

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
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PRESENTED BY

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Chairwoman Ernst, Ranking Member Slotkin, and distinguished members of this subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the posture of our Nation's Naval Special Warfare (NSW) force at this pivotal moment for U.S. national security. On behalf of Naval Special Warfare, we are grateful for your steadfast support.

NSW's mission is to deliver maritime-based special operations capabilities in support of the Fleet and Joint Force. Guided by the 2026 National Defense Strategy (NDS), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), we balance immediate operational requirements with a commitment to experimentation that will enable longer-term modernization. The current demands of our force are significant but manageable thanks to a well-trained and committed force. We are tasked with developing capabilities to maintain a favorable balance of power against an array of threats. This includes generating asymmetric sea denial, improving the lethality and survivability of the Joint Force, and posturing to defeat terrorist networks that threaten the homeland and our interests abroad from the sea. We require a persistent, distributed, and integrated force from the seabed to space. The operational problem is clear: we must project power and exert influence in contested maritime areas while modernizing to stay ahead of emerging threats.

This statement will explain how Naval Special Warfare is postured to WIN in the current environment, how we are rapidly modernizing, and how we are caring for our people/operators—our most decisive advantage.

THE CURRENT OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The current global security environment is becoming more complex, and the era of uncontested maritime access is largely over. We have entered what many call the "Maritime Century," characterized by contested sea lanes, the rise of new naval powers,

and the protection of critical maritime infrastructure. The United States' blockade of the Straits of Hormuz is a reminder of the importance of sea lanes of control. Global commerce, communication, resources, and military advantage are more tied to the sea today than at any point in history.

We can no longer assume permissive access in any domain, and NSW must leverage our unique ability to operate within the enemy's weapons engagement zone to gain an asymmetric edge over our adversaries.

Naval Special Warfare supports each of the Lines of Effort described in the 2026 NDS:

- NSW plays a vital role in defending the homeland by providing a forward line of defense and early warning against potential threats. Our global counter terrorism operations prevent external operations planning before intent matches capability.
- NSW supports efforts to deter Chinese aggression with our ability to conduct distributed, low-visibility and clandestine operations forward, which can raise the costs on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-led People's Republic of China (PRC) during a conflict. Additionally, we continue to improve our forward positioning along the first island chain to deliver effects in support of the Joint Force when called upon.
- In this era of strategic competition, NSW is moving beyond "burden sharing" towards "burden shouldering". We are empowering our partners to take the lead in their own maritime security. We work closely with regional allies and partners and our fellow maritime services to deepen interoperability and trust. NSW's robust allied and partner network gives us critical access to forward basing options.
- NSW's highly capable and driven operators are a unique advantage to help drive innovation and supercharge the defense industrial base. We have committed to identifying new technologies and driving rapid development and acquisition. NSW is increasingly working with small businesses, startups, and academic institutions to access innovative technologies and deepen the industrial base.

FORCE POSTURE

Naval Special Warfare delivers an outsized strategic impact with a small footprint as we comprise just 2.5% of the U.S. Navy and 15% of SOCOM.

Our force supports the full spectrum of military operations. Our campaigning efforts are built around operating from forward maritime-focused locations as well as from our maritime platforms both on the surface and undersea. In competition, NSW strengthens deterrence by operating clandestinely to enable maritime-centric effects that create strategic leverage. We have also built small organizations that are rapidly experimenting and developing new technologies to enable asymmetric opportunities. In conflict, we will conduct the most physically demanding maritime-based special operations that produce tactical effects to deliver operational and strategic victories.

In the Western Hemisphere, our partnerships are central to targeting transnational crime by detecting and disrupting illicit networks. Since 2000, NSW has operated the Small Boat Training Command (SBTC) in Stennis, MS to provide education and training to foreign military students. Today, SBTC offers more than 20 courses of instruction and has trained thousands of foreign military students not only in small-boat tactics and maintenance but also in human rights, professionalism, and coalition operations. SBTC graduates go on to become leaders in their own militaries, further strengthening the NSW network.

Should deterrence fail and a crisis emerge, our posture allows for a rapid transition to combat operations. Our distributed forces are equipped with advanced tools and resilient communications that enable us to be lethal, informed, and to respond to crises on short notice. NSW's deep targeting expertise gained during the Global War on Terror (GWOT), combined with our access and placement forward, allows us to detect a target, transmit targeting data, and assist in terminal guidance of Joint Force fires. By demonstrating the capability and will to operate forward in contested maritime environments, we signal that the United States and its allies are prepared to act decisively.

MODERNIZATION INITIATIVES

Over the last several years, SOCOM has invested heavily in exquisite, special operations forces (SOF)-peculiar maritime platforms that demonstrate immense value to the Joint Force. These capabilities are not replicated anywhere else in the Joint Force or across the U.S. Government—this includes our world-leading undersea capabilities. NSW's combatant surface and undersea platforms deliver strategic capabilities that enable power projection and survivability in contested maritime environments. Modernization will allow our low-signature forces to penetrate further into weapons engagement zones, enhancing support for the Joint Force kill chain at greater speed and lower cost.

Our platforms and processes need to continue to adapt at the tactical and technical edge. NSW's greatest tactical advantage is the commitment of our talented, combat-experienced operators to the experimentation cycle. We are increasingly working alongside partners in

academia and industry to rapidly experiment and field maritime unmanned systems that conduct a full spectrum of missions. These missions include sea denial; reconnaissance; one-way attack; and contested logistics. The recent SONIC SPEAR exercise demonstrated that NSW's contributions to the Defense Autonomous Warfare Group (DAWG) can rapidly experiment and deliver accelerated capabilities that support the Joint Force and meet statutory requirements.

Our clearest and most significant pacing factor today is not technology or people, but our own acquisition processes. Legacy bureaucratic processes for capability development lack the agility to match the speed of modern warfare. Said simply, our deliberate processes are not matching our adversaries' technical progress. We are seeking continued progress towards more agile acquisition authorities that use flexible contracting to field solutions more rapidly.

The Secretary's July 10, 2025, Drone Dominance memorandum rescinded restrictive policies for small drones, pushed procurement authority closer to warfighters, and stated that "drone dominance is a process race as much as a technological race." These changes enabled us to use a Commercial Solutions Opening to partner closely with industry and conduct a 90-day sprint with operators to deliver a product – much faster than a traditional requirements and procurement process. A tighter feedback loop among operators, contracting, and industry allowed for more rapid iteration and a materially shorter path from product selection to fielding.

FORCE READINESS

The CNO's Fighting Instructions make it very clear: Sailors First. Our operators are our greatest strength and our most decisive advantage. We recruit and select high-performing and determined professionals. Then we put them through the most rigorous assessment, selection, and training program – Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/s) and Special Warfare Combat Crewman (SWCC) crucibles. Increasing force generation demands and a competitive talent market create significant pressures on our force and our families, evidenced by higher losses than accessions.

The most significant pressures we face are:

- **Accessions:** Despite trying to grow, our intake has declined. We continue to work with the Navy to adjust actions and processes to address this issue.
- **Training:** We have systematically advanced NSW's assessment and selection processes by detailing our highest performers to train the next generation,

professionalizing our instructor cadre, and better preparing candidates before BUD/s—all while upholding our consistent and proven standard.

- **Talent Management and Retention:** We face a critical challenge in retaining our talented and experienced mid-career and senior personnel. These are the leaders who possess the expertise and judgment essential for success in complex, high-risk environments. We are exploring ways to correct this decline, including increased bonuses and more predictable detailing.
- **Force Generation Cycle:** The demand for our unique maritime capabilities remains high, stretching a small force across global commitments. Our force generation cycle is built for sustained combat on land and is not inherently agile, technologically advanced, or primarily focused on the maritime domain. We are generating the force required for the new mission set, one that requires advanced technical skills in areas like unmanned systems and data analytics, but it will take several fiscal years to complete.
- **Sustainability and Readiness:** True readiness begins at home. The long-term health and well-being of our warriors and their families are paramount, so we are investing in programs that maximize human performance, build resilient health for our families, and proactively address operational exposure injuries like Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI). Since 2008, NSW's embedded Human Performance Program has seen an 84% reduction in days lost per injury, 98% deployment readiness, and saved \$15 million. Our family support program supported over 12,000 NSW service members and their families in FY25 alone, with a 90% satisfaction rating. By taking care of our teammates and their families, we optimize their individual contributions to our mission and ensure the long-term readiness and sustainability of the force.

We prioritize our "People" line of effort. Continued funding to Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) functions is critical to address these stressors.

CONCLUSION

Naval Special Warfare provides unique, persistent, scalable, and lethal options in the maritime domain to compete, deter, and win. In line with the NDS, we are helping the Joint Force defend the homeland, deter the PRC, increase burden sharing with allies and partners, and invigorate technical experimentation in the Defense Industrial Base. Our forward posture offers tailored maritime-centric packages to provide senior leaders with credible, flexible options. NSW operators, paired with industry and acquisition

professionals, are accelerating the development and validation of emerging technologies. Adjustments in training, Force Generation, and POTFF programs are generating sustainability and readiness improvements.

NSW is adapting and solving the hardest problems for the Joint Force from the most challenging forward locations and maritime positions. To continue our mission, we require your continued support. Sustained, predictable investment in our modernization initiatives, flexible authorities to accelerate capability delivery, and an unwavering commitment to our people and their families are essential. With this support, Naval Special Warfare will continue to deliver decisive maritime-based effects in support of the Joint Force, ensuring the United States can prevail across the full spectrum of competition and conflict.