

STATEMENT OF
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COMMANDER
U.S. MARINE FORCES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND
BEFORE THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES
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Introduction

Chairman Kelly, Ranking Member Ernst, and other distinguished members of the Sub-Committee, thank you for this opportunity to update you on the status and posture of the Marine Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC). I am honored to testify alongside my fellow Special Operations Forces (SOF) Component Commanders and also extremely proud to be in command as we mark the 15th year in the history of MARSOC, celebrating continued commitment to the professionalism and proficiency of your Marine Raiders.

I am thankful for the exceptional support for our warfighters from this committee and from the rest of Congress. We continue to uphold our Marine Raider legacy and forge the path of providing the nation and Geographic Combatant Commanders a Marine Special Operations Force capable of strategic impact while dynamically adjusting to meet the demands of the future operating environment. As the smallest SOF Component, we continually seek opportunities leverage our agility to maximize the effectiveness of our force and bring outsized benefit to the SOF enterprise and our parent Service. Over the past two decades, we have rightfully been focused on the global counterterrorism fight. We concentrated our efforts on the skills required to be successful in the military fight against violent extremist organizations (VEO), becoming highly effective in this arena.

As we move forward however, we are in the midst of reassessing the skills and organizational capabilities required to maintain our military advantages in every domain. Our Commandant has set forth reimagining the Marine Corps to answer this challenge through ongoing Force Design efforts. These changes have broad effects that compel MARSOC to follow suit rapidly to ensure we bring the capabilities and organizational construct required to conduct strategic shaping and reconnaissance in support of the Joint Warfighting Concept, the

Special Operations Command Vision, and Service concepts like Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) and Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment (LOCE).

With our Marine ethos and “Gung-Ho” attitude, MARSOC is well suited as an experimentation force, test bed and innovation engine for distributed operations in contested environments. As we continue to implement the tenets of Marine Special Operations Forces 2030 vision, it will be of utmost importance to leverage our size as an advantage to be the nimble, flexible, and pliable force that can understand, wargame, and experiment with developing operating concepts, leading edge technologies, and the latest equipment to develop competitive advantage and enable the joint force. As with the Marine Corps writ large, MARSOC is undergoing a capability review to ensure we integrate and enhance the capabilities to operate in the information environment, increase our understanding of developing situations, create asymmetric advantages, and further evolve the role of SOF in competition and conflict. The ability to compete in multiple domains simultaneously and synchronize those effects is an essential element as we refine objectives from the traditional kinetic realm.

In our role as a connector between United States Special Operations Command and the Marine Corps, MARSOC remains positioned to capitalize on the forward deployed placement and access to help prepare the operating environment for potential future operations in competition and conflict. As a complementary force in the contact layer, Marine Special Operations Forces are poised to do the advanced work to assess strategic locations, operational imperatives and tactical capabilities, while also working as part of the Stand-In Force to trade time and space for Joint Force physical and virtual maneuver. All aspects of multi-domain operations (Electromagnetic Spectrum Operations (EMSO), Cyberspace Operations, Space Operations, Influence Operations, Deception Operations, and Information Operations) will

require to be enabled by SOF, and MARSOC is posturing for such and remains prepared to support the Nation's expeditionary force in readiness. These capabilities, more effectively integrated into our operations, facilitate actions SOF can take to support the resilience of our partners, support resistance movements against adversaries, influence populations to align with our ideals, and conduct precision direct operations as required.

Priority: Our People, Our Force

We clearly recognize that our operational capability ultimately rests upon a foundation of outstanding and diverse population of Marine Raiders and their families. To safeguard and sustain our most valuable resource, we continually strive to create inclusive environments and balance operational commitments with time at home station. In keeping with the enduring first SOF truth that "humans are more important than hardware," our inclusion and diversity efforts coupled with the Preservation of the Force and Families (POTFF) program, not only delivers responsive and effective support, but continues to evolve with the changing demands and needs of our force. The POTFF program provides resources that facilitate the holistic human, psychological, social, spiritual, and cognitive performance of our personnel. When fully utilized, the POTFF program increases the resiliency of our families. With your continued support, POTFF improves the longevity, effectiveness and resilience of our force by using best practices across SOCOM, the Marine Corps, and the Naval Medical community to provide a command-driven, organizational culture of excellence to enhance mission success in career, family and all other life areas.

Reinforcing our POTFF efforts, we are engaged to ensure that personnel of all backgrounds and talents excel in our organization and add the strength of diversity to the force. Specifically, we created a Diversity and Inclusion Committee determined to create policies,

programs, and procedures to improve recruitment of more diverse talent, expand training and education of our force, improve visual information to internal and external audiences; and eradicate any actual or perceived barriers to success. SOF and the Marine Corps both reward performance and those that possess the drive and initiative to make a difference, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, upbringing etc.; our organization recognizes the operational importance of a diverse force and respect each individual's contribution to the organization.

As a learning organization, MARSOC always welcomes opportunities that allow us to seek improvement and identify areas for growth or change to make us better. We embraced the SOCOM Comprehensive Review and the Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Strategic Plan to identify best practices, strengthen ethics, develop leaders and reinforce trust both at home and deployed. Our efforts in both the CR and D&I, regard continue, and through initiatives like Onboarding, where everyone recently assigned to the command is formally welcomed through a 5-day process, we are building on initial steps based on feedback from our force. Of note, this Onboarding process now includes diversity and unconscious bias training.

Improving on existing programs, the Marine Raider Training Center (MRTC), our initial acquisition and advanced skills training and education facility, has refined and instituted an enhanced curriculum of leadership, ethics, and culture education in all its courses. Instruction in these core subjects is woven throughout the training continuum, starting during our Assessment and Selection (A&S) and expanded during our Individual Training Course. This training is also infused in each advanced skills course in order to reinforce the culture of inclusivity, leadership, discipline, and accountability throughout the force. We have also taken steps to incorporate this training into other venues and use each opportunity to address the moral and ethical challenges our personnel face daily. Our refined training is the continuation of a multi-year command-wide

push to reinforce our values as Marines. We strive each day to provide you Marine Raiders that continue to embody the values of integrity, accountability, and commitment to render honorable service to our nation.

Our force continues to get healthier and more diverse due to our internal recruiting efforts and the 'fix MARSOC' initiative that you have supported over the past few years to better balance the force ratio, specifically our combat support (CS) and combat service support (CSS) personnel. Our Recruiting and Advertising Division works very closely and with the larger Marine Corps Recruiting to not only leverage service efforts, but also enhance mutual endeavors to attract and retain quality and diverse Marines across the force. Based on our professional reputation and continued operational employment, there has never been a shortage of highly qualified Marines applying to attend our Assessment and Selection (A&S), and we continue to fill A&S courses three times each year. We consistently attract a talented and qualified pool of Marines to fill our ranks.

As an organization, MARSOC has routinely exceeded the service goals for first and subsequent term reenlistments. In Fiscal Year (FY) 20, the Headquarters Marine Corps first term reenlistment goal was 26% and subsequent term goal set at 56%. MARSOC exceeded both goals at 34% and 77% respectively. Our Critical Skills Operator (CSO) retention in FY 20 was 80%, with an average of 80% over the last three years.

As a result, our deployment to dwell ratio is steadily trending for the better for our Special Operations Officers and Critical Skills Operators. In addition, and with your support over the past few years, the assimilation of the aforementioned CS and CSS Marines coming to the command will further improve the deployment to dwell ratio across the command.

Priority: The Mission

Over the past year, MARSOC personnel deployed in support of 7 named operations across 14 countries. Reinforced Marine Special Operations Companies (MSOC), made up of Marines and Sailors from the Marine Raider Regiment (MRR) and the Marine Raider Support Group (MRSG), were persistently forward deployed in order to conduct full spectrum operations in the Indo Pacific, Central, and Africa Command areas of operation, with elements also episodically deployed in support of the European and Southern Commands.

In addition, MARSOC has maintained a forward deployed O-5 level headquarters, Special Operations Task Force (SOTF) , in support of combat actions in Iraq and Syria for the last 5 years and has also deployed a MARSOC–led Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – Iraq (CJSOTF-I), an O-6 level headquarters, to Iraq multiple times during the same period.

Inherent in all MARSOC deployable formations is the ability to collect and fuse information that illuminates adversary actions and networks and then conduct activities to shape and influence the environments, contribute to partner resilience, and conduct combat operations.

MARSOC efforts in the Indo-Pacific are of note, where Raiders are deployed in several key areas throughout the region gaining access and placement to build relationships and partner resilience. Notably, MARSOC elements in the Philippines are paired with significant support from III MEF forces to provide robust assistance to partner nation forces as they work to root out the final remnants of ISIS capabilities while providing reassurance of the United States commitment to the region in an active competitive location.

Priority: Readiness and Training

MARSOC maintains a high, but sustainable, operational tempo in support of our nation’s initiatives overseas and has maintained an average of approximately twenty percent of

the command forward deployed. On any given day, we have approximately 400 Raiders deployed out of an organization just over 3,000 Active-Duty Military personnel and 200 Civil Servants. We pride ourselves on being a premier example of an effective and efficient operating model, providing outsized return on investment. Over the course of the past 15 years, the continual assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiencies of our structure, employment, force development and force design, leads us to make adjustments to maintain a reputation as good stewards of the resources provided to the command. MARSOC continues to account for approximately 1.5% of the Marine Corps end-strength, utilizing approximately 0.6% of the Service's annual budget (MFP-2). Similarly, MARSOC accounts for 4.5% of USSOCOM's manpower, operating on less than 2% of the MFP-11 budget, while executing approximately 10% of USSOCOM's missions.

In order to provide the highly trained Raiders required to execute these missions, over the last year, the Marine Raider Training Center (MRTC) conducted three Assessment and Selection courses and graduated two Individual Training Course (ITC) classes that produce our Special Operations Officers (SOO) and Critical Skills Operators (CSO). Our Special Operations Capability Specialist (SOCS) formal training pipeline has been enhanced with the implementation of a standardized screening process for all SOCS students, which includes refined psychological, physical, and intellectual testing events. This standardization ensures the most qualified and capable personnel are assigned to deploying SOF formations. In addition, the MRTC conducted seventeen other advanced skills courses enhancing direct operations skills, intelligence collection capabilities, and other discreet capabilities in technical surveillance, advanced Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), Sensitive Site Exploitation (SSE), and advanced communications.

To enhance collective unit training and pre-deployment certification, we have taken steps to reformat our RAVEN unit readiness exercises (URXs) into a cycle consisting of six exercises conducted over two iterations. This increases predictability for the integration of other Joint Force, Interagency, and Coalition partners to enhance interoperability, expands the opportunity for integrated upper level Command and Control training and evaluation, and provides substantial cost savings.

RAVEN capitalizes on MARSOC's enterprise level agility to remain aligned to the National Defense Strategy, SOCOM's Operating Concept 2030, and MARSOF 2030 by remaining capable of winning the current counterterrorism fight while preparing for great power competition against state and non-state actors. Some specific ways we have adapted RAVEN to ensure MARSOC is ready for current operations as well as tomorrow's missions is by moving from a strictly violent extremist organization (VEO) scenario, to a balanced threat environment incorporating VEOs and near peer forces operating in a contested space. Through RAVEN, Marine Raiders remain postured to respond to challenges of the future multi-domain operating environment through a purposeful focus on: electromagnetic spectrum management, decreasing reliance on GPS, the cyber domain, signature management, and operating in contested environments.

Priority: Force Modernization and Innovation

Though MARSOC is not a platform centric organization, we realize the use of specialized technologies and equipment can significantly enhance our operations across the spectrum. SOCOM guidance outlines areas that the SOF enterprise will focus its modernization efforts. These areas include Increased Lethality, Improved Interoperability, Next Generation Mobility Platforms, Network and Data Management, Next Generation ISR/Targeting,

Biotechnologies and Human Interface, Hyper-Enabled Operators, Autonomy, Edge Computing, and Alternative Precision Navigation and Timing (PNT).

In coordination and partnership with other SOF elements, the Service, and a broad array of government and industry partners, MARSOC Combat Development continues to pursue the integration of intelligent unmanned, automated, and robotic technologies across the force. At the forefront of these development efforts is the pursuit of a technological fusion of our unmanned systems technologies with our advancing Cognitive Raider, Broadband Tactical Edge Communications, and Organic Precision Strike efforts.

Our planned unmanned systems (air, ground, and maritime) will operate with greater autonomy and serve as an increasingly important force multiplier, extending the operational reach, capability, and capacity of Marine Raiders by teaming them with intelligent and interactive robotic partners. Coupled with other capabilities, this human-machine teaming effort will increase survivability and increase the tempo of operations in the physical and virtual realms. These capabilities are effective operating against both Violent Extremist Organization (VEO) networks, as well as near peer competitors.

Given that our most prized asset is our people, it should be no surprise that our innovation efforts are centered on the skills, training, and equipment we provide the future Cognitive Raider to be a blend of elite commando, intelligence collector, and information operations expert with a deep understanding of the environment. The future Marine Raider needs to possess the knowledge of how to blend, synchronize, and apply a wide variety of capabilities to accomplish the given mission. To achieve that, MARSOC will continue to be an evolving force that enhances the way we approach the operating environment and how we leverage and facilitate Joint, Governmental, and Partner capabilities. Over the next five years,

you will see an organization that operates with the same intensity as we currently do, but with potentially smaller, more specialized and capable elements focused on discreet indirect actions that counter peer adversaries. These teams are intended to shape adversary/competitor behavior through enabling partners, assuring sovereignty, and eroding confidence in their own systems through a variety of low visibility methods. This may call for organizational and capability enhancements that allow us to stay ahead in this mission area. Specifically, we anticipate increased demand for organic capabilities in the areas of Cyber, EMSO, Space, and Information Operations. Skills in these areas are increasingly important at every echelon of action, especially as we operate in the increasingly complex and sensitive future operating environments.

Conclusion

In closing, we remain committed to providing our Nation with Marine Raiders that possess superior special operations capability and whose actions continually demonstrate our motto of *Spiritus Invictus*, or ‘unconquerable spirit’. Your Marine Raiders will remain always faithful, always forward. I thank the Sub-Committee for your continued support to our military members and their families and for your commitment to national security. Semper Fidelis.