

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

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

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1 HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON
2 UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND'S EFFORTS TO
3 TRANSFORM THE FORCE FOR FUTURE SECURITY CHALLENGES
4

5 Wednesday, April 11, 2018
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7 U.S. Senate
8 Subcommittee on Emerging
9 Threats and Capabilities
10 Committee on Armed Services
11 Washington, D.C.
12

13 The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:00 a.m.
14 in Room SR-232A, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. Joni
15 Ernst, chairman of the subcommittee, presiding.

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

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

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

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

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

25 We have with us Lieutenant General Scott A. Howell,

1 United States Air Force, Vice Commander, United States
2 Special Operations Command -- thank you, sir; Lieutenant
3 General Kenneth E. Tovo, United States Army, Commanding
4 General, United States Army Special Operations Command;
5 Lieutenant General Marshall B. Webb, United States Air
6 Force, Commander, USAF Special Operations Command; Rear
7 Admiral Timothy G. Syzmanski, United States Navy, Commander,
8 Naval Special Warfare Command; and Major General Carl E.
9 Mundy III, United States Marine Corps, Commander, Marine
10 Corps Special Operations Command.

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

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

20 Over the last 16-plus years, SOCOM has largely focused
21 its efforts on executing its role as a leader in the global
22 counterterrorism fight. As a result, SOCOM's organization,
23 tactics, techniques, procedures, and its development of
24 capabilities has reflected this mission set. While it's
25 clear that counterterrorism will remain a persistent mission

1 of SOF, the severity of the threat posed by China, Russia,
2 and other adversarial nation-states demand increased
3 attention by our Nation's most agile and innovative force to
4 ensure they're postured to fight and win.

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

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

25 With that, Senator Heinrich.

1 STATEMENT OF HON. MARTIN HEINRICH, U.S. SENATOR FROM
2 NEW MEXICO

3 Senator Heinrich: Thank you.

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

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

12 Since 9/11, the vast majority of special operations
13 activities have really been focused on defeating al-Qaeda
14 and on defeating ISIS while seeking to prevent the emergence
15 of other violent extremist groups. However, the recently
16 released National Defense Strategy, or NDS, states that the
17 central challenge facing our Nation is the reemergence of
18 long-term strategic competition with Russia and China, and
19 that this competition replaces terrorism as the primary
20 concern in national -- U.S. national security. This
21 strategic prioritization raises some pretty important
22 questions with respect to the readiness of our Special
23 Operations Forces to conduct the most sensitive and, in many
24 cases, highest-risk missions tasked to the military. Our
25 Special Operations Forces will surely continue to play a

1 central role in addressing the threat posed by violent
2 extremist groups, but are also increasingly likely to be
3 engaged in so-called hybrid warfare or gray-zone conflict,
4 below the threshold of traditional armed conflict. The
5 current demand for special operations capabilities already
6 outstrips supply. And, under the new NDS, such capabilities
7 are likely to be stretched even further. Just last year,
8 the SOCOM Commander, General Thomas, stated that, quote,
9 "Most SOF units are employed to their sustainable limit."

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

18 While Special Operations Forces retain the capability
19 to operate in sensitive environments, some core skills,
20 including foreign language proficiency, may need to be
21 reemphasized in their training. Additionally, new secure
22 communications, intelligence-gathering, directed energy, and
23 nonlethal weapons capabilities may also be required for our
24 Special Operations Forces to be successful. The growing use
25 of social media and other means of communication by both

1 state and nonstate actors to influence vulnerable
2 populations is also a concern for the special operations
3 enterprise.

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

16 I look forward to hearing from each of you.

17 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Senator.

18 And we will start with Lieutenant General Howell. Sir,
19 if you would, please.

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1 STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL SCOTT A. HOWELL, USAF,
2 VICE COMMANDER, U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

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

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

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

24 However, as the National Defense Strategy outlines, the
25 global security environment is rapidly changing.

1 Correspondingly, SOCOM is transforming at an ever-increasing
2 pace. Today, you'll hear from each of our service component
3 commanders on how their commands are meeting the challenge.

4 Comprising just 2 percent of the defense budget and 3
5 percent of the manpower, Special Operations Forces play a
6 critical role in addressing the Nation's priority security
7 challenges and provide an extraordinary return on
8 investment. But, as one of ARSOF truths state, most special
9 operations require non-SOF assistance. And the additional
10 support the military departments provide to each of our
11 service components, estimated about \$8 billion annually,
12 plays an essential role in the success of our force.

13 The continued support and trust of this committee to
14 U.S. SOCOM and our service components and the military
15 departments has been crucial in maximizing these dividends.

16 And, Madam Chairwoman, you've already introduced my
17 colleagues here alongside us. I will just say, these
18 commanders provide superior leadership to their respective
19 organizations and a clear vision for the transformation
20 required to ensure special operations remains at the
21 forefront in addressing emergency -- emerging threats and
22 capabilities.

23 Pending any immediate questions for me, I'll ask each
24 component commander to provide brief remarks to the
25 committee. And we look forward to the discussion.

1 Senator Ernst: Thank you, General.

2 General Webb.

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

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

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

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

22 As General Thomas testified before your committee 2
23 months ago, Special Operations' unique capabilities are in
24 high demand across the globe. For 17 years, AFSOC has been
25 laser focused on counterterrorism operations. This has

1 accelerated the AFSOC operations tempo and has drawn our
2 efforts towards the low end of the conflict spectrum. We
3 realize these efforts are predominantly long-term
4 engagements in which cumulative tactical effects lead to
5 long-term strategic impact. To make such engagements
6 successful, AFSOC must lower the resource and opportunity
7 costs of conducting persistent counterterrorism operations.

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

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

1 operational problem sets.

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

15 Finally, our third priority is resiliency. What
16 defines AFSOC is not technology or platforms. Rather, we
17 are defined by our people -- Active Duty, Guard, Reserve,
18 and civilians, alike -- and the relentless application of
19 our ethos and strategic values. Tomorrow's fight is
20 unknowable, but one thing is for certain: It must be an
21 integrated joint venture, where our creative concepts will
22 win out. AFSOC fervently believes a diverse formation lends
23 itself to this end, and we develop all Air Commandos
24 accordingly. The readiness and relevance of our force is
25 for naught if we neglect our physical, mental, spiritual,

1 and social fitness. Using SOCOM's Preservation of the Force
2 and Family and the Air Force's Comprehensive Airman Fitness
3 Program -- Programs, we ensure that our Air Commando
4 community, including our brave Gold Star families, have
5 access to every possible tool to achieve sustained
6 resiliency, and we exploit every opportunity to encourage
7 our airmen to use these tools.

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

13 [The prepared statement of General Webb follows:]

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1 Senator Ernst: Thank you, General Webb.
2 General Tovo.
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1 STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL KENNETH E. TOVO, USA,
2 COMMANDING GENERAL, U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

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

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

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

1 lastly, crisis response.

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

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

17 USASOC is sustaining the counter-VEO fight while
18 building readiness for peer and near-peer threats by
19 investing in three major efforts. First, we are in the
20 midst of a multiyear effort to restore balance to the force,
21 with the aim of improving the health of the force and
22 providing additional time to train against the broader set
23 of tasks that must be mastered to address peer adversaries.

24 Second, we have made significant investments in the
25 intellectual space to ensure that we understand the

1 implications of changes in the security environment and that
2 we find ways to maintain an enduring competitive advantage
3 over our Nation's adversaries. Third, the command published
4 strategic guidance, USASOC Strategy 2035, to establish the
5 objectives and framework for developing the capabilities
6 required to move ARSOF from the force of today to the force
7 that the Nation will need in the future.

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

20 Before I conclude, I'd like to thank this Congress for
21 its continued support of SOF, the Army, and DOD. Your
22 efforts to provide budgetary relief are greatly appreciated.
23 Your continued endorsement of critical SOCOM programs, such
24 as Preservation of the Force and Family, are essential to
25 the resilience and readiness of ARSOF. And I'd like to

1 specifically thank the Senate Armed Services Committee for
2 its advocacy for SOF in the 2018 NDAA. The authorities
3 provided under Section 1202 gives SOF the tools required to
4 impede the progress of adversary advances in the competitive
5 space, short of war.

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

8 [The prepared statement of General Tovo follows:]

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1 Senator Ernst: Thank you, General.
2 Admiral Szymanski.
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1 STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL TIMOTHY G. SZYMANSKI, USN,
2 COMMANDER, NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND

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

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

14 Naval Special Warfare is made up of sea, air, land
15 operators, our SEALs, our special boat operators, commonly
16 referred to as SWCC, or Special Warfare Combatant Craft
17 Crewman, our combat support and combat service support
18 personnel, such as intelligence analysts, cryptologists,
19 communications specialists, chaplain corps and medical
20 support, amongst others. We are a mix of Active Duty,
21 Reserve, and civilians. Our nearly 10,000 personnel account
22 for 2.4 percent of the Navy's overall personnel numbers and
23 14 percent of the U.S. Special Operations personnel numbers.
24 Our budget accounts for less than 1 percent of the
25 Department of the Navy's budget and approximately 12 percent

1 of the U.S. Special Operations Command budget.

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

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

1 Cognitive Health Initiatives are about operational
2 readiness, battlefield performance, and the well-being of
3 our force and families.

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

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

17 With our component partners and throughout Special
18 Operations Command, innovation is embedded in every level of
19 our force. Impressively, our most junior operators
20 routinely demonstrate the talent, creativity, and
21 battlefield know-how to move ideas to action. Our force on
22 -- our focus on innovation is driven by our people, buying
23 down risk to our force while increasing our speed, accuracy,
24 and lethality. But, innovation is not just about bringing
25 technology to bear. The National Defense Strategy demands

1 that we think differently, adapt to the changing
2 environment, look for efficiencies and ways to increase our
3 lethality. Optimizing our force is vital to meeting our
4 current operational requirements and providing greater
5 agility and lethality to meet future obligations.

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

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

18 [The prepared statement of Admiral Szymanski follows:]

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1 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Admiral.

2 General Mundy, please.

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1 STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL CARL E. MUNDY III,
2 USMC, COMMANDER, MARINE CORPS FORCES SPECIAL OPERATIONS
3 COMMAND

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

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

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

23 In that historical mold, MARSOC today produces Marine
24 Raiders to conduct full-spectrum special operations to
25 combat complex transregional problems in support of

1 geographic combatant commands. MARSOC does this by building
2 upon the unique attributes and ethos that we already bring
3 to the table as marines. On top of our bedrock marine
4 identity, we add an assessment and selection process
5 demanding individual skills and realistic world-class
6 collective training to produce agile, enabled, and
7 responsive marine SOF. Our Raiders comprise a tight-knit
8 community of specially selected and trained critical-skills
9 operators and combat and combat service support specialists
10 that are task organized for every mission.

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

19 Although able to support operations globally, the
20 majority of our forces deploy to Central Command, Africa
21 Command, and Pacific Command regions. MARSOC's base unit of
22 deployment is a Marine Special Operations Company, or MSOC,
23 which we provide persistently on a 6-month rotation to each
24 of these regions. On average, MARSOC has approximately 400
25 Raiders deployed across 18 countries, performing various

1 special operations tasks. Currently, our special operators
2 average 1 day overseas for every 1.9 days at home, and our
3 capability specialists, such as communicators, intelligence
4 specialists, explosive ordnance disposal technicians, and
5 the like, tend to have a higher tempo that varies from
6 between 1.5 and just less than 1 day at home for every day
7 deployed. While high, this operational tempo is manageable.

8 We continue to benefit from MARSOC's Preservation of the
9 Force and Families Program as a critical tool to maintain
10 the health of our force. We pay close attention to the
11 behavioral health of individual Raiders, and are always
12 looking to expand and innovate the individual programs and
13 services we provide to their families to relieve them of the
14 strains of ordinary life, increase their resiliency, and
15 help them better manage the stresses associated with
16 frequent operational deployments. Our people, not
17 technology or any other particular capability, represent our
18 most precious resource. It's one that we must preserve and
19 cultivate as we look to the future.

20 My priorities within the command reflect both MARSOC's
21 commitment to its people as well as the requirement to
22 develop the -- for the future. They are, first, to provide
23 integrated full-spectrum SOF; second, to better integrate
24 the capabilities of SOF with the Marine Corps's air-ground
25 teams; third, to develop MARSOC's future force; and,

1 finally, to preserve our force and families. MARSOC is full
2 of supremely talented and dedicated Americans, and I feel
3 especially privileged to be able to represent these fine
4 women and men to you today.

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

11 Thank you.

12 [The prepared statement of General Mundy follows:]

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1 Senator Ernst: Thank you, General.

2 Again, gentlemen, thank you. Excellent opening
3 statements.

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

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

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

1 as well as ensuring that the equipment on the -- onboard our
2 current systems measure up to the threat that is potentially
3 out there.

4 Senator Ernst: Yeah.

5 General Webb: Those are the major pieces.

6 Senator Ernst: Very good. Thank you.

7 General Tovo.

8 General Tovo: Senator, just a couple of things.

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

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

22 Senator Heinrich talked about the information domain
23 and our tools to compete with our adversaries in that
24 domain. And that is something that we're looking at very
25 closely, on how do we get beyond loudspeakers and leaflets,

1 and really get our psy-op capability to be able to wield
2 operational and strategic-level tools. A big part of that,
3 though, is not about tools so much as it is about the
4 authorities and permissions to use them, and how we, as the
5 U.S. Government, decide to divvy up the information domain
6 in this competitive space, and what agency and executive
7 branch owns what responsibilities.

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

9 Senator Ernst: Very good.

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

12 Senator Ernst: Thank you.

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

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

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

24 Second is really returning to the unique special
25 maritime capabilities that Naval Special Warfare possesses,

1 but in concert or in interoperability with the Navy. I
2 think, as we look at near-peer access into A2 or anti-access
3 denied areas, we have something to offer there, but we've
4 got to be -- my capabilities have got to be compatible with
5 the Navy's platforms -- its ships, its submarines. And so,
6 we're making a huge effort to close, if there is a gap
7 there, but ensure that we're completely compatible.

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

16 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Admiral. I appreciate that.

17 And visiting your Mind Gym, that was very important to me.

18 And I'll come back here in a little bit and we'll talk a
19 little bit more about some of those efforts, as well.

20 Thank you.

21 General Mundy.

22 General Mundy: Senator Ernst, just briefly. In
23 addition to time to train, our number-one priority is
24 gaining the personnel that allows MARSOC to build out to the
25 original number that it was supposed to be. And so, we're

1 shy of some critical enablers that would help us buy down
2 the individual readiness numbers that I articulated in my
3 opening statement that would allow us to be able to focus on
4 preparing the force to meet the emerging threats. So, our
5 number-one priority is people, gaining -- I think the number
6 is 368 right now.

7 Senator Ernst: Okay.

8 General Mundy: Thank you.

9 Senator Ernst: Wonderful. Thank you.

10 Thank you, gentlemen.

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

17 Thank you.

18 Senator Heinrich: General Webb, I'd like to start with
19 you. I was at Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico last
20 week, and, as you know, the proud airmen at Cannon and the
21 community there in Clovis provide significant contributions
22 to our national security, both in terms of the incredible
23 personnel and also the aircraft that they operate. And they
24 do this despite really what has become an insatiable demand
25 being placed on our Special Forces and their families, by

1 extension. You mentioned, in your testimony, that AFSOC is
2 working to meet a 1-to-2 deployment-to-dwell for Active
3 Force, which means 2 months at home for every 1 month
4 deployed. Can you elaborate a little bit on why that
5 deployment-to-dwell ratio is so critical to the long-term
6 health of Special Forces, and what progress still needs to
7 be made in that area?

8 General Webb: Well, Senator, thank you for the
9 steadfast support to our Air Commandos out on the plains of
10 eastern New Mexico. The deploy-to-dwell ratio for AFSOC
11 stands at -- I have 12 percent of my force that is below a
12 1-to-2 dwell. I have none that are below 1-to-1 at this
13 point. But, the demands of multiple deployments, back-to-
14 back, at this stage in the ongoing countering-violent-
15 extremist type of fight, you have -- it is not a rare
16 exception at all for airmen to be on their 12th or 13th,
17 14th deployment, including those at Cannon Air Force Base.
18 So, the POTFF program and the Comprehensive Airman Fitness
19 Program from the Air Force side, absolutely vital and
20 critical.

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

1 as a gauge of how useful that program is.

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

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

6 Senator Heinrich: Right.

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

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

17 It's my understanding that SOCOM's current plan is to
18 demo a 4-kilowatt laser and then one in the 30-kilowatt
19 range, which really isn't operationally relevant for SOCOM's
20 purposes, in my understanding, and then move to a 60-
21 kilowatt-or-higher device. And at that rate, the system
22 won't be fieldable until nearly 2030, from what I
23 understand. The technology to develop an operationally
24 relevant laser in the 60-kilowatt range could be ready for
25 integration and fielding, in my view, in the next 4 to 5

1 years. So, if the technology is there, what's wrong with
2 skipping the 30-kilowatt demo entirely and moving directly
3 into something that can be used in the field?

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

15 Senator Heinrich: We look forward to --

16 General Webb: -- would support you on that.

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

19 SOCOM is the joint force proponent for military
20 information support operations, or what we used to call psy-
21 ops. SOCOM's military information support teams frequently
22 deploy to embassies around the world, help with embassy
23 public diplomacy efforts. How are SOCOM's information
24 operations capabilities being transformed to a more
25 effective -- to more effectively compete with the

1 operational and strategic messaging challenges that we see
2 in our adversaries today? Can you talk about that a little
3 bit more, General Tovo?

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

15 Senator Heinrich: Getting the authorities.

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

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

20 General Tovo: Senator.

21 [The information referred to follows:]

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

25 Senator Sullivan: Great, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1 And, gentlemen, welcome.

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

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

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

24 As you noted, the counter-WMD mission was passed to
25 U.S. SOCOM a couple of years ago. We've been investing

1 heavily in that. We have been designated by the Department
2 as the coordinating authority for counter-WMD. We've been
3 -- which gives us a -- an opportunity to bring together the
4 community of interest to plan, establish intelligence
5 priorities. What it has done, thus far, and in close
6 integration with our colleagues from the Defense Threat
7 Reduction Agency, is bringing together the interagency to
8 one area to look at the problem globally, look
9 transregionally across the boundaries of the GCCS and kind
10 of develop the intelligence picture in the priorities.
11 We're also looking at reaching out more to our international
12 partners, who are in this space as well, through EUPOL,
13 INTERPOL, law enforcement, as well as our military
14 colleagues from the alliance and coalition elsewhere.

15 I would say, right now, Senator, we -- there's no
16 specific asks for us right now. We're still developing it.

17 We're developing a functional campaign plan that we owe
18 back to the Department and to provide assessment on the way
19 ahead. And I think we're --

20 Senator Sullivan: And a lot of that work is probably
21 left of launch and involves Federal agencies that aren't
22 necessarily military agencies, but like the CIA and other
23 intelligence agencies. Do you think the coordination,
24 particularly with regard to the networks -- I mean, it
25 seems, as we are pressuring North Korea right now, that the

1 proliferation threat has probably never been higher. I also
2 believe it's still very, very high, regardless of the JCPOA,
3 with regard to Iran. Both countries have a long history of
4 proliferation. Do you think that the networks that we need
5 to disrupt those networks are in place? And is there
6 sufficient integration, say, between the SOF forces and the
7 CIA and other elements of the Federal Government that work
8 to defeat those networks?

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

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

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

22 Senator Sullivan: Let me ask another question that
23 kind of relates to -- and again, I've talked to General
24 Thomas and Secretary Mattis about this, but -- you know, as
25 we have a new National Defense Strategy, which I think has

1 bipartisan support in the Congress, and that's focused much
2 more on kind of peer rivals and great-power threats, that
3 it's a shift, of course, from the terrorists and al Qaeda
4 and post-9/11 focus, which, at the time, I think was
5 appropriate, but it's an appropriate shift. How are your
6 forces -- and this is for any and everybody -- how are your
7 forces starting to implement that?

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

19 So, are we -- is that, kind of -- are we starting to,
20 kind of, shift, in terms of the great-power focus -- China,
21 Russia, North Korea -- in the special operations field, the
22 way that the Secretary has laid it out in the National
23 Defense Strategy? Sometimes I think a number of us worry
24 that we have these incredible military members, that you're
25 all in charge of, going after, you know, targets that,

1 while, at some level, are disturbing, are not threats to our
2 country. I mean, if we have a predator feed on a low-level
3 Taliban guy on a motorcycle for 7 hours in Afghanistan, is
4 that the proper use of your forces, relative to the threat,
5 particularly in light of the National Defense Strategy that
6 says the focus needs to shift? And I'll open that up to
7 anybody and everybody. And what are we doing about it?

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

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

1 in Korea and broadly across the Pacific.

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

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

17 Senator Ernst [presiding]: Thank you.

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

20 Senator Ernst: Okay.

21 Senator Sullivan: Otherwise, I would stay around for
22 --

23 Senator Ernst: Well --

24 Senator Sullivan: Very interesting. And thank you for
25 your service, gentlemen. To all the men and women under

1 your command, we very much appreciate what they're doing.

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

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

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

13 And I'll share one story with you. I had the
14 opportunity to visit Fort Bragg, just a couple of years
15 back, and a very, very good friend of mine was with a group
16 there, a Special Forces group. And I had the opportunity to
17 go to THOR3 with him and do one of his workouts. And I --
18 I'm not embarrassed to say I had my rear end kicked by a
19 one-legged man as we went through some of his training.
20 But, it demonstrated to me how important these programs are
21 in getting our operators back to where they need to be,
22 whether they will reengage in the fight or whether they will
23 prepare to be medically discharged.

24 So, if you could, from your own experiences across the
25 panel, please, explain to me why you think POTFF is

1 important. And what have you seen with your operators to
2 demonstrate why it's important?

3 General Webb?

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

18 Senator Ernst: Thank you.

19 General Tovo: Senator, I think it's important to
20 understand that the capability that we get out of a military
21 treatment facility is really designed to return an
22 individual to a baseline of performance, and that the -- our
23 programs within POTFF are designed to try and not only get
24 -- to pass that baseline, really to get to that full high
25 level of performance that we demand out of our special

1 operators. From a performance perspective, it's kind of the
2 SOF ad, if you will. You know, it's the P-11 slice of what
3 they -- the services have invested in.

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

19 Senator Ernst: Thank you.

20 Admiral.

21 Admiral Szymanski: So, thank you for -- for all of us.
22 A lot of it's about return to duty, as General Tovo just
23 mentioned on the performance piece. And it's return to
24 duty, it's cutting down the recovery time. It's about
25 extending the service life of the individual, and ensuring

1 they have a good transition, post service, to -- with a high
2 quality of life. But, I think, you know, in essence, it --
3 it's improved the operational readiness of the organization.
4 It's strengthened -- your favorite word -- resiliency of the
5 families. When the family is strong, then the unit is going
6 to be strong. You know, I think that's it, in a nutshell.
7 But, the cognitive piece is really important, again. And I
8 maybe can talk more in the closed session about that.

9 Senator Ernst: Thank you.

10 General Mundy.

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

20 Senator Ernst: Thank you. I appreciate that.

21 Senator Heinrich.

22 Senator Heinrich: Thank you.

23 General Tovo, I want to ask you a little bit about
24 SFABs. As AFSOC forces have continued to experience
25 increased demand from combatant commanders and particularly

1 in an advisory role for foreign forces, how is the
2 establishment of SFABs as dedicated advisors for
3 conventional foreign forces affecting your ability to
4 refocus on other essential missions?

5 General Tovo: Senator, thanks for that question.

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

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

24 Senator Heinrich: Right.

25 General Tovo: The challenge we had was, we were

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

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

12 Senator Heinrich: Sure.

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

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

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

1 valuable for the Army.

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

4 Senator Ernst: Thank you.

5 Senator Wicker.

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

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

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

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

1 good place, for now.

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

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

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

18 Admiral Szymanski: Senator Wicker, I also don't think
19 it's completely down at the deck-plate level yet, because
20 the morale -- because we are funded through SOCOM at the
21 individual level really well for the things we do. But,
22 where it has shown confidence -- and I can indirectly talk
23 to the fact of the interoperability, our warfighter talks
24 with our service components, who, in effect, it may be more
25 by sequestration, because we're -- people-driven

1 organization, where often there are platform-centric
2 organizations. And I was just talking about my priorities
3 for interoperability with the Navy and ensuring my
4 capabilities are compatible with the Navy's assets, capital
5 assets. And I -- we're in great dialogue, and I think it's
6 all an indicator of the budget -- presidential budget
7 recommendation.

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

22 I might -- Madam Chair, when I came in, Senator
23 Heinrich was asking a specific question about Afghanistan.
24 Who would like to take this question? It seems to me that
25 the vast majority of the citizens of Afghanistan, across the

1 tribal differences, appreciate our presence there, think
2 we're about to win this thing, and want us to see it
3 through. Am I correct there? Who could comment? Who is
4 able to -- General Howell, if you'd take that question.

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

18 Senator Wicker: Taliban's on the wane there.

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

21 Senator Wicker: Thank you, Madam Chair.

22 Senator Ernst: Thank you.

23 Senator Peters.

24 Senator Peters: Thank you, Madam Chair.

25 And thank you for -- the panel, for your testimony

1 today, and, more importantly, for your service to our
2 country every day. We appreciate it.

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

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

22 So, my question to all of you, because you are trying
23 to figure out how to integrate some of these new
24 technologies in very innovative ways, if you could talk a
25 little bit about how that's going, what we need to do, and

1 how some specific platforms you think are particularly
2 promising that we need to support here, from -- at the
3 congressional level. And maybe if I could just go down the
4 panel, it will be very helpful.

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

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

24 Senator Peters: Great.

25 General Tovo: Senator, I think you hit the nail on the

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

20 Admiral Szymanski: Senator, it's a great question.
21 And I think the -- maybe a little different twist than my
22 colleagues put it, very -- I think, very consistent with
23 what they said, is -- most of our organizations were founded
24 to be innovative in concept and not technology. You go back
25 to the history of SEALs and underwater demolition teams, and

1 it was a innovative concept to how we clear beaches to allow
2 amphibious assaults. And we would do that much differently
3 today, with the technology that we have.

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

17 Senator Peters: Right. Right.

18 General Mundy: Senator, our approach is twofold, kind
19 of near term and far term. In near term, we are -- we
20 approach it from an additive capability, take already
21 existing programs and look to add some of this new
22 technology into it. We have a very small capability
23 development group in our organization, and it's one of the
24 areas that we'd look to grow, here, going forward in the
25 future.

1 Our long-term view, I think, like everybody here, is,
2 we're -- as we see that we're on the cusp of machine
3 learning and AI and those sorts of things, how to get in
4 front of that. So, we've also published a futures document
5 that looks out about 12 years. It's conceptual and a vision
6 right now. So, the next step for us would then be to really
7 put some meat on the bones -- we've now written a futures
8 document -- and to begin to develop innovation pathways that
9 allow us to take some of those new technologies and apply
10 them to our concept.

11 Senator Peters: Great. Thank you. Appreciate it.

12 Senator Ernst: And thank you, Senator Peters.

13 Now, at this time, we will go ahead and recess. We
14 will move to SVC-217, where we will go into closed session.
15 Just a reminder, it will be a closed session. You must have
16 the appropriate clearance to engage, in 217.

17 So, with that, we will close -- or, excuse me, recess,
18 and we'll move to 217.

19 Thank you.

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

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