those
16 countries into, you know, they call them hedgehogs or
17 porcupines, to the Russian bear. And so, now there is a
18 lot of discussion about, is there a way that we could turn
19 Taiwan into a porcupine looking island to the Chinese?

20 And a lot of the types of things I just described in
21 terms of, you know, SOF interacting with specific parts of
22 the Taiwanese military, specific parts of the Taiwanese
23 population to help build that resilience, to help prepare
24 for resistance in the eventuality of a Chinese occupation
25 of the island, those are things that SOF could be doing

1 now, if they had the authorities to do them.

2 And obviously those are things that also have a long
3 shelf life in terms of building those capabilities. So,
4 the longer it takes to get such approvals in place, the
5 less likely those capabilities are to be useful in the, you
6 know, in the eventuality of a Chinese invasion.

7 Senator Schmitt: Thank you.

8 Senator Gillibrand: I want to talk a little bit more
9 about information operations. And Senator Ernst, if you
10 have a second round, you can take it too. Several of the
11 combatant commanders have expressed a need for the
12 intelligence community to be more responsive in downgrading
13 and declassifying intelligence to share with foreign
14 partners and for messaging purposes.

15 With respect to Ukraine, the administration has been
16 successful in deliberately releasing information derived
17 from intelligence in an effort to expose Russian true plans
18 and intentions. What are the lessons learned from Ukraine
19 for our broader information operations activities? Do you
20 believe the tactics used in Ukraine could have -- could be
21 used to expose China's coercive behavior and aggressive
22 actions towards others?

23 In your view, what is the appropriate role of the
24 Department, and specifically Special Operations Forces in
25 the broader information operations and strategic

1 communications efforts of the U.S. Government?

2 And do you believe that SOCOM's military information
3 support capabilities can be more effectively utilized? And
4 I think you both said yes on that earlier. If so, are
5 there any modifications to doctrine, policy, or authorities
6 that you believe can make the military information support
7 capabilities more effective?

8 Dr. Schrodin: Sure. It is a great question and there
9 is a lot to unpack there. I will try and keep my answer
10 brief. I think, you know, I would start by saying more
11 capacity would be useful. Again, coming back to the force
12 structure assessment that I mentioned earlier. Almost all
13 of the scenarios that we looked at, there was a demand for
14 more PSYOP forces.

15 So, you know, having two PSYOP groups, in my opinion,
16 professional opinion, is not enough capacity for that
17 mission. So, I think additional capacity there would be
18 helpful.

19 With the additional capacity, I think you could do
20 some other things as well, such as modern -- further
21 modernization of those PSYOP forces to, as General Tovo
22 mentioned earlier, to make them more attuned to the digital
23 age, to give them tools and capabilities that are more
24 aligned with the way, you know, people consume information
25 around the world today.

1 So those are things that I would start with, and there
2 is obviously a lot more that you could build on, if you
3 were able to get to that point.

4 General Tovo: Senator, thank you. Specifically in
5 response to your question about, are there lessons from the
6 Ukraine? Yes. I think it is important to note that the
7 SOF presence, Civil Affairs, PSYOP, and SF, really started
8 persistently in 2014.

9 And so, from that point until 2022 invasion, there was
10 a constant presence on the ground. And so specifically in
11 the information space, we had PSYOP teams that were helping
12 our Ukrainian counterparts work on countering Russian
13 propaganda efforts, trying to send -- build messages of
14 national resistance and resilience, and in general to
15 strengthen the will of the populace to resist Russian
16 invasion.

17 And so, in the end, I think, the Ukrainians own the
18 large measure of the success, but I would like to think
19 that all our efforts, particularly in the information
20 domain, helped in some ways, as well as on the Special
21 Forces side.

22 The work that was done through SOCEUR, as Dr. Schroden
23 mentioned, to help them develop and legalize a national
24 concept of resistance on which they could then build
25 capability on that framework.

1 So, I think there are a lot of lessons from the
2 Ukraine. I think Taiwan will have some of its own
3 challenges that make it a little bit different case.

4 Senator Gillibrand: [Technical problems]
5 -- throughout SOF, women service members representation has
6 increased approximately 40 percent over the past five
7 years."

8 However, late last year, the GAO identified a number
9 of barriers to women serving in Special Operations and made
10 a number of recommendations for revisions to policy
11 gathering of data and process improvements to address the
12 challenges.

13 Dr. Schroden, can you describe the value of women that
14 they bring to the Special Operations unit, and what more
15 needs to be done to increase participation?

16 Dr. Schroden: Well, it is a great question. I mean,
17 I think we -- so let me start with the value. I think
18 there is a lot of value that women bring to SOF. And one
19 doesn't -- the people who argue most vehemently against
20 that, to people like me on Twitter, for example, I find to
21 be the ones who are also the most ignorant of SOF history,
22 right.

23 If you go back to the origins of Special Operations in
24 this country, the OSS, right, the original sort of
25 incarnations of special operations like forces, you will

1 see many stories of women involved in very, very
2 interesting and, you know, fascinating in operationally
3 effective ways. Getting back to that in an era of
4 competition, I think makes a lot of sense, both on
5 historical grounds but also relative to current
6 requirements.

7 So, I think there is a lot of value to having women in
8 SOF. In terms of barriers to entry, you know, in early on,
9 a lot of it had to do with, you know, making equitable
10 facilities. And there is still some challenges with that,
11 as the GAO pointed out.

12 So, there is still some work to be done there. A lot
13 of it had to do with making sure the requirements were
14 operationally focused and not sort of arbitrarily derived
15 based on, well, this is the way we have always done it.

16 A lot of work was done on that immediately after these
17 occupational specialties were open to women. So, I think
18 we are at a point now where, you know, the vast majority,
19 if not all, of the standards, have been, you know,
20 operationally validated and sort of made gender neutral.
21 What I am seeing now is, in order to get more women into
22 especially the parts of SOF that require assessment and
23 selection, you need trailblazers, right.

24 You need people to actually make it through those
25 programs so that other women can look at that and say,

1 somebody made it through, that means I could make it
2 through, too. And that is just, I think, a natural part
3 of, you know, a new population breaking into any career
4 field or population, etcetera.

5 We are starting to see that now, right. More women
6 have broken through the -- you know, we have women Rangers.
7 Rangers who have led, you know, other Rangers in combat.
8 We have women Green Berets now.

9 There are women trying to become Marine Raiders, as
10 well as, you know, special tactics operators in AFSOC. So,
11 as we get more women into the force, I think it will have
12 sort of a gravitating effect of showing that it can be done
13 and hopefully inspiring other women to try as well.

14 Senator Gillibrand: Lieutenant General, anything you
15 want to add?

16 General Tovo: Yes, I would just -- a couple quick
17 points. First, I agree on the aspect of history, right.
18 We have had women involved in our special operations since
19 our roots of the modern force with the OSS.

20 As Commander at USASOC, I was actually the, you know,
21 had the -- lived through the process by which we had to
22 recommend through the SecDef to open up combat specialties
23 of the Rangers and the Green Berets.

24 And we did put a tremendous amount of effort into
25 studying the issue, looking at what other nations and

1 services had done, to ensure that we built the best
2 possible framework for women to join and succeed. I think
3 across the SOF force right now, women are at a pretty high
4 density, and as you quoted, they are higher than they have
5 ever been.

6 We are still in fairly low numbers, though, in the
7 combat specialties of rangers, you know, infantry rangers.
8 They are in other aspects, but also within the Green
9 Berets. But certainly, we have had many years now of women
10 in some of our sensitive activities roles, and they have
11 performed remarkably.

12 And then lastly, I would just highlight that USASOC
13 about a year ago did a study on some of these barriers to
14 entry, but also challenges once women are in the force, and
15 have a pretty significant ongoing effort to overcome
16 everything from, you know, facilities, but also just
17 equipment challenges, etcetera.

18 So, I think the command is focused on any remaining
19 issues and are working through them.

20 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you.

21 Senator Ernst: Thank you very much. And I will start
22 by just reflecting upon the conversation directed by
23 Senator Budd when it came to cuts across the force in SOF.

24 And I was going to focus a little on that, something
25 that we discussed yesterday, General Tovo, but I feel

1 strongly about SOCOM and their numbers because at some
2 point, and just to give everyone that is here listening a
3 little background.

4 Any time that there is a cut or additional
5 requirements placed upon SOCOM, our SOCOM Command team
6 will, you know, salute smartly and move out, and say, we
7 can do it, we can do it, yes, sir, yes, ma'am -- we are
8 going to do it.

9 We keep cutting in that area. We see force structure
10 challenges coming up in the near future. And I am very
11 concerned about this, because while SOCOM will always take
12 on that mission and move out, at some point those cuts
13 become untenable and we can't continue to do it.

14 You know, SOF truth, you know this very well, General
15 Tovo, that you cannot mass produce SOF in a crisis. And we
16 can't get to a point where we are faced with a crisis, and
17 we do not have the operators that are able to step forward.
18 So, we really do have to push back against that. I am glad
19 that Senator Budd went down that line of questioning.
20 Gentleman, as I said in my opening statement, SOF is
21 purpose built.

22 We were just talking about some of those, you know,
23 those -- from the Ranger community. Remember William
24 Darby, you know, and Darby's Rangers in World War II. They
25 were put together for various specific purpose in World War

1 II. And they are purpose built to lead competition in the
2 force within the Department of Defense.

3 Yet I am very, very concerned that a number of our
4 senior leaders in the Department have yet to formulate
5 clear strategies and the role that SOF will play, that
6 associated guidance to drive the actions of SOF and the
7 broader joint force.

8 So first, Dr. Schroden, I would like to start with
9 you. In your view, how should we be thinking about the
10 strategic objectives of competition when it comes to China?
11 And what role should SOF play in supporting these efforts?

12 Dr. Schroden: You know, again, another million-dollar
13 question, Senator. I think a lot of it starts with what is
14 the theory of success of competition. And I have yet to
15 see anyone in the Department firmly articulate --

16 Senator Ernst: Bingo.

17 Dr. Schroden: -- what that is. If you were asking
18 me, in my professional judgment, you know, what would I
19 advance as a particular theory of success for that, I might
20 advance that what we are competing for is the relative
21 alignment of non-allied states around the world.

22 And if we would take that, for example, as a theory of
23 success for competition and then ask, well, what role can
24 SOF play in helping to generate relative alignment of
25 countries with the United States relative to China or

1 Russia, for example, there is a lot that SOF could do,
2 right.

3 In terms of training, engagement, mil-to-mil, you
4 know, sort of tactical level diplomacy, support to, you
5 know, diplomatic and informational lines of effort that
6 would not be led by SOF but would be led by, for example,
7 the State Department, but that SOF have capacity to
8 support.

9 You know, there are also things SOF could do in terms
10 of gathering intelligence that could be used to illuminate
11 the behaviors of China and Russia in some of these
12 countries.

13 That, to Senator Gillibrand's earlier question, that
14 could be used in a potential, you know, release this
15 information to try and make clear what China is doing in
16 some of these countries that might be antithetical to those
17 countries' own interests.

18 So that, you know, that is one way of thinking about
19 competition. But again, I have not seen anything like that
20 firmly codified in the Department itself.

21 Senator Ernst: And neither have we, Dr. Schrodin.
22 General Tovo, thoughts?

23 General Tovo: Yes, I think Dr. Schrodin hit the nail
24 on the head. I mean, we would call it a defeat mechanism
25 or, as he said, the theory of success.

1 You know, for the Cold War, we had a containment
2 strategy with the idea that if we contained communism, and
3 in some cases it moved into a rollback strategy to kind of
4 press back on the boundaries, but the idea -- there was a
5 theory that we agreed on for a 50-year effort that focused
6 all our activities underneath it. So, I think we have got
7 to start there, and then he did a great job highlighting
8 where we can help.

9 Certainly, the engagement with partners. Illuminating
10 the activities of our adversaries, the nefarious activities
11 can't be overstated. And that then turns into fodder for
12 the information campaign, if you will.

13 And then I think we can support the interagency in a
14 more progressive and offensive, if you will, narrative
15 development that highlights the strengths of the Western
16 way and the American way of life and the rules-based order.

17 I mean, we have -- we are a force -- my view, we are a
18 force for good in the world and have been since the rules-
19 based order we enacted post-World War II. And we all,
20 every aspect of the USG that has its component of this
21 information campaign globally, ought to be on message,
22 pushing that narrative as a counter to what the Chinese and
23 the Russians offer, which when you actually put them side
24 by side, aren't that appealing to anybody in the world.

25 Senator Ernst: Thank you. Thank you, gentlemen.

1 Senator Gillibrand: Just to follow up on that
2 question. Do you have any alignment with defense
3 intelligence? Like, do you do defense intelligence
4 operations ever?

5 General Tovo: Given that this is an open hearing --

6 Senator Gillibrand: We will do it -- in closed
7 setting --

8 General Tovo: I will just say, Senator, that in my
9 experience as a TSOC Commander, and then subsequently in
10 other jobs, yes, we work very closely to ensure that we
11 were presenting a -- or creating a coherent and
12 synchronized effort, not only with defense intelligence,
13 but with all the intelligence community.

14 Senator Gillibrand: The entire intelligence
15 community. Well, that makes a lot of sense to me. Senator
16 Ernst, do you want to close the hearing, or do you want to
17 ask more questions? I think I probably have a couple more
18 if you -- yes, or are you done? Okay, I have one more
19 round. In the wake of several -- this is about culture and
20 accountability.

21 In the wake of several high-profile ethical lapses,
22 SOCOM completed a comprehensive review of SOF culture and
23 ethics in 2020, which identified 16 corrective actions to
24 be taken by SOCOM in the areas of force employment,
25 accountability, leader development, force structure, and

1 selection and assessment, most of which has been completed.

2 Alleged widespread use of performance enhancing drugs
3 by SEALs and ongoing investigation into illegal drug use by
4 soldiers assigned to special -- to Army Special Operations
5 have raised a few questions about whether more actions are
6 necessary.

7 Do you have any additional reforms that you would
8 suggest that you believe are necessary to address perceived
9 cultural issues within Special Operations communities? For
10 both of you. Dr. Schroden -- General, go ahead.

11 General Tovo: Thank you, Senator, for that. I would
12 note that in my professional life, I am actually involved
13 in the effort to implement the comprehensive review and so
14 on, and have been for about three years, I guess, now.

15 So, I am fairly conversant, and I would say that, in
16 short, I would say the command is very focused on the idea,
17 and I have heard this from the commander himself, that the
18 journey of focusing on professionalism and accountability
19 across the force is an indefinite journey. It is not a
20 -- the comprehensive review, as you noted, listed some
21 actions to take.

22 They are mostly completed, but the journey is not
23 over. And that his focus, and I think there in fact, he is
24 holding essentially a leadership town hall at the end of
25 the month, that is directly focused on professionalism and

1 accountability across the force, and really instilling this
2 culture that, as a SOF community, we can do better.

3 It is still going to be composed of humans. You are
4 never going to eliminate acts of ill-discipline, but
5 certainly the command is focused on driving them down to
6 the bare minimum.

7 [Technical problems.]

8 General Tovo: I would view -- I view the
9 comprehensive review as a hypothesis. That the force was
10 over-employed. Leaders were disengaged in some cases
11 because they were operationally employed away from their
12 forces, and that that led to acts of ill-discipline. I
13 will tell you that there has been a pretty good effort on
14 data to try and prove or disprove the hypothesis, and that
15 correlation has not been proven.

16 I think it is a much more complex environment than
17 just over employment, under engaged leaders. And that is
18 what part of the effort is still ongoing to do, is to
19 provide an ability to supplement senior leader, and
20 commander, and senior NCO their own collective judgment and
21 intuition about what is going on in the force, with some
22 data -- you know, some data approaches that allow them to
23 understand what is truly going on in the force.

24 Do we really have a crisis at any given time and in
25 certain portions of it as far as ill-discipline, etcetera,

1 and so that they can act in a much more responsive manner,
2 when in fact they are --

3 Senator Gillibrand: Do you have a force survey to
4 give you data on what the force thought the issues were?

5 General Tovo: I am sorry, Senator --

6 Senator Gillibrand: Did you have a force survey,
7 meaning let people fill out questionnaires?

8 General Tovo: Actually, the effort has tried to take
9 advantage of the ongoing surveying tools, the DIAC survey
10 that happens every year. Big effort to look particularly
11 at the written comments to understand what folks are
12 actually taking the time to put down on paper, and then
13 characterize trends that they have provided to the command
14 for their information.

15 Senator Gillibrand: My last question is about
16 civilian oversight. As I mentioned in my opening
17 statement, recent National Defense Authorization Acts have
18 included important reforms designed to enhance the ability
19 of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Ops and
20 Low Intensity Conflict to act as service secretary-like
21 civilian responsible for oversight and advocacy of Special
22 Operations Forces.

23 To both of you, what is the value to the Special
24 Operations enterprise in having a properly empowered
25 service secretary-like civilian in the Pentagon, or not?

1 Dr. Schrodin: I think there is enormous value in
2 that, in part for the reasons that we just discussed in
3 terms of, you know, negative incidents in the force and
4 providing appropriate accountability and oversight.

5 And part of that stems from having a strong civilian,
6 you know, hand on the SOF enterprise in terms of oversight.
7 I think ASD SO/LIC does -- you know, it does its literal
8 best to try and do that, but it is, I think, hobbled in its
9 ability to do that, both by structural issues, and -- I
10 mean, you know, the Assistant Secretary of defense relative
11 to a four star is not much in the way of horsepower inside
12 the Pentagon, so there is that sort of structural
13 imbalance, which I think is exacerbated by, you know, the
14 actual secretariat.

15 The service secretary is run by DASD, which is even
16 less horsepower relative to a four-star command. And then
17 there is just a mismatch in manpower. I mean, the service
18 secretariat in ASD SO/LIC is some tens of people trying to
19 provide civilian oversight of an enterprise of 70,000.

20 It doesn't take much math to see that they are an
21 overworked and overwhelmed staff, and they could -- I think
22 in Secretary Maier's testimony some weeks ago, he said
23 another 20, 25, 30 people would be useful, and having more
24 senior leaders so that they could show up at all the right
25 meetings with the right level of seniority would also be

1 helpful, and I concur with those recommendations.

2 General Tovo: I think I agree with everything the
3 doctor said. The only thing I would add is, in addition to
4 being short on manpower, the ASD SO/LIC also has several
5 other tasks that one might -- have been given to it, that
6 also diffuse its efforts to focus on oversight.

7 But also, and the other piece is that SOCOM needs a
8 strong advocate inside the building when it is battling
9 things like force cuts. And because of its relative under
10 empowerment compared to the service secretaries, it can't
11 really fulfill that role of advocacy for the force in some
12 of these resourcing fights that I think it could if it was
13 more powerful.

14 Senator Ernst: Thank you. And just to go a little
15 bit further with the civilian oversight, you alluded to it
16 a little bit earlier, but General Tovo, it was actually in
17 your opening statement that the current process that
18 governs how we use SOF to conduct operations around the
19 world is overly bureaucratic.

20 I think we can all agree in this room. It is risk
21 averse and undermines our ability to effectively compete
22 with our adversaries. Now, you went on to state that it is
23 a process that will, "stymie initiative, fail to match the
24 pace and volume of our adversaries' activities, and result
25 in an arthritic campaign that neither deters our

1 adversaries, nor sets the necessary conditions to prevail
2 in competition or conflict."

3 Our special operators are -- they are really the most
4 innovative force within the DOD. They can take what they
5 are given, come up with solutions. They provide enormous
6 value in competing with China and our other adversaries.
7 But instead of empowering them to think creatively and make
8 those decisions, the bureaucracy has literally forced them
9 to fight with one hand tied behind their back.

10 One of my trips to Afghanistan during GWOT, I spent
11 some time with the 75th Ranger Regiment there and sitting
12 in their ops-cell, and literally half of the discussion was
13 focused on their JAG and what ops they could continue in
14 and what they couldn't, according to the JAG's estimate.

15 And it goes back to the point where you have so many
16 of those that can say no, and very few that can say yes, on
17 moving out. So, General Tovo, will you talk more about how
18 this bureaucracy undermines SOF's ability to effectively
19 operate? And if you can tie that more broadly to how it
20 ties us up when we are dealing with China.

21 General Tovo: Yes, Senator, thanks for that. Yes, it
22 comes down to the fact that one of the strengths of our
23 military writ large, and really across our Government, are
24 our people, right.

25 The ingenuity, complex, problem-solving skills, and

1 particularly in SOF, we pride ourselves on specially
2 assessing and selecting individuals who are problem
3 solvers. But if you don't give them the authority to act,
4 all they become is frustrated. And in many ways, that is
5 where we have been in a lot of ways, both, I would say the
6 last portion of the GWOT, but also now in competition.

7 They are being told, you need to help compete against
8 China. They are coming up with ideas, they are pushing
9 forward CONOPS, but it is just translating that to action
10 has been very difficult.

11 And it -- once again, I am a believer that part of
12 this challenge is without an overarching strategy that
13 defines what we are trying to accomplish as a nation to
14 achieve success, as Dr. Schroden talked about, it is hard
15 for decision makers at every level in between to
16 understand, is this the kind of activity that supports the
17 strategy, or is this kind of activity that will be counter
18 to the strategy?

19 And so, God bless our SOF operators. We will come up
20 with a lot of good things. And there may be some things in
21 there that might be counterproductive from a strategic
22 perspective. So, you have got to have the framework as a
23 start, and then that -- and then empower those below to
24 take it on.

25 You know, and it is -- nowhere is this more apparent,

1 frankly, than in the information sphere. You would think
2 that information, yes, words matter, but there is this fear
3 that somehow if we put the wrong message out, we are going
4 to break the internet. I think the internet is fairly
5 resilient. I think, you know, it can survive a bad -- what
6 is that?

7 [Laughter.]

8 General Tovo: It is already broken.

9 [Laughter.]

10 General Tovo: But we need to be more aggressive, and
11 part of being more aggressive in every environment,
12 information included, is that we have got to power down
13 decision making. You know, provide our information experts
14 with the themes and messages that are acceptable at the
15 national level, and allow them to figure out how to apply
16 it.

17 And they will do it effectively, particularly in those
18 places where we do it in conjunction with partners who
19 really understand their micro-information and human
20 environment, so that our professionals help partners craft
21 the right things that will resonate inside their
22 populations to support our objective.

23 Senator Ernst: Thank you. I appreciate it. A lot of
24 takeaways today, Madam Chair. I think very important
25 discussion. Of course, the strategy of success. We have

1 to understand what is that ultimate objective, and then how
2 does SOF progress to get to that level of success or that
3 objective? I think we need that clearly defined within the
4 Department of Defense.

5 I think force structure is another big takeaway from
6 our conversation, that we as leaders are very concerned
7 about the impending force restructure of SOF and the fact
8 that we may lose so many valuable operators throughout the
9 forces. And information operations, another good takeaway
10 there.

11 But I want to go back, just as I close, to the very
12 first question, I think that you had General Tovo, where
13 you talked about relationships and building relationships
14 around the globe. And as we look at our force structure,
15 if we are pulling these forces out of places like the
16 Philippines and elsewhere, we lose those relationships.

17 And if we really do want to compete against our
18 adversaries in global power competition, we have to have
19 these operators, these forces out there working with those
20 populations, developing those relationships and trust, in
21 order to push back against Russia, push back against China.

22 I think it is incredibly important. And those that
23 are tasked to do it are Special Operations Forces. So,
24 gentlemen, thanks for being here today. Madam Chair, thank
25 you very much for convening this subcommittee.

1 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you. Thank you, gentlemen.
2 Committee adjourned.

3 [Whereupon, at 10:50 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25