

**OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR JACK REED
CHAIRMAN, SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**ROOM SD-G50
DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
Thursday, July 21, 2022**

*To consider the nominations of
Lieutenant General Bryan P. Fenton, USA to be general and Commander, United
States Special Operations Command; and
Lieutenant General Michael E. Langley, USMC to be general and Commander,
United States Africa Command
(As prepared for Delivery)*

REED: Good morning. The Committee meets today to consider the nominations of Lieutenant General Bryan Fenton to be the next Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command and Lieutenant General Michael Langley to be the next Commander of U.S. Africa Command. Thank you both for your willingness to lead in these important positions.

General Fenton, we welcome your wife, Dawn; daughters, Nora and Cecilia; and parents, John and Kathleen. General Langley, we welcome your father, Willie, and thank him for his 25 years of service in the Air Force; we welcome your mother, Ola, and thank her for her career of service as a postal worker; and we welcome your sisters, Cheryl and Shannon. We are grateful to each of your families for their continued support of your service to the nation.

General Fenton, if confirmed, you will take command of U.S. Special Operations Command, or SOCOM, during an important period of change and transformation. Because of the efforts and sacrifice of the special operations community over the past two decades, the threat from ISIS, al Qaeda, and other violent extremist groups has been greatly diminished.

However, U.S. national security interests are increasingly challenged by Chinese aggression, Russia's illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine, and the destabilizing activities of both Iran and North Korea. The persistent engagement of our special operations forces with their Ukrainian counterparts since 2014—and especially in the last few months—has yielded important lessons for how our special operations personnel can be employed to support our partners and U.S. national security objectives in the years to come.

In particular, many of these lessons apply to our efforts to engage partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific region to counter Chinese aggression. If confirmed, General, I expect your experience commanding both conventional and special operations forces in the Indo-Pacific region will serve you well as we address this pacing threat for the Defense Department. I hope you will share how you would plan to lead the special operations community to meet this challenge.

Finally, as a combatant command with service-like responsibilities, SOCOM needs and deserves a senior civilian to provide service secretary-like oversight and advocacy for our special operations forces. Congress has sought to empower the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict to fulfill that mandate. General Fenton, if confirmed, I ask for your support as the Department continues to work to fully implement those reforms.

General Langley, if confirmed, you would lead U.S. Africa Command, or AFRICOM, at a critical time. The security situation in East Africa has been on a downward trajectory following the previous Administration's decision to withdraw the majority of U.S. military personnel from Somalia in December 2020. Since then, U.S. forces have been conducting periodic engagements to train and advise Somali partners, but U.S. and partner efforts to disrupt and degrade al Shabaab have not achieved the success we need. I hope you will share your views on the current security situation and the best approach to reestablish persistent U.S. military presence with our Somali partners.

The situation in West Africa is also increasingly fragile. Over the past two years extremist operations have expanded across the region. While the intelligence community assesses these regional extremist groups are not currently capable of carrying out attacks outside the region, several have professed their intent to do so. Given these challenges, General Langley, I would like to know your views on what can feasibly be accomplished with partner security forces and how we should seek to engage as part of a whole of government effort.

Both SOCOM and AFRICOM will play important roles in our long-term strategic competition with China and Russia. In the Middle East and Central Asia, Russia continues to leverage hybrid warfare capabilities to expand its own influence and stymie Western security interests, and China has deepened its economic and security ties with Iran. And, on the African continent, both Russia and China are looking to expand their security and economic investments, and may seek to leverage such access to undermine U.S. influence in critical regions. During today's hearing, I hope you will both discuss your plans to engage with partners and how we can best leverage our competitive advantages to maintain key relationships.

Finally, issues related to civilian harm have been a focus for the Armed Services Committee for several years. The U.S. military goes to great lengths to avoid civilian casualties. When tragic errors occur on the battlefield, the United States has an obligation to be transparent, take responsibility, and do everything we can to learn from and prevent future mistakes. I am encouraged by Secretary Austin's personal involvement in these issues and the priority he has placed on them for the Department, but more must be done. I look forward to the forthcoming comprehensive Defense Department policy on assessing, investigating, and responding to allegations of civilian casualties and expect, if confirmed, that each of you will make these issues a priority for your respective commands.

Thank you again for your service and willingness to lead in this challenging time. I look forward to your testimonies.

Let me now turn to the Ranking Member, Senator Inhofe.