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Posture Statement of
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Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for providing this opportunity to discuss the posture of the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). I am proud to testify alongside Mr. Christopher Maier, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD(SO/LIC)), and General Paul Nakasone, Commander of U.S. Cyber Command (USCYBERCOM).

The unwavering support of Congress, particularly this committee, has ensured that our nation's special operations forces (SOF) are the most capable in the world. Your support remains essential to our efforts to defend the nation, care for our people, and strengthen alliances and partnerships. Your SOF remain engaged globally, ensuring violent extremists have no respite, while setting advantageous conditions across all domains to compete with adversaries. We are ready to meet today's requirements, while adapting to address tomorrow's challenges.

Today, I present an account of USSOCOM priorities, activities, and investments to provide the Nation with peerless SOF talent, tactics, and technologies. Each of you are keenly interested in how we are building a professional force, caring for our people, defending our nation forward, and modernizing for the future. I will address each of these concerns.

The current strategic landscape comprises a complex set of problems presented by nation-state competitors and violent extremist organizations. Overmatch in strategic deterrence, conventional military force, and space and cyberspace capabilities are unequivocal necessities. However, our overmatch compels competitors to seek asymmetric avenues to attack, erode, or undermine the advantage and interests of the United States, our allies, and partners. Many of these challenges take place in the information space, with disinformation employed as a political weapon at unimaginable speed and scale without regard for geopolitical boundaries. These concerns are further amplified by disruptive, destabilizing impacts of climate change, diminished influence of international institutions, and shifts in global power dynamics.

SOF are problem solvers, and their enduring value resides in their ability to adapt and combat asymmetric threats; employ precision and surprise to achieve strategic effects in conflict or crisis; and build access, placement, and influence through sustained partnership with foreign forces – all providing discrete options when conventional action is impractical. Our team extends beyond operators in the field, to a wide array of military and interagency support, as well as our unassailable partnership with ASD(SO/LIC). The oversight, policy guidance, and advocacy within the DoD provided by ASD(SO/LIC) are essential for the modernization, readiness, and wellbeing of SOF and their families.

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged our readiness in unexpected ways. Disciplined enforcement of DoD risk mitigation strategies has largely protected our uniformed, civilian, and contractor populations. The postponement of several major exercises and a majority of FY20 Joint Combined Exchange Training events has been unfortunate, but barring long-term

disruption, our joint interoperability and multinational partnerships remain strong. We appreciate the CARES Act funding from Congress that enabled us to reduce immediate risk through distribution of protective equipment and improved telework systems.

To address current and future strategic challenges, SOF are aligned with the priorities set forth in the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) and newly published Interim National Security Strategic Guidance. The full range of USSOCOM's operational and institutional efforts coalesce within three broad objectives: strengthen our force and their families, enable the Joint Force to compete and win globally, and innovate to transform for the future.

Strengthen our Force and Families

The primacy of our people is central to the success of every endeavor. These competent and creative men and women stand ready to adapt and evolve to be the SOF the nation needs to meet any challenge. Our commitment to advancing professionalism, improving policy to acquire and groom the right talent, and caring for the health and welfare of our teammates underpins every organizational decision.

Advancing Professionalism and Credibility

Last year, USSOCOM and ASD(SO/LIC) provided Congress the results of our Comprehensive Review which identified opportunities to improve our force and address lapses in leadership, accountability, and discipline. Our Comprehensive Review Implementation Team used that assessment to make institutional adjustments that promote active and engaged leadership at all levels accountable for force governance, leader development, sustainable tempo, and behavior reflective of Constitutional and Service values. Our forthcoming report submission to Congress will provide details on each of our actions thus far. This is a long-term, institutional approach, and we will see this process through to make our force better.

Furthermore, the urgent need to remove the scourges of sexual assault and extremism within the force has our full attention. USSOCOM supports DoD and Service policies on sexual assault and harassment that have improved reporting processes and victim advocacy. With maturing response and victim support systems, we are applying focused leadership toward prevention. Our SOF components are implementing tailored programs to promote a climate and culture intolerant of these abuses, committed to identifying and removing predators, and able to rapidly identify and address shortfalls.

Extremist and dissident ideologies conflict with our Constitutional obligations and corrode cohesion, discipline, and public trust. USSOCOM is fully engaged in DoD's effort to remove behaviors that promote discrimination, hate, or harassment. We are working closely with the DoD and Services to engage service members at all levels to ensure the force is undivided in their commitment to defend the Constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic.

Managing and Welcoming Diverse Talent

In 1999, a RAND study identified barriers to the participation of women and minorities. Since that study twenty-two years ago, we have made limited progress in fully opening those doors. The past few years have provided the momentum and support to correct this problem for future generations. We continue to see positive movement with the contributions of women leaders in all four Service Component Commands and the selection of the first African American officers to command a Navy SEAL Team and a Ranger Battalion. However, these steps are not sufficient as we envision a force that better reflects the society it defends.

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We need men and women of all ethnicities and races along with a diversity of backgrounds and beliefs in our formation. Improving diversity and inclusion in our force is an operational imperative. In a force charged with solving multifaceted problems in a complex global environment, service members who are included, respected, and empowered are more ready to deter aggression and win wars. We developed a five-year Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and hired a Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer. Together, USSOCOM and ASD (SO/LIC) chair the SOF Executive Committee on Diversity and Inclusion ensuring senior leader oversight and engagement to keep us accountable for tangible progress over time. We are absolutely committed to finding and removing barriers where they exist, and welcome all service members who have the desire and aptitude to pursue a career in SOF.

In addition to diversity of background, the current and next era of competition and conflict require different skills, specifically in artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies. In FY20, our AI-Ready Workforce initiative took two steps forward in growing data-savvy leaders and technology experts inside SOF. First, in collaboration with Carnegie Mellon University and the DoD's Joint AI Center, we educated hundreds of senior and midgrade SOF leaders on basic AI principles and ethics. Second, USSOCOM welcomed our first cohort of data science interns. The program exposes talented students and graduates to SOF problems and harnesses their creativity and technical skill in developing AI solutions for the force. We are working with DoD to expand these programs and find flexible means to exchange talent with industry and academia to supplement the organic growth of AI-ready service members.

Growing a Healthy and Resilient Team

USSOCOM continues to build on the successes of the Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) initiative and the Warrior Care Program (WCP). The POTFF program gained early traction and notice through its work with physical readiness; however, 62% of the POTFF team's manpower now supports the psychological and cognitive performance of SOF. Today, the program continues to increase its focus on brain health and cognitive performance to address the growing cognitive load on operators facing technologically advanced adversaries and information-rich battlespaces. Not only must we build resilience, we must care for those in need, and we have no more sacred duty than to care for our wounded, injured, and ill teammates.

Since 2005, the USSOCOM Warrior Care Program (WCP), also referred to as the Care Coalition, has led this vital effort. Over the WCP's 16-year lifespan, 72% of wounded SOF have been retained in military service, with 61% returning to duty inside their original occupational specialty. This remarkable achievement has only been possible with Congress's continued support for these programs.

Lastly, USSOCOM has not diverted our attention from the crucial problem of suicide within our ranks. In 2020, we lost teammates to suicide and saw teammates hospitalized for suicide attempts. We are seeing a slight reduction in suicides among SOF; however, any suicide is an unacceptable loss of life. We continue to work closely with DoD and the Services to apply engaged leadership, education, and training resources to prevent these tragedies.

Compete and Win Globally

Special operations capabilities are essential tools to address both violent extremist threats and strategic competition with other states. Counterterrorism (CT) and Countering Violent Extremist Organizations (C-VEO) remains a priority mission for SOF, but we do not allow these

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missions to prevent us from also responding to the other threats facing the Nation. USSOCOM fluidly prioritizes force employment to build readiness, strategic flexibility, and apply unique SOF capabilities judiciously, in concert with the Joint Force and Interagency, to counter and impose cost on the malign activities of adversaries.

Today, we have nearly five thousand SOF deployed to 62 countries. We continue to streamline direct C-VEO investments abroad and rebalance SOF to force generation, modernization, and Great Power Competition (GPC) activities. Our deployed forces are down 15% from last year – the lowest since 2001, and in FY21, nearly 40% of our deployed forces will focus on GPC requirements. In the coming year, we expect to achieve a sustainable balance of deployed forces across both C-VEO and GPC mission sets and reach the DoD's directed 1:2 deployment-to-dwell ratio for all SOF.

Sustainable C-VEO Pressure

Violent Extremism remains a threat to our national interests and the safety of our people. Drivers of extremist violence exist in deep, multigenerational ideological divisions that cannot be overcome quickly or with military force. This problem will persist, and USSOCOM is committed to a sustainable approach to C-VEO focused on threats that exhibit both intent and capability to export violence transregionally, specifically against the homeland, while building burden-sharing partnerships that enable local and regional leaders to manage others. Additionally, USSOCOM fulfills our role as the DoD's Coordinating Authority for C-VEO by producing a quarterly VEO threat assessment that uses our inherently global outlook C-VEO engagement across multiple Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) areas of responsibility (AORs) to inform department-wide policy, priorities, and activities.

Over the past year, USSOCOM has assumed moderate but acceptable risk to C-VEO capacity as we rebalance the force for modernization, readiness, and strategic competition. Despite these constraints, our unified action with joint, interagency, and multinational partners continues to illuminate terrorist attack planning, track illicit financing, and sustain pressure on transregional networks, all while meeting directed reductions in troop presence across multiple theaters. In Afghanistan, our forces continue to dismantle remnants of al-Qaeda (AQ) and Islamic State (ISIS) leadership and support the ongoing peace process. In Iraq, we continue to support multinational pressure on pockets of ISIS leaders and fighters while building the capacity of our partners in the Iraqi Security Forces. The information sharing model of Operation Gallant Phoenix continues to enable allies and partners to prosecute violent extremists. While we realize success on multiple fronts, challenges linger.

Capable terrorist leaders continue to operate in portions of Afghanistan. Despite losing territory and momentum, ISIS has avenues to reconstitute and spread transregional violence if pressure is abated. Violent extremism among internally displaced persons is a major security concern in the Middle East. In east Africa, VEOs remain a destabilizing force, reliable local partners are limited, and remotely delivering sustainable, effective pressure is problematic. In many remote areas, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance (ISR) and close air support assets are stretched thin and come at high cost, and we continue to work with DoD to address this issue.

SOF in Strategic Competition

Competition among states remains a constant strategic consideration across multiple regions, and we must adapt to maintain advantage. Since their inception, modern SOF have

contributed to this contest through the aperture of irregular warfare. These capabilities are as relevant today as they were at the onset of the Cold War. USSOCOM continues to rebalance SOF training, activities, and investments to better enable the Joint Force to compete below the threshold of armed conflict. For SOF, this requires us to reinforce core competencies in irregular warfare, foreign partner capacity building, clandestine activities, and information operations.

As the U.S. seeks to reinvigorate and modernize our alliances and partnerships to counter China, Russia, and other powers, SOF will play a central role. The “by, with, and through” approach inherent in SOF operations, coupled with our global C-VEO partnerships, information operations, and Counter Threat Finance authorities and expertise, present opportunities to maintain advantage. Our C-VEO activities provide cross-cutting value as SOF illuminate adversary activities, interests, and illicit finances and inform U.S. strategy and whole-of-government efforts. With U.S. SOF as the partner of choice for C-VEO, we will continue to capitalize on these investments that build credible partners and gain access and influence abroad to counter competitor ambitions and malign activities.

Information technology is another instrument used by our competitors, allowing countries like China and Russia to exploit and manipulate populations across the globe. As the DoD’s Joint Proponent for Military Information Support Operations (MISO) and Coordinating Authority for Internet-based MISO, USSOCOM is positioning our psychological operations forces for today’s environment. The Joint MISO WebOps Center (JMWC) is our flagship effort to coordinate MISO conducted via the internet and actively engage foreign audiences to expose, counter, and compete with hostile propaganda and disinformation online. In 2021, we will incorporate our first foreign partners and interagency liaisons.

The collaborative, mutually supporting relationship among the functional combatant commands is essential to maintaining U.S. advantage. These commands have global perspective and are well-positioned to observe our competitors’ regional activities and goals across all domains. One example is USSOCOM’s role as DoD’s Coordinating Authority for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD), in which we focus on improving Joint Force readiness to mitigate risk posed by WMDs and supporting unified approaches to countering proliferation of WMDs and related technologies, materials, and expertise.

Finally, we are grateful for a range of authorities granted by Congress that allow SOF to have outsized impact across multiple mission sets. Operations conducted under 10 USC § 127e (CT) provide flexible options to apply CT pressure in otherwise inaccessible or contested areas, and operations under FY18 NDAA § 1202 (Irregular Warfare) are essential for applying SOF capabilities to illuminate and impose cost on malign actors. Additionally, authorities under 10 USC § 127f (Intelligence / Counter-Intelligence) and FY20 NDAA § 1057 (Clandestine Operational Preparation of the Environment) replaced the Emergency and Extraordinary Expense authorization allowing application of SOF capability with greater efficiency and transparency.

Innovate to Transform

Our SOF must modernize to compete and win. Guided by DoD priorities and operating concepts, SOF are divesting of legacy platforms that fail to provide increased value across GPC and C-VEO mission sets. Over the last five budget cycles, USSOCOM has realigned 14% (roughly \$9B) of its Total Obligation Authority to modernizing SOF. We are focused on capability development improvements, digital age changes, and business administration reforms.

Modernizing Capability Development and Acquisitions

The acquisitions authorities given to USSOCOM by Congress are indispensable in modernizing SOF capabilities. Our SOF Acquisitions, Technology, and Logistics team works tirelessly to improve the lethality, survivability, and sustainment of our operators and special-operations-peculiar equipment. Our research, development, and acquisition priorities center on adapting emerging technologies to empower hyper-enabled operators and teams. Our initiatives seek to accelerate gains in our ability to provide power, protection, and force projection at the tactical edge.

Over the years, SOF have been an incubator and testbed for new technology, and USSOCOM continues as a pathfinder for select capabilities. In FY20, we achieved notable returns across multiple programs, including modernization of AC-130 and MC-130 platforms, fielding of next-generation software-enabled tactical radios, and successful combat tests of suitable Precision Strike missile prototypes. For future combat platforms, USSOCOM is working closely with the Services to introduce SOF requirements into the development process. Our collaborative work with the U.S. Army's Future Vertical Lift initiative is an exceptional example. By synchronizing requirements early, SOF will receive next generation systems that require minimal modification, and the Joint Force will save on sustainment and upgrade costs.

Critical SOF capability gaps still exist, and Congressional support is essential in delivering these assets to reduce risk for our operators and bolster SOF's ability to complement conventional capabilities in competition. To provide sustainable support to C-VEO operations, we are working with the U.S. Air Force to develop the Armed Overwatch program. This program will provide cost-effective, multipurpose aircraft to support operations in remote, austere areas for the foreseeable future. Additionally, we are working with the U.S. Navy to modernize Naval Special Warfare undersea warfare capabilities central to GPC. These include wet and dry submersibles, unmanned options, and offshore delivery solutions to provide coastal subsurface clandestine activities and access.

Modernizing a Digital Age Force

To compete in the current environment, we need world-class talent enabled by cutting-edge data management, software, and AI. USSOCOM is committed to serving as a vanguard for the integration of AI in mission command, intelligence analysis, and operations processes. Our newly published strategies for data and digital network architecture align with DoD's vision and advance a path toward greater data processing, network interoperability, and security in contested environments. Digital transformation, multi-domain data search and discovery, and cross-domain data solutions are USSOCOM critical priorities. Incorporating these capabilities with AI at the tactical edge within a secure, reliable cloud-computing framework is essential for competing with our adversaries across multiple domains. We are working closely with USCYBERCOM, DoD leadership, and the Services to develop and implement these solutions.

We are building a wide range of partnerships to explore the potential of data-driven technologies. Our work with the DoD's Project Maven and multiple service-led initiatives have expanded our understanding of data collection and algorithm development to support the warfighter and lay the initial groundwork for future AI integration. Some of our newest partnerships focus on using AI to study cognitive performance and brain health. We are investing in AI technologies with goals to boost intelligence analysis and reduce overhead for ISR processing, exploitation, and dissemination; accelerate identification and response to online

disinformation; improve reporting and decision making at the tactical level; enhance predictive maintenance and logistics; and optimize human performance.

Modernizing Business Administration

USSOCOM is steadfast in improving efficiency, costs, and transparency in business administration, auditability, and capability development. In FY20, we completed our third financial statement audit and developed a roadmap aligned with DoD and Service plans to obtain a clean audit opinion by FY28. Additionally, USSOCOM continues to reduce low-return activities and reallocate funds toward SOF, Joint Warfighting, and DoD strategic competition priorities.

We have also taken action to balance the SOF portfolio to address national priorities and SOF capabilities that will remain in high demand. In depth reviews of deployed forces and regionally aligned headquarters are reducing pressure on the force and allowing our teams to focus on priority tasks to build long-term readiness, assist the joint force in competition, and experiment for greater interoperability. Most importantly, these reviews are now integrated with the DoD's routine force management processes. These changes better posture USSOCOM to meet the full range of national priorities.

Our acquisitions team continues to be a defense leader in applying Middle Tier Acquisitions and Other Transactional Agreement authorities provided by Congress, and we have had continued success in leveraging our SOFWERX platform via a Partnership Intermediary Agreement. SOFWERX enhances USSOCOM's ability to collaborate and connect with a diverse network of small, non-traditional companies, labs, scientists and academia. The FY20 NDAA § 851 authorization to use this platform to improve our interactions with Small Businesses through the Small Business Innovation Research pilot program has been especially effective. Since the pilot implementation, we have awarded 17 contracts with results that matter to both DoD and industry: a 200% increase in small business participation, 80% reduction in total contracting time, and 60% decrease in the time from initial award to prototype delivery.

Conclusion

In closing, USSOCOM is committed to providing the best trained and equipped SOF to support the Nation. We are actively realigning our operations, activities, and investments to align with NDS priorities and the operational needs of the GCCs, maintaining sustainable pressure on priority C-VEO threats while enabling the Joint Force to maintain advantage in competition, respond in crisis, and win in conflict. We are modernizing and innovating for the future, updating our organizational structures and processes for improved performance and affordability. Most importantly, we are staying true to our first SOF Truth – “Humans are more important than hardware” – by investing in our people, ensuring a trusted, capable, diverse, and committed force that is ready to meet any challenge. We are thankful to Congress for the foresight in creating USSOCOM many years ago, for trusting and sustaining this command as we developed a peerless force, and for your continued support for this truly special cohort of men and women who volunteer to undertake the most complex, challenging, and dangerous missions in defense of our great nation.