

NOT FOR PUBLIC DISSEMINATION
UNTIL RELEASED BY THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF

GENERAL JOSEPH L. VOTEL, U.S. ARMY
COMMANDER
UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

BEFORE THE

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

MARCH 8, 2016

OPENING REMARKS

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today as the 10th Commander of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). This is my second address on the posture of US Special Operations Forces (SOF). Since my statement last year, the challenges we face in the security environment have continued to evolve and create new conditions to which the military must adjust. USSOCOM is also evolving and tailoring our expertise to these challenges, though we remain consistent in our priorities, our commitment to excellence, and our dedication to serving the needs of our nation. During my remarks, I would like to discuss how we see the security environment changing, and how we believe SOF can best contribute to safeguarding the security of the American people, both now and in the future.

TODAY'S US SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCE

USSOCOM is unique among the Unified Combatant Commands in that it was legislated into existence, and has Service-like responsibilities to organize, train, and equip Special Operations Forces. Our mission, as I pointed out last year, is to synchronize the planning of special operations and provide SOF to support persistent, networked, and distributed Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) operations to protect and advance our nation's interests.

USSOCOM has approximately 56,000 active duty, 7,400 reserve, and 6,600 civilian men and women serving in a wide variety of roles and functions. Our organizations include Army Special Forces, SEALs (Sea, Air, Land Teams), Air Commandos, Rangers, Army Special Operations Aviation, Marine Raiders, civil affairs personnel, and psychological operations personnel. Our military personnel include both active duty as well as Guard and Reserve SOF,

which provide us with an essential operational capacity that allows us to surge in support of emerging requirements. We also have a variety of enablers that are critical to our success in diverse mission sets which include acquisition experts, logisticians, administrators, analysts, planners, communicators, and other specialists who are instrumental in fulfilling our mission.

On any given day, nearly 10,000 SOF are deployed or forward-stationed in more than 80 countries worldwide. They are filling GCC requirements that span the range of our Congressionally-delineated core activities. Our actions in support of the GCCs include such mission sets as: enhancing partner capabilities; coordinating counter-terrorism (CT) planning and operations; supporting the capabilities of our interagency partners; and developing critical relationships with key influencers. In all of these examples, which cover just a segment of our activities, SOF plays a key role by working with a range of partners on complex and demanding problem sets. Even in those situations where SOF are in the lead for small-footprint, high-risk missions, we are fully integrated with, and fully dependent upon, our conventional force, international, and interagency partners.

Given the security environment we now face, the demand for the skill sets that our SOF operators possess is understandably very high. Although we will always answer these calls, expanding USSOCOM's role in multiple locations is not without risk. The skills, maturity, and agility that we develop in our operators requires significant time, effort, and investment. This is one of our SOF truths: SOF cannot be mass-produced. Therefore, the employment of SOF should be based upon where we can create the greatest strategic effect to advance our nation's interests. I believe we need a continuing dialogue on how this can be accomplished, as well as how we can best prepare to meet the challenges we see developing in the future.

ENDURING PRIORITIES AND PROGRESS

My priorities remain unchanged from those I discussed with you last year. Focusing on these priorities have helped us continue to develop appropriate capabilities and capacities to meet the needs of our nation, as well as the needs of our force. I would like to take a moment to review these priorities as well as mention some of our ongoing efforts in each.

First, we are ensuring SOF readiness by developing the right people, skills, and capabilities to meet current requirements as well as those that will emerge in the future. Although we share responsibility with the Services for developing our special operations forces, USSOCOM has the responsibility for ensuring the current combat readiness of SOF. To maximize our effectiveness here, our readiness assessment process focuses on identifying GCC demands, and assessing our ability to support those requirements as well as our ability to surge in support of new demands. This approach is helping us identify and rectify any gaps we may have in supporting the GCCs. In another important dimension of readiness, we are implementing the Defense Secretary's decision to fully open all military positions, career fields, and specialties, including special operations specialties and units, to women. We did not request a waiver to this decision because our range of missions require a wide variety of skills and perspectives. As I conveyed to the USSOCOM Enterprise through a recorded video, we will not lower, raise or create multiple sets of standards for SOF; our priority is to identify and train the very best people for these demanding roles.

Second, we must help our nation win in today's challenges and contribute to keeping the nation safe. Our most important effort under this priority has been to organize our processes for dealing with trans-regional threats – those challenges that are dispersed not only across the borders of nation-states, but also across our GCC boundaries. As a headquarters with global

responsibilities, USSOCOM is well-positioned to help the GCCs prioritize and synchronize SOF operations to maximize our effectiveness. This trans-regional approach also allows us to better inform DoD decision-making processes on force management and determine where we can act to seize opportunities. Our role in Operation Gallant Phoenix, aimed at countering the flow of foreign fighters, is prime example of our integrated and innovative approach to the challenges we face. This effort has enabled a very limited number of people to have a significant impact on these networks.

Third, we are continuing to build relationships with international and domestic partners through sustained security cooperation, expanded communication architectures, and liaison activities. USSOCOM has strengthened the relationships and connections that provide the foundation for this network to enable more regular communication and collaboration. Over the last two years, we have invested heavily in integrating our international partners into our headquarters. We now have representation from 17 nations working with us in Tampa, and we are placing our own liaisons into 15 partner nations across the globe. Our facility provides our international partners access to their own national classified communication systems while placing them in a single collaborative space, side-by-side with their US counterparts.

We are also continuing to find opportunities to work across the interagency on our most pressing national security challenges, and have hosted a number of collaborative sessions to improve our perspectives on these issues. For example, last year we hosted a counter-ISIL forum with representatives from the Departments of State, Justice, Homeland Security, Treasury, and Defense, as well as the FBI, CIA, Office of the Attorney General, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, USAID, and other departments and agencies. We have also held other such forums this past year with the Department of State on messaging, and with 18 of our

international partners on coordinating hostage rescue operations. There is still more to be done, and I look forward to working with Congress in determining how we can best work across the interagency and serve the national security interests of the United States.

Fourth, we are preparing for the future by investing in SOF that are able to win in an increasingly complex world. Ultimately, preparing for the future is about ensuring that we match the right people and capabilities with the very best ideas to address our most pressing challenges. Improving our ability to perform in the future requires us to find innovative ways to invest today in programs that enhance existing capabilities as well as create new advantages for our SOF operators. Programs such as the Tactical Assault Light Operator Suit (TALOS) are providing us with the ability to collaborate and rapidly prototype with industry, academia and other government organizations to match the latest technologies with the needs of our force. Another critical effort is our SOF Information Environment, which supports our need for better situational awareness, collaboration, decision-making, and synchronization under complex conditions. While these technologies are important, we believe humans are more important than hardware, and are expanding our investments in the human part of the equation. Our Future Special Operator concept describes appropriate attributes and competencies of the future force and is helping us identify and build the right mix of cultural and language expertise. We are also investing in education and training that will further enhance our forces' ability to adapt and innovate in rapidly changing conditions.

Critical to all of our efforts is ensuring we preserve our force and families, providing for their short- and long-term well-being. People – military, civilian, and families – are our most important asset. To the maximum extent possible, we are working with the Services to fulfill the needs of our force in terms of care. Where there are gaps in their ability to meet the unique

needs of our operators, which is driven by a high, sustained operational tempo, the relative maturity of our force, and the range of stressors our force and families are placed under, we are building programs to fill these gaps. In our efforts to address these needs, we are partnering with academia and governmental agencies, as well as non-governmental agencies. We have also begun to integrate discussion of these subjects into our professional military educational venues, so that the notion of seeking help and continuously building resilience becomes a habit, rather than an aspiration.

I believe these are the right priorities – and I also believe we are seeing progress toward generating the right capabilities and capacities to deal with the emerging security environment.

THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT AND USSOCOM

Last year, I provided an overview of how we see the strategic environment changing in ways that enhance the ability of connected and empowered populations to reshape security conditions – which are taking place against a backdrop of power shifts among both state and non-state actors. Today, I will explain how I see this environment influencing the challenges we face – specifically, those that we consider “trans-regional.” Improving our understanding of the context of these challenges will improve our ability to identify appropriate solutions.

This is clearly an era of rapidly shifting power, which has stimulated increased competition and conflicts between states, within states, and across their borders. As power shifts, we frequently see competition emerge as empowered actors attempt to expand their spheres of influence, while others attempt to preserve the status quo. Empowered actors naturally seek to seize new privilege commensurate with their elevated power status – this is not new. What is new is that increasingly, populations are becoming connected through modern

communications technology and are demanding change on a range of governance issues. Grievances can now quickly mobilize a connected population and create opportunities for exploitation by outside state or non-state actors.

Trans-regional challenges are situations in which an actor, such as a violent extremist organization (VEO), operates across the borders of states – and more problematic for us, across our GCC boundaries. When these organizations are able to leverage local grievances in multiple locations simultaneously, they create an “archipelago” of local insurgencies. These situations are a combination of internal instability and external exploitation. Importantly, these insurgents are motivated by local conditions, though are willing to associate with the trans-regional actors when it suits their purposes. What may appear as a vast, trans-regional threat is in many cases, a series of local issues that an external actor has taken advantage of by leveraging modern communications and culturally-attuned messaging. These associations are opportunistic and based on shared, but often transient, interests.

When these political conditions exist, aggrieved populations are vulnerable to any narrative that is acceptable within the culture and directed at the perceived source of grievance. Organizations such as ISIL are using communication tools to recruit both regionally and globally – exploiting potential recruits’ receptivity to a jihadist message. We must recognize that while the gaps between increased power and lagging privilege are opportunities for our adversaries to exploit, they are also opportunities for us to build stability in strategically important areas, and undermine the ability of these VEOs to build inroads. Over time, we can act to sever the linkages these groups depend upon for survival. What will remain is denying future opportunities to these groups to exploit local grievances for their own purposes.

USSOCOM'S VALUE TO THE NATION

Despite this complex security environment, USSOCOM is well-postured to support the GCCs in countering these trans-regional challenges by virtue of its global perspective. Our responsibility to synchronize planning against VEOs will help the GCCs identify opportunities to influence dynamics in one region by applying pressure in another. Further, we can provide a range of local options, which includes building critical influence with key actors, to magnify our strategic effects.

The range of challenges we deal with in this environment, and the span of their reach, prevent a one-dimensional approach from achieving our desired ends. Partners, both international and domestic, are critical to providing us with the range of capabilities, resources, and access we require. USSOCOM's extensive investment in building a global network of partners has proven indispensable in developing comprehensive approaches against these threats. Although we work with a large network of partners, USSOCOM can also provide the capability to act discreetly in politically-sensitive situations, where a low-visibility approach is more effective than a larger footprint.

While the challenges we face will not be solved by military capabilities alone, there are simply cases in which force will be our only recourse. For these situations, USSOCOM has invested a great deal of effort in ensuring we are fully integrated with the Services. SOF plays an important enabling role for conventional forces in conflict. Simultaneously, we tirelessly work to improve those capabilities that we are uniquely structured to provide. Yet even in these cases, most SOF missions require non-SOF support; we remain fully dependent upon our Joint Force partners.

By understanding the complex security environment, building meaningful relationships with our domestic and international partners, and ensuring we are integrated with the Joint Force, SOF can help influence strategic outcomes prior to crisis. Properly posturing SOF will help us identify emerging issues and rapidly adjust our approaches to best seize opportunities. All of these characteristics allow us to develop long-term and cost-effective options to prevent or mitigate conflict, and create decision-space for policymakers. We also can deter and disrupt the most immediate and important threats to US, partner, and allied interests.

Therefore, SOF's value to the nation lies in: our global perspective that spans regional boundaries, coupled with our ability to act and influence locally with a range of options; our networked approach that integrates the capabilities of our domestic and international partners, paired with our ability to act discreetly against our most important threats; and our seamless integration with the Services to support and enhance their effectiveness, while we provide capabilities that SOF is uniquely structured to deliver. All of these are only possible due to our people - adaptive, agile, flexible, bold, and innovative – who allow us to seize opportunities early, and have strategic impact with a small footprint.

With the range of capabilities that we can deliver, there are a variety of functions we are called upon to fill. These functions can be categorized into three broad bins: things we must do, things we are expected to do, and things we should do. Each of these bins are important for the security of the United States; our task is to determine the appropriate balance across each of them. To be clear, we are laser-focused on today's fight, but we remain vigilant in preparing SOF to best meet the challenges of the future.

WHAT WE MUST DO

SOF remains a multi-spectrum, multi-phased force – we provide a full array of capabilities across the range of conflict, and are prepared to support the GCCs when conflicts escalate. Yet, USSOCOM provides two no-fail mission sets to safeguard our interests.

First, we must provide the ability to rescue and recover US citizens from hostage situations. This is one of the central missions USSOCOM was created to execute. Recovery of Americans in crisis situations denies the incentives to attempt to coerce US policymakers with the lives of US citizens in the future, while safeguarding the lives of those currently in danger to the best of our ability.

Second, SOF plays a critical role in reducing incentives to obtain and employ weapons of mass destruction (WMD), as well as deny the effects of current and emerging WMD-capable threats. USSOCOM is forging enduring, purposeful relationships with intelligence and law enforcement agencies to fully capitalize on opportunities to achieve national counter-WMD goals. Ideally, we will be able to more formally codify these relationships to ensure proper and enduring synchronization of efforts. While forums currently exist to bring various government agencies together on these problems, they tend to be more focused in the near-term and in response to crises. The most effective options require a longer-term focus with enduring partnerships.

These capabilities are unique to SOF and constitute what I perceive as our two enduring no-fail responsibilities. However, the utility of SOF in other mission sets has led to us taking a lead role in many other challenges we face, some of which share connections to these two missions.

WHAT WE ARE EXPECTED TO DO

Over the past fifteen years, USSOCOM has invested heavily in developing counter-terrorism capabilities. The increasing influence of various VEOs has understandably resulted in a call for more capacity to counter them. Our operators undertake demanding, time-sensitive, high-risk mission sets to prevent these groups from using terrorist tactics to achieve their ends at the expense of our interests, our partners' interests, and the lives of innocent civilians. While SOF is not primarily a CT force, we recognize that we provide the core CT capabilities for the Department of Defense (DoD).

I believe the use of more kinetically-centric CT operations are best undertaken as a narrow set of actions in support of broader activities intended to separate VEOs from the populations they are attempting to influence. Certainly, this kinetic aspect of CT will play a role in safeguarding our security going forward, though not necessarily the central role.

Although SOF excel in high-risk, politically sensitive situations, the employment of SOF against any problem set is not risk-free. If we restrict our approaches to direct action-centric responses, we can quickly consume our readiness and capacity, which can undermine our ability to seize early opportunities to prevent escalation in other crises. This is particularly so when we apply a great deal of our force structure and activities against tactical conditions that emerged from unchanging – or worsening – strategic trends. A focus on these tactical conditions comes with a hefty strategic opportunity cost. We believe the most effective approach to CT is to think of it more expansively, and find options to prevent VEOs from building inroads with the populations they depend upon for their own strategic success.

Similar to the complex pathway actors seeking WMD must take, VEOs also have pathways they must travel to recruit and train, fund operations, build their networks, develop

relationships with relevant populations, organize, and equip. By looking at this problem set more broadly, I believe we can begin to undermine these groups' ability to achieve success. This approach would prioritize shaping dynamics in the human domain – influencing the “will to fight” of potential recruits as well as the decision-making of VEOs.

WHAT WE SHOULD DO

Earlier, I discussed the necessity of seizing opportunities. Many of the trans-regional actors we encounter are taking an experimental approach to find opportunities they can build upon. We should realize that *the tactical actions of our competitors are lagging indicators of where they expect to find – or have found – strategic success*. SOF's role as “global scouts” fits well with our need to also locate and seize opportunities, while denying them to our adversaries. USSOCOM is, and must continue to be, a learning organization intensely focused on finding areas of high-leverage opportunities to safeguard and advance our nation's interests.

I believe this aspect of our value is where we are currently under-invested, and will experience the highest returns on our efforts if we rebalance our activities. This rebalance will consist of deepening our understanding of complex regional issues, developing important relationships, providing early warning of emerging problems, and ultimately cultivating the influence that we can use to undermine the efforts of violent organizations. All of this preserves decision-space and expands our windows of opportunity – therefore minimizing our risk.

We are putting time and effort into developing a family of strategic documents intended to guide the development of our ability to do this. Maximizing the strategic effectiveness of deployed SOF requires a long time frame, efforts to understand underlying dynamics on the ground, and cultivation of key relationships to maximize our influence. The realities of today's

strategic environment simply defy short-term, small-force, risk-free solutions that create the desired strategic results. Improving our strategic performance will take time, but earlier commitments can help control costs overall.

Throughout the troubled regions of the world in which we operate, actors are increasingly using approaches and methods that avoid conventional military responses to territorial encroachments. Sophisticated fusions of information operations and targeted tactical actions are helping these actors find areas in which they can achieve more enduring strategic success. Russia, for example, is advancing its interests by employing a variety of approaches across their periphery that combine traditional military operations with sophisticated information campaigns aimed at a variety of audiences. The proliferation of, and increasing reliance on, unconventional tools in the security environment requires us to invest time and effort in ensuring we prepare ourselves with the proper capabilities, capacities, and authorities to safeguard our interests.

Accordingly, we are working hard to determine how we can best leverage the capabilities of our international SOF partners to mutual benefit. Their access to and influence in key strategic locations are essential to maximizing the effectiveness of our own force, while we possess capabilities that they can benefit from. However, we must remember that these arrangements are two-way streets, and built upon mutually beneficial relationships. There are a range of areas we are exploring to improve here, such as in communications infrastructure and policies that support information sharing, as well as planning integration.

Domestically, our interagency partners provide an array of essential capabilities to address many of the challenges we face – most of which defy a military-centric solution. We continue to look for ways in which we can enhance our ability to work with interagency partners. SOF capabilities alone are insufficient to achieve policy objectives, but we can create time and

space for policymakers, while identifying opportunities to integrate the capabilities of the interagency to advance our interests. Although we have made significant progress in working with our domestic partners, I believe there is much more to do.

In short, simply improving upon what we are doing today will not be sufficient to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Shifting from a reactive approach to a more proactive one will require some time and a sustained effort. I believe this approach will be the most effective in controlling the risks we face to our national security interests.

Accordingly, we are working to organize around problem sets and better integrate the capabilities of our domestic and international partners. Further, we are working to match our operators' agility with our institutional agility – improving our support to those from whom we ask so much. As an organization that routinely deals with unique and shifting challenges, we prize our adaptability. This is a characteristic we are also leveraging in our programmatic processes to best enable our force.

ENABLING OUR FORCE

The United States and our allies face an unpredictable and dynamic security environment, while DoD simultaneously faces significant fiscal constraints. To effectively confront challenges we must make timely decisions on tradeoffs between capability, capacity, and in limited cases, readiness. These decisions require analysis and oversight.

USSOCOM's overall readiness remains stable. However, we expect to see impacts on our readiness should significant constraints be put on Service budgets that result in cuts to programs and activities that we depend upon. SOF would begin to lose its technological superiority or be forced to jeopardize various essential recapitalization and modernization

programs, leaving the force with reduced capability and/or capacity in critical areas. Further, a significant increase in the demand for SOF would prevent us from adequately resetting and retraining for the large variety of missions we are expected to execute.

Programmatically, our priorities have remained consistent. We focus on enhancing Service-provided platforms to meet the needs of our force – we are therefore highly dependent on investment decisions made by the Services, and greatly impacted by budget changes that affect them. Much of our funding is currently dedicated to procurement, modernization and/or modification of aviation and mobility platforms, weapons, ordnance, and communications equipment. Our budgetary realignments are aimed at better balancing capability, capacity, and readiness as we continue to face a great deal of fiscal uncertainty. Critical procurement programs supporting the development of our force include: a precision strike package, rotary wing upgrades, and the AC/MC-130J in support of SOF aviation; improved wet and dry submersibles in support of our shipbuilding programs; and upgraded communications, weapons, protection, and visual augmentation in support of our SOF operators on the ground.

Our own investments in technology are focused on those areas that require relatively small amounts of funding in order to mature them into useful tools that uniquely meet the needs of SOF. Often they are centered on the enhancements to the platforms that form the backbone of our lethality, mobility, survivability, and communicability. We currently have a list of 32 technologies that meet this criteria and are investing in them over the next two years.

USSOCOM continues to build a culture that embraces and supports innovation in our research, development, and acquisition programs. Our acquisition team is developing and testing new operating models to help build a marketplace for SOF innovation. For example, we are piloting a venue we call SOFWERX; an unclassified, open collaboration facility designed to

bring non-traditional partners from industry, academia, and the government together to work on our most challenging problems. SOFWERX is the central node in USSOCOM's efforts to push advanced manufacturing, rapid prototyping, and 3D printing technology to our operational units. This year we have provided orientation training on these technologies to operators in two of our Service components, and are already seeing the benefits of enabling their ability to think through a problem and rapidly iterate on potential solutions at all levels of our organization.

We are also breaking down barriers to innovation through industry engagement – we are using more non-traditional contractual agreements that provide greater flexibility, including signing more than 120 Cooperative Research and Development Agreements, and awarding five non-Federal Acquisition Regulation-base contracts called Other Transaction Authorities or OTAs. The TALOS effort, which I mentioned earlier, is one of our key vehicles we are using to improve our innovation capabilities across a variety of disciplines by better collaboration with industry, which we will be applying in other efforts going forward. In the second full year of that effort, the TALOS team has grown from long, less frequent prototyping events to nearly continuous rapid prototyping in a number of key technologies.

In another important area of innovation for us, we appreciate the support you have provided through the 2016 NDAA to allow our forces to develop creative and agile military information support operations concepts, technologies, and strategies. USSOCOM is currently carrying out a series of technology demonstrations to assess innovative tools designed to detect previously unseen patterns in complex social media data, integrate and visualize vast information, and allow warfighters to sense, understand, and respond to changes in the information environment in real time. The ability to conduct effective messaging, as well as counter-messaging, will only grow in importance, given the evolving nature of conflicts.

USSOCOM'S INTERDEPENDENCE

As I have indicated, a great deal of USSOCOM's procurement is focused on Special Operations-Peculiar enhancements to Service-managed programs. Being ready to support the range of contingencies we prepare for depends upon maintaining a robust fleet of air, ground, and maritime platforms that we tailor to our unique needs through our MFP-11 funding. Our buying power is highly dependent upon the Services' continued investment in these platforms. Major cuts or reprioritization in these programs will require us to reassess our readiness investments. Not only do we focus on SOF-specific enhancements to Service-managed programs, but we also focus a great deal of our training and equipping efforts on ensuring interoperability with conventional forces and partner nation forces. Major reprioritization on the part of the Services will create a significant "sunk cost" for us.

Therefore, one of USSOCOM's greatest concerns is the potential impacts of fiscal reductions to the Services' readiness, which directly affect SOF. We have already seen reductions which negatively affect us in a variety of ways. Naval Special Warfare Command is seeing training challenges associated with lower fleet asset availability which impacts readiness and interoperability. Marine Forces Special Operations Command is experiencing reductions in access to some important school seats. US Army Special Operations Command is experiencing a reduction in the Military Training Specific Allotment as well as staffing at heavily-used ranges. Air Force Special Operations Command is facing risk in the AC/MC-130J recapitalization program. If further reductions become necessary, we are certain to see more examples of adverse impacts on USSOCOM like these.

We are also dependent upon the capabilities that reside within some of the defense agencies, such as the Joint Improvised Threat Defeat Agency (JIDA), the Defense Intelligence

Agency (DIA), and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA). DTRA is uniquely positioned to look at WMD threats from a global perspective and provide USSOCOM with planning support, expertise and tools to counter this threat from both state and non-state actors. DTRA provides research and development support to USSOCOM by providing warfighter-unique counter-proliferation technologies. These organizations help reduce our analytical load on complex problems, while providing us with valuable insight on the threats our operators face today and will continue to face in the future. Relatedly, we appreciate the FY16 NDAA (Sec 1533) authorization for training foreign security forces to defeat improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which enables a wider effort against this shared threat. We request your continued support in sustaining budgetary allotments and authorities for these essential enablers.

Another enduring budgetary concern for us is the future of the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding, which we remain heavily reliant upon. Maintaining contingency funds is essential for responding to today's threats while preserving the ability to prepare for the future. The current fiscal environment is forcing us to continue to leverage this funding to maintain capabilities that should be programmed into our baseline budget; much of our globally-distributed, enduring operations are currently funded with OCO. We also rely upon programs and activities provided by the Services that are funded through OCO – steep reductions will impact SOF operations. In other cases, funding enduring requirements through OCO is creating challenges for the Services to adequately match manpower specializations to requirements. For example, our operational tempo has created an increased need for Tactical Systems Operators (TSOs), which are airborne intelligence specialists provided by the Services. TSOs operate on aircraft that are not programs of record, but are vital to our ability to target enemies on the ground. This creates a situation where the Air Force, as well as the other Services, have an

increased manpower bill they have not programmed for, while they provide us with essential intelligence support. For critical and unique enduring capabilities like TSOs, it is essential that we provide sustainable funding that allows the Services to provide sustainable sourcing--migrating funding from OCO to Base preserves our ability to best prepare for the future.

PRESERVING OUR FORCE AND FAMILIES

The demand for SOF across the GCCs as they deal with the complexities of the strategic environment will result in an unchanging, or potentially higher, operations tempo for our SOF operators. In order to respond to these strategic challenges, maintaining a high state of readiness among the entire USSOCOM team - service members, families, and our civilian workforce - is paramount. To this end, I continue to place the Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) initiatives at the forefront of my priorities.

I am deeply appreciative of the support Congress and the Department have given the Command in this area and for the collaboration and support we receive every day from the Services. With that assistance, we have built an infrastructure of holistic support services at each of our tactical units. These services include behavioral healthcare, family counseling and support services, physical training and rehabilitation, and a cadre of chaplains with skills to guide our community members anytime and anywhere. For each SOF member and/or family member requiring care, there is an entire team of professionals ready to guide and care for them during their too-short downtime before the next major training event or deployment.

USSOCOM's POTFF is an enduring element of our efforts to design, build, and implement a holistic approach to address the pressure on our total force. This program identifies and implements innovative, valuable solutions across the USSOCOM Enterprise aimed at

improving the short and long-term well-being of our SOF members and their families. POTFF addresses significant stressors on SOF families to include a lack of predictability, compressed and irregular training cycles, and limited post-deployment family reintegration time by leveraging both Service and SOF sponsored programs.

Since implementing the POTFF initiative, USSOCOM has conducted annual surveys to monitor usage and satisfaction and several psychological / health related factors. The program has increased resilience, decreased reported symptoms of depression, increased utilization of behavioral health services, and expanded access to timely rehabilitative care. As a result, we are beginning to see the benefits of these initiatives. The members of our SOF community are proactively and increasingly seeking behavioral healthcare. We are also seeing steady improvement in quickly returning our injured personnel to a full-mission capable status. We deeply appreciate Congressional support for these efforts. Resources to support the personnel, facilities, equipment and research necessary to sustain this initiative is a priority for USSOCOM.

Despite this progress, we continue to struggle with the challenge of suicides within our ranks and our community. Any loss of life has a profound impact on the Command. Accordingly, we are working with the American Association of Suicidology to review all of our suicides over the past four years to help us understand where we may better intervene to prevent these tragic events. We have also redoubled our efforts to ensure that our professional staff and leaders recognize the dynamics that lead to suicides and better understand how to intervene. We also continue to work with the Defense Suicide Prevention Office to develop a peer-to-peer mentoring program, so that our Service members and their Spouses have access to critical support networks during trying times. We are seeing indicators of progress in this area, and will

continue to stress the value of behavioral health care across the continuum, from individual and unit performance enhancement to crisis intervention.

WORKING WITH CONGRESS

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the posture, perspective, and health of our Special Operations Forces. I would also like to extend my thanks for your support on a range of issues that are critical to ensuring USSOCOM is able to provide the Secretary of Defense and the GCCs the capabilities that are in such high demand in our current security environment. Given that we expect demand for SOF to remain high, it is incumbent upon all of us to do our utmost to ensure those in the SOF community and their families are properly cared for.

Congressional support is critical to ensure we can improve our ability to act early and seize opportunities in this complex environment. This improved ability to influence outcomes will come through a combination of tailored authorities and effective programs that enhance our capabilities, while ensuring that we adequately care for our people. The potential fallout of possible budget reductions in the future remains a significant concern for us – the indirect impacts on USSOCOM of cuts to the Services could potentially undermine our ability to field the best possible Special Operations Forces.

We will continue to earn the high level of trust that our leaders have placed in us by maintaining an open dialogue on the challenges we face, providing our best military advice, and remaining responsible stewards of US tax dollars.