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COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND’S
EFFORTS TO TRANSFORM THE FORCE FOR FUTURE
SECURITY CHALLENGES

Wednesday, April 11, 2018

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U.S. Senate
Subcommittee on Emerging
Threats and Capabilities
Committee on Armed Services
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The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:00 a.m. in Room SR-232A, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. Joni Ernst, chairman of the subcommittee, presiding.

Members Present: Senators Ernst [presiding], Wicker, Fischer, Sullivan, Heinrich, and Peters.
OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JONI ERNST, U.S. SENATOR
FROM IOWA

Senator Ernst: Good morning. It is 10 hundred, or 10 o'clock. For all of the folks here, I want to thank you for attending this morning's Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee. We will go ahead and start.

Just to let our audience know, we will be in open session for a period of time. We will then be required to go into a closed session, and we'll need to move locations. And the closed session location, for our panelists, will be SVC-217. And that, again, will be at the closing of the open session. So, we'll remind you again here in 40 to 45 minutes or so.

So, good morning. I am Senator Joni Ernst, from Iowa. And we will meet today to receive testimony from Special Operations Command, or SOCOM, senior leaders on efforts to transform the Special Operations Force for future security challenges. I believe this is the first time we have had all of our SOCOM component commanders before this committee, and we welcome you gentlemen here.

I would like to introduce all of you very briefly, and then I'll make some opening statements, and Senator Heinrich will also make some opening statements before we begin with your testimony.

We have with us Lieutenant General Scott A. Howell,
United States Air Force, Vice Commander, United States Special Operations Command -- thank you, sir; Lieutenant General Kenneth E. Tovo, United States Army, Commanding General, United States Army Special Operations Command; Lieutenant General Marshall B. Webb, United States Air Force, Commander, USAF Special Operations Command; Rear Admiral Timothy G. Syzmanski, United States Navy, Commander, Naval Special Warfare Command; and Major General Carl E. Mundy III, United States Marine Corps, Commander, Marine Corps Special Operations Command.

Gentlemen, again, want to thank you very much for being here today.

The National Defense Strategy reoriented the way the Department of Defense prioritizes its efforts in an increasingly complex and dangerous global security environment. A rising China and an increasingly belligerent Russia are now the Department's top strategic priorities, while Iran, North Korea, and countering violent extremism remain enduring lines of effort.

Over the last 16-plus years, SOCOM has largely focused its efforts on executing its role as a leader in the global counterterrorism fight. As a result, SOCOM's organization, tactics, techniques, procedures, and its development of capabilities has reflected this mission set. While it's clear that counterterrorism will remain a persistent mission
of SOF, the severity of the threat posed by China, Russia, and other adversarial nation-states demand increased attention by our Nation's most agile and innovative force to ensure they're postured to fight and win.

In testimony earlier this year before this committee, General Tony Thomas, Commander of SOCOM, stated that, quote, "As we focus on today's operations, we must be equally focused on required future transformation. SOF must adapt, develop, procure, and field new capabilities in the interest of continuing to be a unique, lethal, and agile part of the joint force of tomorrow," end quote. In particular, he identified emerging technologies, such as, quote, "cyber, next-generation, low-observable infiltration platforms, airborne high-energy laser applications, automation, and machine learning as capabilities key to future success on the battlefield."

I look to our witnesses to describe what they're doing to support General Thomas's transformation priorities, as well as implement the new National Defense Strategy. Specifically, I want our witnesses to provide their assessment of the future operating environment likely to confront their forces, as well as provide a description of what they are doing to ensure their forces are organized, trained, and equipped to succeed.

With that, Senator Heinrich.
STATEMENT OF HON. MARTIN HEINRICH, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW MEXICO

Senator Heinrich: Thank you.

And let me start by just thanking Senator Ernst for holding this hearing on the efforts of SOCOM's service component commands to transform our Special Operations Forces for the missions that they may be asked to conduct in the future.

New Mexico is the proud home to a significant AFSOC presence. But, to be transparent, I would welcome any of your components in the future.

Since 9/11, the vast majority of special operations activities have really been focused on defeating al-Qaeda and on defeating ISIS while seeking to prevent the emergence of other violent extremist groups. However, the recently released National Defense Strategy, or NDS, states that the central challenge facing our Nation is the reemergence of long-term strategic competition with Russia and China, and that this competition replaces terrorism as the primary concern in national -- U.S. national security. This strategic prioritization raises some pretty important questions with respect to the readiness of our Special Operations Forces to conduct the most sensitive and, in many cases, highest-risk missions tasked to the military. Our Special Operations Forces will surely continue to play a
central role in addressing the threat posed by violent extremist groups, but are also increasingly likely to be engaged in so-called hybrid warfare or gray-zone conflict, below the threshold of traditional armed conflict. The current demand for special operations capabilities already outstrips supply. And, under the new NDS, such capabilities are likely to be stretched even further. Just last year, the SOCOM Commander, General Thomas, stated that, quote, "Most SOF units are employed to their sustainable limit."

In the coming years, I understand that SOCOM is on track to grow by approximately 2,000 personnel, to reach a size of about 72,000 overall. While this growth will help ease the burden, to some degree, we need to be thoughtful in our employment of Special Operations Forces, to preserve the readiness of our highest-demand, lowest-density capabilities. This will require careful prioritization by senior military leadership in coming years.

While Special Operations Forces retain the capability to operate in sensitive environments, some core skills, including foreign language proficiency, may need to be reemphasized in their training. Additionally, new secure communications, intelligence-gathering, directed energy, and nonlethal weapons capabilities may also be required for our Special Operations Forces to be successful. The growing use of social media and other means of communication by both
state and nonstate actors to influence vulnerable
cpopulations is also a concern for the special operations
enterprise.

I note that SOCOM is the joint proponent for military
information support operations and has been directed by the
Secretary of Defense to establish a centralized global
messaging/counter-messaging capability. I'm pleased to see
the Department taking these challenges seriously, but I
believe we must also fundamentally reevaluate the training
and readiness of our military information support or
psychological operations personnel to maximize their
effectiveness. Our adversaries have demonstrated innovation
and flexibility in the information environment, and we must
find a way to move beyond the traditional leaflets-and-
loudspeakers approach to keep pace.

I look forward to hearing from each of you.

Senator Ernst: Thank you, Senator.

And we will start with Lieutenant General Howell. Sir,
if you would, please.
STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL SCOTT A. HOWELL, USAF,
VICE COMMANDER, U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

General Howell: Chairwoman Ernst, Ranking Member Heinrich, distinguished members of the committee, good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today.

As the Vice Commander for U.S. SOCOM, I'm honored to represent General Thomas and your United States Special Operations Command alongside our component commanders. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss the Command's efforts to transform against the emerging threats and capabilities of our adversaries, with a particular focus on near-peer competitors.

As General Thomas testified in February, your U.S. Special Operations Forces are relevant against all our country's national security priorities. With nearly 8,000 members deployed in over 90 countries, our forces are postured, ready, and relentlessly focused on winning today's fights. From countering violent extremism to countering weapons of mass destruction, from rogue regimes to near-peer adversaries, Special Operations Forces continue to provide the geographic combatant commanders options to protect our Nation, our allies, and our interests worldwide.

However, as the National Defense Strategy outlines, the global security environment is rapidly changing.
Correspondingly, SOCOM is transforming at an ever-increasing pace. Today, you'll hear from each of our service component commanders on how their commands are meeting the challenge. Comprising just 2 percent of the defense budget and 3 percent of the manpower, Special Operations Forces play a critical role in addressing the Nation's priority security challenges and provide an extraordinary return on investment. But, as one of ARSOF truths state, most special operations require non-SOF assistance. And the additional support the military departments provide to each of our service components, estimated about $8 billion annually, plays an essential role in the success of our force.

The continued support and trust of this committee to U.S. SOCOM and our service components and the military departments has been crucial in maximizing these dividends. And, Madam Chairwoman, you've already introduced my colleagues here alongside us. I will just say, these commanders provide superior leadership to their respective organizations and a clear vision for the transformation required to ensure special operations remains at the forefront in addressing emergency -- emerging threats and capabilities.

Pending any immediate questions for me, I'll ask each component commander to provide brief remarks to the committee. And we look forward to the discussion.
Senator Ernst: Thank you, General.

General Webb.
STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL MARSHALL B. WEBB,
USAF, COMMANDER, U.S. AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

General Webb: Chairwoman Ernst, Ranking Member Heinrich, distinguished members of the committee, I'm honored to appear before you as the Commander of Air Force Special Operations Command and your superb Air Commandos. Today, I will discuss AFSOC's efforts to ensure lethal readiness and relevance against the full spectrum of our Nation's potential adversaries.

As United States Special Operations Command's air component, we continuously strive to hone capabilities and evolve our force to remain ready, relevant, and resilient, our three AFSOC priorities.

I want to express my gratitude for the resources projected in presidential budget '19, as these will fully fund our current requirements and will help us turn a strategic corner as we engage in great-powers competition. In line with the National Defense Strategy, AFSOC has the duty and opportunity to shape specialized airpower to accentuate both the far low end and high end of the conflict spectrum.

As General Thomas testified before your committee 2 months ago, Special Operations' unique capabilities are in high demand across the globe. For 17 years, AFSOC has been laser focused on counterterrorism operations. This has
accelerated the AFSOC operations tempo and has drawn our efforts towards the low end of the conflict spectrum. We realize these efforts are predominantly long-term engagements in which cumulative tactical effects lead to long-term strategic impact. To make such engagements successful, AFSOC must lower the resource and opportunity costs of conducting persistent counterterrorism operations.

Conversely, AFSOC operations on the high end are predominantly those that deliver strategic impact in a short amount of time. AFSOC must be capable and flexible in order to confront competitors across the range of potential conflicts and areas. We must develop a force that is more lethal and resilient in contested environments.

This brings me to AFSOC's first priority: readiness. AFSOC must build full-spectrum readiness while ensuring that we are postured to fight tonight. We are invested in virtual, adaptive, and realistic training to build readiness beyond traditional means. Using virtual reality to integrate live training environments with simulators reduces training costs, lowers personnel tempo, and engages us to realistically exercise high-end mission sets. Likewise, AFSOC's conducted 78 joint exercises and training events with partner nations in 2017, including our capstone exercise, the recently concluded Emerald Warrior. These events focus on providing complex integration and realistic
operational problem sets.

AFSOC remains postured to deter, compete, and win against strategic competitors via our second priority: relevance. To meet the challenges enumerated in the National Defense Strategy, AFSOC must cultivate a balanced force for high-end and low-end conflict by investing in new capabilities while leveraging current capabilities in innovative ways. This strategy aims to balance and expand AFSOC relevance across the spectrum of conflict to deter and, if necessary, defeat America's adversaries. AFSOC embraces the process of innovation from within our formation, striving towards a balance of incremental and transformational efforts that are cost-effective and that extend strategic purpose.

Finally, our third priority is resiliency. What defines AFSOC is not technology or platforms. Rather, we are defined by our people -- Active Duty, Guard, Reserve, and civilians, alike -- and the relentless application of our ethos and strategic values. Tomorrow's fight is unknowable, but one thing is for certain: It must be an integrated joint venture, where our creative concepts will win out. AFSOC fervently believes a diverse formation lends itself to this end, and we develop all Air Commandos accordingly. The readiness and relevance of our force is for naught if we neglect our physical, mental, spiritual,
and social fitness. Using SOCOM's Preservation of the Force and Family and the Air Force's Comprehensive Airman Fitness Program -- Programs, we ensure that our Air Commando community, including our brave Gold Star families, have access to every possible tool to achieve sustained resiliency, and we exploit every opportunity to encourage our airmen to use these tools.

Chairwoman Ernst, Ranking Member Heinrich, members of the committee, AFSOC represents our Nation's finest assets and our enduring strategic advantage. On behalf of all Commandos -- Air Commandos, I thank you for the opportunity to address you today, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Webb follows:]
Senator Ernst: Thank you, General Webb.

General Tovo.
STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL KENNETH E. TOVO, USA, COMMAN
COMMANDING GENERAL, U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

General Tovo:  Madam Chairwoman Ernst, Ranking Member Heinrich, distinguished Senators of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to highlight the phenomenal men and women of the Army Special Operations community and the great work they do on behalf of the Nation every day around the world.

USASOC provides more than 51 percent of the Nation's SOF and consistently fills over 60 percent of SOF deployments worldwide. The command consists of Special Forces, also known as the Green Berets, our premier practitioners of irregular warfare; psychological operations, who use the power of influence to shape operational environments; civil affairs, who conduct civil reconnaissance, mapping of human terrain in governance and counter-governance activities; Rangers, who specialize in direct-action raids and joint forcible entry; and Army Special Operations aviators, who provide a unique rotary wing and ISR capability.

ARSOF soldiers are deployed in more than 70 countries on any given day of the year, delivering strategic value to the Nation through four complementary capabilities: an indigenous approach, precision targeting operations, developing understanding and wielding influence, and,
lastly, crisis response.

You have asked me to discuss what USASOC is doing to prepare ARSOF for both the current and emergent range of threats our Nation faces. At the macro level, our Nation's threats can be binned in two categories: first, violent extremist organizations that threaten the homeland and other strategic interests; and, second, those peer and near-peer adversaries who seek to undermine our global influence and overturn the current international order that preserves our prosperity.

The counter-VEO fight has monopolized our global efforts for over 16 years. However, it is clear that competing nations, such as Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran, will continue to challenge the current international security order to seek greater regional and, in some cases, global influence.

USASOC is sustaining the counter-VEO fight while building readiness for peer and near-peer threats by investing in three major efforts. First, we are in the midst of a multiyear effort to restore balance to the force, with the aim of improving the health of the force and providing additional time to train against the broader set of tasks that must be mastered to address peer adversaries. Second, we have made significant investments in the intellectual space to ensure that we understand the
implications of changes in the security environment and that we find ways to maintain an enduring competitive advantage over our Nation's adversaries. Third, the command published strategic guidance, USASOC Strategy 2035, to establish the objectives and framework for developing the capabilities required to move ARSOF from the force of today to the force that the Nation will need in the future.

Competing successfully against our adversaries is demanding. It requires persistent engagement at points of vulnerability around the world. It requires soldiers who understand the political, cultural, and geographic complexities of austere operating environments and the unique challenges faced by our allies and our partners. It also requires an advanced understanding of our adversaries and how they are evolving in an effort to shift the competitive space to their advantage. To meet these requirements and to counter hybrid threats of the future, USASOC will continue to provide the Nation with a balanced portfolio of complementary capabilities.

Before I conclude, I'd like to thank this Congress for its continued support of SOF, the Army, and DOD. Your efforts to provide budgetary relief are greatly appreciated. Your continued endorsement of critical SOCOM programs, such as Preservation of the Force and Family, are essential to the resilience and readiness of ARSOF. And I'd like to
specifically thank the Senate Armed Services Committee for its advocacy for SOF in the 2018 NDAA. The authorities provided under Section 1202 gives SOF the tools required to impede the progress of adversary advances in the competitive space, short of war.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Tovo follows:]
Senator Ernst: Thank you, General.

Admiral Szymanski.
STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL TIMOTHY G. SZYMANSKI, USN,
COMMANDER, NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

Admiral Szymanski: Chairwoman Ernst, Ranking Member Heinrich, and distinguished members of the committee, I'm honored to be here today with my Special Operations counterparts to provide an update on your naval Special Operations Force and the maritime component of U.S. Special Operations Command.

I have with me today my force master chief, Special Warfare Operator Derrick Walters. We are proud to represent the men and women of Naval Special Warfare, who are fulfilling the missions our Nation's ask of them with courage, diligence, and professionalism.

Naval Special Warfare is made up of sea, air, land operators, our SEALs, our special boat operators, commonly referred to as SWCC, or Special Warfare Combatant Craft Crewman, our combat support and combat service support personnel, such as intelligence analysts, cryptologists, communications specialists, chaplain corps and medical support, amongst others. We are a mix of Active Duty, Reserve, and civilians. Our nearly 10,000 personnel account for 2.4 percent of the Navy's overall personnel numbers and 14 percent of the U.S. Special Operations personnel numbers. Our budget accounts for less than 1 percent of the Department of the Navy's budget and approximately 12 percent
of the U.S. Special Operations Command budget.

As you are aware, and as the National Defense Strategy
describes, and as my colleagues have highlighted, security
challenges facing the Nation today are numerous, and the
changing nature of war requires that we change with it.
Today, we have more than 1,000 special operators and support
personnel deployed to more than 35 countries, facing those
challenges, assuring partners, and strengthening alliances.
I would like to thank this committee for your support to
Special Operations.

As we continue in the longest stretch of armed conflict
in our Nation's history, congressional support is paramount
as we work to maintain advantage over our enemies, protect
the Nation, and care for the health and well-being of our
operators and their families. The first SOF truth, that
humans are more important than hardware, remains our guiding
principle. We have the best weapons and technology, but our
primary weapon systems are now, and always have been, our
operators. We select, train, and sustain men and women of
character, who are mature, highly skilled, culturally
attuned, and trusted to execute our Nation's most sensitive
missions. It's precisely because of what we ask our people
to do, operation after operation, that we never lose focus
on their long-term health. Preservation of the Force and
Families, our Human Performance Program, and our latest
Cognitive Health Initiatives are about operational readiness, battlefield performance, and the well-being of our force and families.

After nearly 17 years of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, we are focused on strengthening our capabilities as the maritime component to Special Operations. We are making progress modernizing our maritime mobility platforms that can operate effectively in contested environments. I sincerely appreciate the support from the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Richardson, and his leaders on the Navy staff, towards these priorities.

In today's world, adversaries are pursuing rapidly advancing technologies in an effort to surpass those of the United States. We, in turn, are relentlessly pursuing innovative solutions to generate effective and lethal capabilities to outpace our adversaries.

With our component partners and throughout Special Operations Command, innovation is embedded in every level of our force. Impressively, our most junior operators routinely demonstrate the talent, creativity, and battlefield know-how to move ideas to action. Our force on -- our focus on innovation is driven by our people, buying down risk to our force while increasing our speed, accuracy, and lethality. But, innovation is not just about bringing technology to bear. The National Defense Strategy demands
that we think differently, adapt to the changing
environment, look for efficiencies and ways to increase our
lethality. Optimizing our force is vital to meeting our
current operational requirements and providing greater
agility and lethality to meet future obligations.

Naval Special Warfare places priority on strengthening,
equipping, and protecting our people, outpacing our enemies
in the employment of new technologies in accelerating
trends, and adapting our force to remain agile, accurate,
and lethal for many years to come. As a command, we remain
vigilant to the resiliency of our operators, support
personnel, and their families, and remain committed to our
Gold Star families, whose sacrifice we can never repay and
whose memory continues to be a source of strength for us.

Thank you for your time, your care for all our sailors
and our Naval Special Warfare community. I look forward to
your questions.

[The prepared statement of Admiral Szymanski follows:]
Senator Ernst: Thank you, Admiral.

General Mundy, please.
STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL CARL E. MUNDY III,
USMC, COMMANDER, MARINE CORPS FORCES SPECIAL OPERATIONS
COMMAND

General Mundy: Chairwoman Ernst, Ranking Member Heinrich, thank you for providing me with the opportunity to appear before you this morning.

I have the honor of serving as the sixth Commander of Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, or MARSOC, as it's more commonly known. And so, I very much look forward to telling you about MARSOC and what your Marine Raiders are doing to help protect the American people.

MARSOC is the Marine Corps' contribution to U.S. Special Operations Command, and it's the youngest of the four SOF service components, having been established just 12 years ago, in 2006. However, our roots extend back to World War II, when President Roosevelt, determined to bring the war to our enemies as rapidly as possible, considered the Marine Corps to be an ideal organization for the President's vision of commando operations. So, in January 1942, the Marine Corps established two Raider battalions, with the missions of conducting raids against Japanese-held territory in guerrilla-type operations behind enemy lines.

In that historical mold, MARSOC today produces Marine Raiders to conduct full-spectrum special operations to combat complex transregional problems in support of
geographic combatant commands. MARSOC does this by building
upon the unique attributes and ethos that we already bring
to the table as marines. On top of our bedrock marine
identity, we add an assessment and selection process
demanding individual skills and realistic world-class
collective training to produce agile, enabled, and
responsive marine SOF. Our Raiders comprise a tight-knit
community of specially selected and trained critical-skills
operators and combat and combat service support specialists
that are task organized for every mission.

Like my fellow component commanders here today, I
execute Title 10 authorities as the MARSOC Commander to man,
train, and equip SOF, and then provide them to SOCOM for
missions that support the geographic combatant commanders.
Our authorized strength is approximately 3,000 marines and
sailors along with 200 civilians. All together, we
represent just over 4 and a half percent of SOCOM, and we
account for 2 percent of its annual budget.

Although able to support operations globally, the
majority of our forces deploy to Central Command, Africa
Command, and Pacific Command regions. MARSOC's base unit of
deployment is a Marine Special Operations Company, or MSOC,
which we provide persistently on a 6-month rotation to each
of these regions. On average, MARSOC has approximately 400
Raiders deployed across 18 countries, performing various
special operations tasks. Currently, our special operators average 1 day overseas for every 1.9 days at home, and our capability specialists, such as communicators, intelligence specialists, explosive ordnance disposal technicians, and the like, tend to have a higher tempo that varies from between 1.5 and just less than 1 day at home for every day deployed. While high, this operational tempo is manageable. We continue to benefit from MARSOC's Preservation of the Force and Families Program as a critical tool to maintain the health of our force. We pay close attention to the behavioral health of individual Raiders, and are always looking to expand and innovate the individual programs and services we provide to their families to relieve them of the strains of ordinary life, increase their resiliency, and help them better manage the stresses associated with frequent operational deployments. Our people, not technology or any other particular capability, represent our most precious resource. It's one that we must preserve and cultivate as we look to the future.

My priorities within the command reflect both MARSOC's commitment to its people as well as the requirement to develop the -- for the future. They are, first, to provide integrated full-spectrum SOF; second, to better integrate the capabilities of SOF with the Marine Corps's air-ground teams; third, to develop MARSOC's future force; and,
finally, to preserve our force and families. MARSOC is full of supremely talented and dedicated Americans, and I feel especially privileged to be able to represent these fine women and men to you today.

I'll close by saying, once again, that it's an honor to be here today and to speak to you about our mission. Thank you, as well, for what you do for our Nation and our military, particularly the support that you provide in terms of funding and oversight. I appreciate your interest in MARSOC and look forward to your questions.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of General Mundy follows:]
Senator Ernst: Thank you, General.

Again, gentlemen, thank you. Excellent opening statements.

In your opening statements, you did very briefly go through the skillsets that are particularly unique to your own components. If you could, just -- and each of you, just briefly answer -- within those skills, those operators, the equipment that you have, what gaps do you see, whether it's within your own component or even between the components, that exist within SOCOM?

General Webb, if we could start with you, please.

General Webb: Madam Chairwoman, the -- we contend, at Air Force Special Operations Command, that our Nation needs us to be a full-spectrum force, with a focus on the low and high end. And, as I said in my opening statement, with a -- we want to continue to hone to a fine razor's edge those low-end capabilities that we have done over the last, you know, decade plus. But, on the high end, it's both conceptual and technology-wise that we need to look -- What can we do with weapons -- major weapon systems that we already have today, in new and unique ways? And also, looking out to that next horizon, what are those technologies, such as specialized mobility for long range, long distance in contested environments, that could still land vertically, that I think we want to continue to pursue,
as well as ensuring that the equipment on the -- onboard our current systems measure up to the threat that is potentially out there.

Senator Ernst: Yeah.

General Webb: Those are the major pieces.

Senator Ernst: Very good. Thank you.

General Tovo.

General Tovo: Senator, just a couple of things.

First, I wouldn't identify them necessarily as a gap, but a big part of our challenge has been time to train. And so, part of our ability to regain balance in the force and both preserve our forces from an OPTEMPO overuse has been to put more time on the training schedule so that they -- we can address that expanded set of skills we need to train against. So, that's already ongoing.

We are always in a continual struggle, much like Rod's force, to make sure that our air systems are able to penetrate the variety of threats that our adversaries are fielding to deny us access. And so, that is a constant challenge. It's not a new challenge, but it is one that we're always working to address.

Senator Heinrich talked about the information domain and our tools to compete with our adversaries in that domain. And that is something that we're looking at very closely, on how do we get beyond loudspeakers and leaflets,
and really get our psy-op capability to be able to wield operational and strategic-level tools. A big part of that, though, is not about tools so much as it is about the authorities and permissions to use them, and how we, as the U.S. Government, decide to divvy up the information domain in this competitive space, and what agency and executive branch owns what responsibilities.

So, it's just a couple of the highlights. I'll --

Senator Ernst: Very good.

General Tovo: We can certainly go further if you'd like.

Senator Ernst: Thank you.

And we'll go on to the Admiral. Thank you.

Admiral Szymanski: Chairwoman, I wouldn't express them as gaps, either, but I think I've got three that I'd like to kind of highlight.

And the first, I'll start with people. I think, in the people space, this is the -- you know, in places like Iraq and Syria, we're using the virtual advise-and-assist kit. And I really believe that SOF can be on the vanguard, particularly on the near-peer competition below the threshold of human-machine teaming. And I think that that's a growth area for SOF in this space.

Second is really returning to the unique special maritime capabilities that Naval Special Warfare possesses,
but in concert or in interoperability with the Navy. I think, as we look at near-peer access into A2 or anti-access denied areas, we have something to offer there, but we've got to be -- my capabilities have got to be compatible with the Navy's platforms -- its ships, its submarines. And so, we're making a huge effort to close, if there is a gap there, but ensure that we're completely compatible.

And then, third, coming back to the people, I -- one area that's very -- of particular interest to me is neuro-cognitive health and the long-term sustainment of our individuals, both for the low-end fight and the high-end fight. We're learning some things about the brain that we haven't learned before, and exposure to blast trauma and blast -- low-level blast exposure, that we're -- I'm looking to really kind of close that gap and drive the science.

Senator Ernst: Thank you, Admiral. I appreciate that. And visiting your Mind Gym, that was very important to me. And I'll come back here in a little bit and we'll talk a little bit more about some of those efforts, as well.

Thank you.

General Mundy.

General Mundy: Senator Ernst, just briefly. In addition to time to train, our number-one priority is gaining the personnel that allows MARSOC to build out to the original number that it was supposed to be. And so, we're
shy of some critical enablers that would help us buy down
the individual readiness numbers that I articulated in my
opening statement that would allow us to be able to focus on
preparing the force to meet the emerging threats. So, our
number-one priority is people, gaining -- I think the number
is 368 right now.

Senator Ernst: Okay.

General Mundy: Thank you.

Senator Ernst: Wonderful. Thank you.

Thank you, gentlemen.

And next, we'll move to Senator Heinrich for his
questions. And then we have been joined by Senator Dan
Sullivan, as well. Not a regular member of our committee,
but certainly, Senator Sullivan, after Senator Heinrich has
done, if you would like to ask questions, feel free to do
so.

Thank you.

Senator Heinrich: General Webb, I'd like to start with
you. I was at Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico last
week, and, as you know, the proud airmen at Cannon and the
community there in Clovis provide significant contributions
to our national security, both in terms of the incredible
personnel and also the aircraft that they operate. And they
do this despite really what has become an insatiable demand
being placed on our Special Forces and their families, by
extension. You mentioned, in your testimony, that AFSOC is working to meet a 1-to-2 deployment-to-dwell for Active Force, which means 2 months at home for every 1 month deployed. Can you elaborate a little bit on why that deployment-to-dwell ratio is so critical to the long-term health of Special Forces, and what progress still needs to be made in that area?

General Webb: Well, Senator, thank you for the steadfast support to our Air Commandos out on the plains of eastern New Mexico. The deploy-to-dwell ratio for AFSOC stands at -- I have 12 percent of my force that is below a 1-to-2 dwell. I have none that are below 1-to-1 at this point. But, the demands of multiple deployments, back-to-back, at this stage in the ongoing countering-violent-extremist type of fight, you have -- it is not a rare exception at all for airmen to be on their 12th or 13th, 14th deployment, including those at Cannon Air Force Base. So, the POTFF program and the Comprehensive Airman Fitness Program from the Air Force side, absolutely vital and critical.

One statistic I would give you, Senator, from a POTFF-result perspective, as we track our airmen as they -- before they go out the door and as they return, using POTFF resources, we see 98 percent of our airmen return to ready-to-deploy-again status within 90 days of deployment. Just
as a gauge of how useful that program is.

Senator Heinrich: Twelve and 13 deployments. Have we experienced anything like that in the past?

General Webb: Senator, not to my knowledge. I mean, obviously, these aren't year-long deployments.

Senator Heinrich: Right.

General Webb: They're measured in months. But, I mean, we're kind of in uncharted territory, which was really the genesis of the POTFF Program, to begin with.

Senator Heinrich: Let me ask you a little bit about high-energy lasers. I very much appreciate SOCOM's investment in high-energy lasers on the C-130 gunship, but I'm quite concerned with the sort of crawl-walk-run approach, when I think we're reaching a point in the technology where we could literally jump from crawl to run. And let me tell you what I mean by that.

It's my understanding that SOCOM's current plan is to demo a 4-kilowatt laser and then one in the 30-kilowatt range, which really isn't operationally relevant for SOCOM's purposes, in my understanding, and then move to a 60-kilowatt-or-higher device. And at that rate, the system won't be fieldable until nearly 2030, from what I understand. The technology to develop an operationally relevant laser in the 60-kilowatt range could be ready for integration and fielding, in my view, in the next 4 to 5
years. So, if the technology is there, what's wrong with skipping the 30-kilowatt demo entirely and moving directly into something that can be used in the field?

General Webb: Senator, on the front of this airborne high-energy laser, I would couch this as a semi-good-news story. We're starting to see funding that would -- could accelerate exactly what you're talking about. In fact, I don't disagree with your assessment at all. The -- this presidential budget actually has money from a SOCOM and an Air Force and an OSD side, so I appreciate your continued support towards that 34 million. We're 58 million short of having a full program that would get us a 60-kilowatt laser flying on a AC-130 by FY22. That should be the goal. And so, like I said, I don't disagree with you at all, and I --

Senator Heinrich: We look forward to --

General Webb: -- would support you on that.

Senator Heinrich: We look forward to helping you with that goal.

SOCOM is the joint force proponent for military information support operations, or what we used to call psy-ops. SOCOM's military information support teams frequently deploy to embassies around the world, help with embassy public diplomacy efforts. How are SOCOM's information operations capabilities being transformed to a more effective -- to more effectively compete with the
operational and strategic messaging challenges that we see in our adversaries today? Can you talk about that a little bit more, General Tovo?

General Tovo: Yes, Senator. We have invested fairly heavily in our psy-op operators, developing new capabilities, particularly to deal in the digital space, social media analysis and a variety of different tools that have been fielded by SOCOM that allow us to evaluate the social media space, evaluate the cyber domain, see trend analysis, where opinion is moving, and then how to potentially influence that environment with our own products. As I mentioned, we have the knowledge and the skills to operate in this domain. Much of the difficulty lies in getting --

Senator Heinrich: Getting the authorities.

General Tovo: -- the appropriate authorities and permissions to do so.

Senator Heinrich: Well, and let us know what your views are and how you think those should be organized.

General Tovo: Senator.

[The information referred to follows:]

Senator Heinrich [presiding]: Senator Sullivan, welcome. We really appreciate your interest in the committee. And the time is yours.

Senator Sullivan: Great, thank you, Mr. Chairman.
And, gentlemen, welcome.

And I wanted to start -- and, General Howell, maybe I can begin with you, but I guess this is a question really for all the witnesses -- but, certainly the counter-WMD mission is one of the most important and, really, kind of, evergreen missions that our country will have. We can defeat ISIS, we can defeat al Qaeda, but, as long as we have the great republic that we defend, the counter-WMD mission is going to be top priority.

U.S. SOCOM recently took over responsibility of that. I've had a number of conversations with General Thomas about that. How do you think it's going? And it's not like your forces don't have a lot on their plate, and now they're taking the lead on probably, in some ways, the most important mission we have in the U.S. military, from my perspective. And are you concerned about integrating this top priority with other priorities that you have? And are there other things that we need to be doing, in terms of authorization or resources, to enable U.S. Special Operations Command to carry out this mission, which we can't fail at?

General Howell: Senator Sullivan, thank you for the question.

As you noted, the counter-WMD mission was passed to U.S. SOCOM a couple of years ago. We've been investing
heavily in that. We have been designated by the Department as the coordinating authority for counter-WMD. We've been -- which gives us a -- an opportunity to bring together the community of interest to plan, establish intelligence priorities. What it has done, thus far, and in close integration with our colleagues from the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, is bringing together the interagency to one area to look at the problem globally, look transregionally across the boundaries of the GCCS and kind of develop the intelligence picture in the priorities. We're also looking at reaching out more to our international partners, who are in this space as well, through EUPOL, INTERPOL, law enforcement, as well as our military colleagues from the alliance and coalition elsewhere.

I would say, right now, Senator, we -- there's no specific asks for us right now. We're still developing it. We're developing a functional campaign plan that we owe back to the Department and to provide assessment on the way ahead. And I think we're --

Senator Sullivan: And a lot of that work is probably left of launch and involves Federal agencies that aren't necessarily military agencies, but like the CIA and other intelligence agencies. Do you think the coordination, particularly with regard to the networks -- I mean, it seems, as we are pressuring North Korea right now, that the
proliferation threat has probably never been higher. I also believe it's still very, very high, regardless of the JCPOA, with regard to Iran. Both countries have a long history of proliferation. Do you think that the networks that we need to disrupt those networks are in place? And is there sufficient integration, say, between the SOF forces and the CIA and other elements of the Federal Government that work to defeat those networks?

General Howell: Sir, thanks for the question. I think the -- the short answer is yes. I think the cooperation --

Senator Sullivan: Do we have enough resources on that side, do you think?

General Howell: There are so specific asks yet, because we're still, you know, building the functional campaign plan and building the picture. But, I would say the interagency cooperation is exceptional in this area. As you described in the beginning of your comment, staying well left of the shot is our goal here. That's success for us. And I think we're well-postured with our interagency partners to be in position of advantage to do something when the opportunity arises.

Senator Sullivan: Let me ask another question that kind of relates to -- and again, I've talked to General Thomas and Secretary Mattis about this, but -- you know, as we have a new National Defense Strategy, which I think has
bipartisan support in the Congress, and that's focused much
more on kind of peer rivals and great-power threats, that
it's a shift, of course, from the terrorists and al Qaeda
and post-9/11 focus, which, at the time, I think was
appropriate, but it's an appropriate shift. How are your
forces -- and this is for any and everybody -- how are your
forces starting to implement that?

And let me just give you an example. You know, in
Afghanistan or, say, in parts of Africa, we have, I would
call them, more -- and maybe not so much in Afghanistan,
although it depends on the threat, but in Africa, say, a
low-intensity threat, a terrorist organization that, while
disruptive for that region, is not necessarily -- poses a
threat to the United States and our citizens, unless, of
course, they're traveling there. And yet, we do have some
of your forces that are focused on those areas and those
threats. And, of course, you have the highest-trained, most
valuable forces, in many ways, in the U.S. military.

So, are we -- is that, kind of -- are we starting to,
kind of, shift, in terms of the great-power focus -- China,
Russia, North Korea -- in the special operations field, the
way that the Secretary has laid it out in the National
Defense Strategy? Sometimes I think a number of us worry
that we have these incredible military members, that you're
all in charge of, going after, you know, targets that,
while, at some level, are disturbing, are not threats to our
country. I mean, if we have a predator feed on a low-level
taliban guy on a motorcycle for 7 hours in Afghanistan, is
that the proper use of your forces, relative to the threat,
particularly in light of the National Defense Strategy that
says the focus needs to shift? And I'll open that up to
anybody and everybody. And what are we doing about it?

General Tovo: Senator, I can tell you. I think what
you're describing is really, How do we balance priorities
worldwide? I think SOCOM's got a pretty good process that's
fairly flexible and adaptable as the priorities coming out
of the national capital region change. We've got the
ability to kind of reevaluate where we have put our forces,
and for what purpose.

I will say, though, that if you look at our current
worldwide disposition, we are already, I think, in many
places, already doing what the National Defense Strategy
tells us to do. So, if you look at the SOF commitment in
Europe, for example, they are not purposed against a
counter-VEO problem, for the most part. They are there in
much of the Balkans, but also all over eastern Europe,
helping partners and allies with just the challenge you
described of an adversary state trying to disrupt our
partners and allies. And so, I think we are already in that
methodology. You could say the same about some of our work
in Korea and broadly across the Pacific.

Senator Sullivan: Do we need 1,000 troops in Niger, General?

General Tovo: Sir, that's a question best asked of the operational commander at AFRICOM. But, I think part of what we've learned in the war on terrorism is that we've got an enemy that is willing and able to move his base of support globally, or certainly regionally, between Africa and southwest Asia. And so, the question is, How much, as a Nation, do we want to invest in trying to help a partner nation preserve stability so a nascent threat or a growing threat doesn't get to the point where it truly is a strategic challenge to the U.S. And that's kind of a daily conversation. And those conversations are happening to try and evaluate, How much do we -- how much do we invest in Niger compared to, do we shift forces to some other threat?

Senator Ernst [presiding]: Thank you.

Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have to go preside right now.

Senator Ernst: Okay.

Senator Sullivan: Otherwise, I would stay around for --

Senator Ernst: Well --

Senator Sullivan: Very interesting. And thank you for your service, gentlemen. To all the men and women under
your command, we very much appreciate what they're doing.

Senator Ernst: And thank you for joining us, Senator Sullivan. We appreciate that.

We will do just a very quick round, with Senator Heinrich and I, before we move into a closed session.

So, I do want to go back. Admiral, we talked about the Mind Gym. Many of you have brought up POTFF, which has been really important to me. You have mentioned the dwell time, the minimal dwell time that your operators have, how about all comes together, how it's affecting them. The operators are put in very difficult circumstance. Many of them return home and have physical difficulties.

And I'll share one story with you. I had the opportunity to visit Fort Bragg, just a couple of years back, and a very, very good friend of mine was with a group there, a Special Forces group. And I had the opportunity to go to THOR3 with him and do one of his workouts. And I -- I'm not embarrassed to say I had my rear end kicked by a one-legged man as we went through some of his training.

But, it demonstrated to me how important these programs are in getting our operators back to where they need to be, whether they will reengage in the fight or whether they will prepare to be medically discharged.

So, if you could, from your own experiences across the panel, please, explain to me why you think POTFF is
important. And what have you seen with your operators to
demonstrate why it's important?

General Webb?

General Webb: Madam Chairwoman, as I said -- and, in
fact, my command chief, Chief Smith, and I were just at
Walter Reed visiting one of our wounded airmen that was
there, had been shot in Afghanistan last year. You know,
his point to me was, he's got 22 months till his team goes
out the door again. He's got a left arm that he needs to
get back in full shape. His mindset is already there. And
it's these -- that is one vignette. And, of course, there's
a ton at this table that you could go to. But, it's that
kind of resourcing and that kind of mindset that's
instilled, you know, mind, body, spirit-wise, from our
airmen, in my case, that is a really -- a difference-maker.
And that gets driven home every time we have one of these
visits.

Senator Ernst: Thank you.

General Tovo: Senator, I think it's important to
understand that the capability that we get out of a military
treatment facility is really designed to return an
individual to a baseline of performance, and that the -- our
programs within POTFF are designed to try and not only get
-- to pass that baseline, really to get to that full high
level of performance that we demand out of our special
operators. From a performance perspective, it's kind of the
SOF ad, if you will. You know, it's the P-11 slice of what
they -- the services have invested in.

But, rather than talk about, you know, kind of, the
numbers of the program and access to care and all those
great things that POTFF has allowed us to do, I would just
share that, as I go around and I talk to both soldiers and
their families, what I hear, particularly from family
members, is that over their -- the course of their career,
they've heard an awful lot about support of families and how
much we care about families and the soldiers, themselves.
And many of them say, "The first demonstrable thing we can
point to that really shows you care about how much you're
deploying my spouse and how much you're asking of them, day
in, day out, combat deployment after combat deployment, are
the POTFF program aspects that have truly focused on, How do
we help our families not only survive this experience, but
really thrive as Army Special Operations families?"

Senator Ernst: Thank you.

Admiral.

Admiral Szymanski: So, thank you for -- for all of us.

A lot of it's about return to duty, as General Tovo just
mentioned on the performance piece. And it's return to
duty, it's cutting down the recovery time. It's about
extending the service life of the individual, and ensuring
they have a good transition, post service, to -- with a high
good quality of life. But, I think, you know, in essence, it --
it's improved the operational readiness of the organization.

It's strengthened -- your favorite word -- resiliency of the
families. When the family is strong, then the unit is going
to be strong. You know, I think that's it, in a nutshell.

But, the cognitive piece is really important, again. And I
maybe can talk more in the closed session about that.

Senator Ernst: Thank you.

General Mundy.

General Mundy: Just all of the above. That's pretty
easy to just pile on top of that. It's important, because
of the way that it fuses all aspects of readiness together
-- mental, spiritual, physical -- and then the families, as
others have alluded to here. And so, I get around. And in
-- I'll just say, in 35 years, you can usually find someone
who will critique a program or a process, but nobody in
MARSOC critiques POTFF -- MPOTFF, in our POTFF. It's
invaluable to us.

Senator Ernst: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Senator Heinrich.

Senator Heinrich: Thank you.

General Tovo, I want to ask you a little bit about

SFABs. As AFSOC forces have continued to experience

increased demand from combatant commanders and particularly
in an advisory role for foreign forces, how is the establishment of SFABs as dedicated advisors for conventional foreign forces affecting your ability to refocus on other essential missions?

General Tovo: Senator, thanks for that question. I think it's important to understand that the Army's -- Chief of the Army's design for the SFAB was really threefold. One was to prevent existing brigade units from being essentially broken down and piecemealed into combat advisory roles in Afghanistan or Iraq, as well as then to improve our ability to do advisory work as an army of conventional partners, and then, lastly, to have a cadre of leadership -- NCO and officer leadership that, in the case of a national emergency, we could add the junior enlisted members to it and we'd have additional force structure.

So, that's kind of the framework of why the SFABs are created. As you look at what they're doing right now -- so, right now, the first SFAB is in Afghanistan, and most of what it is doing is trying to advise conventional Afghan formations -- formations that SOF was not partnered with -- in order to better enable those Afghan formations to fill their role in the security environment. We are an indirect beneficiary of that.

Senator Heinrich: Right.

General Tovo: The challenge we had was, we were
partnering with Afghan SOF forces that were doing great work clearing villages and valleys, and yet there was no hold force. And I think this will help that. The -- a better-partnered conventional Afghan force will be able to fulfill a role that was missing. At this point, I don't see it supplanting what we are currently doing, though. We are working with Afghan Special Operations Forces, and they're going to focus on Afghan conventional forces.

Now, sometime in the future, in other environments, can we see the SFAB employed doing some of the work that right now we have SOF teams doing? That's --

Senator Heinrich: Sure.

General Tovo: -- certainly a possibility. But, right now, it hasn't developed that way.

Senator Heinrich: As we continue to stand up that entire enterprise, do you think it's going to be important for SFABs to have the ability to regularly train in the kind of environments where they will be in that supportive role?

General Tovo: Senator, absolutely. One of the things, I think, that challenged the previous incarnation of SFABs, the regionally aligned forces, was not having the full authorities and funding mechanisms to deploy into the environments that they needed to be training in. So, I think, at some point, some kind of authority and funding mechanism, much like we use the JSET authority for, might be
valuable for the Army.

Senator Heinrich: Madam Chair, I'm going to yield back the rest of my time so we can get to our colleagues.

Senator Ernst: Thank you.

Senator Wicker.

Senator Wicker: Tell me -- whoever wants to answer this -- how's morale, servicewide? And has -- have our troops noticed that sequestration is over and that things are looking up, in terms of resources? Who wants to take that?

General Tovo: I'll take a stab at that, Senator, thanks.

I'll tell you, as I talk to our operators and our soldiers in the field, morale is uniformly very good. They are stressed, they are working hard, but most of them are doing exactly what they signed up to do. And if you told them tomorrow that they were not going to ever deploy again, I'd probably have some challenges on my hands, as far as long-term morale. They are doing what they came into our force to do.

A great indicator of that is, we have phenomenal retention rates. People like what they're doing, they love being in the SOF family. And so, uniformly, both the soldiers and their families are happy with the environment that we have helped create, and I think we're in a pretty
good place, for now.

Senator Wicker: Yeah, it really takes your breath away that they step forward, knowing they've signed up for a very difficult task.

Any reaction to the increased resources and the lifting of sequestration, or is that something they haven't zeroed in on?

General Howell: Sir, I think, from the SOCOM perspective, we are very well resourcing. General Thomas has been consistent. Our budget continues to rise. We're still a small slice of the overall DOD. We still have an over-reliance on the Overseas Contingency Operations Fund, which doesn't allow us to modernize. And that and the continuing resolutions make it difficult to modernize the force. So, that will be something we're interested in focusing on to improve our capability for -- to focus on near-peer competitors.

Admiral Szymanski: Senator Wicker, I also don't think it's completely down at the deck-plate level yet, because the morale -- because we are funded through SOCOM at the individual level really well for the things we do. But, where it has shown confidence -- and I can indirectly talk to the fact of the interoperability, our warfighter talks with our service components, who, in effect, it may be more by sequestration, because we're -- people-driven
organization, where often there are platform-centric organizations. And I was just talking about my priorities for interoperability with the Navy and ensuring my capabilities are compatible with the Navy's assets, capital assets. And I -- we're in great dialogue, and I think it's all an indicator of the budget -- presidential budget recommendation.

Senator Wicker: Well, you know, I appreciate your saying that. And I would just say, you know, the -- this -- the Secretary of Defense says sequestration did, really, more damage over a few-year period than an enemy could have done. And several of us took a pretty tough vote when it came to those budget numbers, and there's been -- I think there's certainly a lot of concern, on the other side, of the fact that we do have a deficit and we are adding to the national debt. I think, on balance, the majority of Congress was persuaded by the words of our Secretary of Defense that we need to quit doing the -- more damage than an enemy could have done. And so, I'm very satisfied with the fact that we took a tough vote and gave you the whole military $80 billion worth.

I might -- Madam Chair, when I came in, Senator Heinrich was asking a specific question about Afghanistan. Who would like to take this question? It seems to me that the vast majority of the citizens of Afghanistan, across the
tribal differences, appreciate our presence there, think
we're about to win this thing, and want us to see it
through. Am I correct there? Who could comment? Who is
able to -- General Howell, if you'd take that question.

General Howell: Sir, one of -- it's probably more
appropriate for General Votel, the CENTCOM Commander. But,
having served in Afghanistan as recently as last May, I can
attest to what you state there. The confidence that the
Afghans have, knowing that we're going to be there with them
for the long term, really buoys their confidence. You can
see it in the way they train, the way they come to work
every day, and the way they fight. So, in just -- not only
the Afghan Special Security Forces that our operators train,
advise, assist, and accompany, but, overall, the Afghans
outside of the defense structure that I came in contact
with. It's just one small picture from my personal point of
view.

Senator Wicker: Taliban's on the wane there.

General Howell: Sir, I think they are. They're in a
tough position right now.

Senator Wicker: Thank you, Madam Chair.
Senator Ernst: Thank you.
Senator Peters.
Senator Peters: Thank you, Madam Chair.
And thank you for -- the panel, for your testimony
today, and, more importantly, for your service to our
country every day. We appreciate it.

This committee is about emerging threats and emerging
capabilities. And I think an awful lot about, particularly,
those emerging capabilities in terms of new technology and
new innovation that's coming online. I'm very involved, for
example, with self-driving cars, as -- being the Senator
from Michigan. And this is technology that'll transform the
way we get from point A to point B, but also really
transform just about everything in our economy, as well.
And certainly, the implications for warfare are equally as
transformative as we move forward.

But, something that I discussed with Secretary Mattis
was that we can't just be the leader in good technology.
You have to match that with doctrine and tactics, as well.
And specifically, in talking to Secretary Mattis, as a
historian, who, in addition to being the Secretary of
Defense, talked about the advantage the French had in tanks
in World War II, but found themselves quickly outmatched by
the German blitzkrieg that changed everything, despite the
technological superiority.

So, my question to all of you, because you are trying
to figure out how to integrate some of these new
technologies in very innovative ways, if you could talk a
little bit about how that's going, what we need to do, and
how some specific platforms you think are particularly promising that we need to support here, from -- at the congressional level. And maybe if I could just go down the panel, it will be very helpful.

General Webb: Senator, thanks very much for the question.

And I would agree with everything that -- as you just laid it out right there. It is about technology, but it's also about concepts. And so, from Air Force Special Operations standpoint, we kind of have a two-pronged approach, and it's, What can we do with our current systems that we have and -- from a standpoint of additive capability, which we're still building out, some as we've transitioned a number of our airframes, but it's also about concepts for the usage of that. And so, there is a concerted effort that we are doing, in conjunction with SOCOM and the Air Force, with Strategic Capabilities Office, DARPA, Air Force Research Laboratory, et cetera, to look at some new concepts and new technologies. And then there's the other leg of, What kind of game-changing kind of technology could be applied in that next ridge-line out? And without getting into specifics in this forum, that's been the approach at AFSOC I'm very comfortable with.

Senator Peters: Great.

General Tovo: Senator, I think you hit the nail on the
head. We've done very well, I think, over the years, on the incremental changes as new technology comes in to kind of take on what we're already doing, and do it a little bit better. About 5 years ago, USASOC stood up a futures staff section designed specifically to look a little deeper in time to understand the implications of technology, demographics, the changing nature of the security environment, in general, and then to understand, through a war-gaming process, how that might apply to us, particularly with scenarios against our current set of adversaries with the advent of new technologies, et cetera, so that we can derive those lessons. And so, I would tell you that much of what we're doing in that deeper fight is trying to stay connected to industry and to the other experts in the field to understand where these technologies are moving to, not just tomorrow or next year, but what does it look like 10 and 15 years into the future, so that we can develop the operational concepts, the doctrine, the techniques, et cetera, as the technology develops.

Admiral Szymanski: Senator, it's a great question. And I think the -- maybe a little different twist than my colleagues put it, very -- I think, very consistent with what they said, is -- most of our organizations were founded to be innovative in concept and not technology. You go back to the history of SEALs and underwater demolition teams, and
it was an innovative concept to how we clear beaches to allow amphibious assaults. And we would do that much differently today, with the technology that we have.

And then, secondly, to -- without getting into some specific platforms; maybe we can talk in closed session -- but we are making some great progress, some promising progress in the incorporation of AI and machine learning, particularly in some of our processing and exploitation and dissemination, that will cut down analyst time. I think, as the CNO likes to talk about, the -- and two of the rogue -- or revisionist powers that are mentioned in the National Defense Strategy, both of their leaders have talked about the decision speed, and he who owns AI will be the master. And I -- so, I think we're in a race with this incorporation. And it's important, I think, that we continue to press hard on the AI and machine learning.

Senator Peters: Right. Right.

General Mundy: Senator, our approach is twofold, kind of near term and far term. In near term, we are -- we approach it from an additive capability, take already existing programs and look to add some of this new technology into it. We have a very small capability development group in our organization, and it's one of the areas that we'd look to grow, here, going forward in the future.
Our long-term view, I think, like everybody here, is, we're -- as we see that we're on the cusp of machine learning and AI and those sorts of things, how to get in front of that. So, we've also published a futures document that looks out about 12 years. It's conceptual and a vision right now. So, the next step for us would then be to really put some meat on the bones -- we've now written a futures document -- and to begin to develop innovation pathways that allow us to take some of those new technologies and apply them to our concept.

Senator Peters: Great. Thank you. Appreciate it.

Senator Ernst: And thank you, Senator Peters. Now, at this time, we will go ahead and recess. We will move to SVC-217, where we will go into closed session. Just a reminder, it will be a closed session. You must have the appropriate clearance to engage, in 217. So, with that, we will close -- or, excuse me, recess, and we'll move to 217.

Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:01 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]