

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

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[To receive testimony on United States Special Operations Command and United States Cyber Command in review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2024 and the Future Years Defense Program](#)
(As Prepared for Delivery)

REED: Good morning. The committee meets today to receive an update on the readiness and posture of U.S. Special Operations Command and U.S. Cyber Command.

Our witnesses are Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, Christopher Maier; Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, General Bryan Fenton; and Commander of U.S. Cyber Command and Director of the National Security Agency, General Paul Nakasone. I would like to welcome General Fenton to his first posture hearing.

On behalf of the committee, I would ask our witnesses to convey our appreciation to the men and women you represent, and their families, for their service and professionalism.

We live in a complex and dangerous global security environment. From Russia's aggression in Europe, to China's malign influence in the Indo-Pacific, to persistent threats from Iran, North Korea, and violent extremist groups, prevailing in this environment will require the tailored and often clandestine capabilities that only our special operations and cyber forces can provide.

The United States has been reducing its footprint in conflict zones around the world. As such, the special operations community is at an inflection point, but is no less relevant to the future challenges we face. As the Defense Department's recently released Joint Concept for Competing makes clear, the objective of our nation's adversaries is to "win without fighting." The Concept warns that if we do not adapt to the realities of long-term competition, "the United States risks ceding strategic influence, advantage, and leverage while preparing for a war that never occurs." The skills, knowledge, and perhaps most importantly, the relationships

with foreign partners that our special operations forces have developed over the past 20 years of combat make them well-positioned to contribute significantly to this strategic competition.

Assistant Secretary Maier and General Fenton, I look forward to an update regarding your efforts to focus and prepare our special operations forces for the challenges ahead. In particular, I would ask that you discuss the capabilities we need to build an enduring advantage over our competitors, and what lessons can be drawn from the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

As part of this, I would like to know how you are shaping the force of the future through new recruiting and retention efforts, including building a culture of accountability. A number of high-profile misconduct cases have reflected poorly on the special operations community, and additional efforts to build upon SOCOM's 2020 Comprehensive Review of Culture and Ethics seem necessary. I also want to hear how you are addressing the unique challenges faced by special operations families.

The office of the ASD SOLIC plays a critical role in the oversight of, and advocacy for, our special operations forces as the "service secretary-like" civilian for SOCOM. I believe more must be done to ensure ASD SOLIC is provided the necessary authority and resources, including manpower, to fulfill these responsibilities. I look forward to hearing more about the Department's efforts on this front.

Turning to Cyber Command, I would like to commend our cyber forces and the intelligence community for their performance over the past year in exposing Russia's activities and helping Ukraine defend itself against both kinetic and cyber assaults. Intelligence officials are understandably cautious about revealing hard-won insights on adversaries, but this current strategy has proven highly effective in strengthening the international community's response and creating dilemmas for Vladimir Putin. This is a great example of competing effectively in the information domain, and I hope we will continue to make this kind of creative use of intelligence.

Some of the tools in our toolbox, like the Section 702 authority from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, or FISA, are critical to our ability to counter our adversaries' malign activities. The committee would appreciate your views on the importance of Section 702 of FISA, which sunsets at the end of this year, and why you believe it is essential that we renew that authority. We would also like to

know what guardrails are in place to give the public confidence that the authority is being used judiciously.

General Nakasone, you have been working to mature the cyber force and advance its capabilities to conduct defensive, offensive, and supporting intelligence operations. It is widely recognized that our Cyber Mission Forces are struggling with shortfalls in personnel numbers. We know that addressing this issue is your highest priority. The military services must also ensure their personnel management provides qualified and trained personnel to your Command at the beginning of their tours so both the personnel and the Command can take full advantage of the time in assignment. I would also note that the private sector has realized the immense value of our cyber operators and is offering them very high compensation to leave the military. The services must adjust accordingly by providing a creative combination of incentives to compete for and retain these personnel.

Finally, over the last decade, a recurring debate has been waged over whether to sustain the “dual-hat” arrangement whereby the Commander of Cyber Command also serves as the Director of the NSA. Recently, an independent panel established by the Director of National Intelligence and the Secretary of Defense, and led by former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joe Dunford, concluded that the dual-hat arrangement should be sustained. We would welcome your thoughts on this issue.

Thank you again to our witnesses for your service and appearance before us today. I look forward to your testimony.

Let me now turn to the Ranking Member. Senator Wicker.