

Statement for the Record on U.S. SOCOM and SOF Futures

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to express my views on the future of U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) and the opportunity to suggest some ideas for utilizing SOF more effectively in the 21st century strategic environment and as crucial tools to enhance preventive planning before a crisis or conflict occurs.

U.S. SOF have always been deployed for both kinetic Direct Action and non-kinetic engagement, or Indirect Action, missions, but over the last several years, in particular, preventive SOF deployments aimed at building partner capacities and shaping regional environments have emerged as particularly important mission-sets for U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) and SOF. Building and nurturing partner security forces is often the price of admission for U.S. access to countries or key regional theaters. Moreover, as more and more nations object to the presence of large American forces deployed in their countries, SOF units, with their small “footprint” are oftentimes more acceptable options. For this reason, U.S. SOF Indirect Action engagements are likely to become even more important going forward as budgets become tighter and the imperative to operate jointly is matched by a growing requirement to work with partners, be they from the Interagency, outside of the U.S. government in International Organizations or from Non-Governmental Organizations, or with allied or partner SOFs.

SOCOM and U.S. SOF have emphasized partner relationships in the past, what is new today and what will likely characterize future operations is the extent to which SOF operate in the pre-crisis and post-crisis ends of the conflict spectrum, building partner capacities, training and equipping allied and partner nation forces, and supporting the Interagency in the attainment of broader national security objectives. In the current security setting and as we look to the future, preventive action has become fundamental to U.S. strategic and operational planning and essential to gaining the initiative in key regional theaters with respect to counter-terrorism planning, countering illicit networks and trafficking, and for fostering intelligence collaboration and fusion between U.S. and partner nation SOF and national intelligence agencies. This creates a new imperative for U.S. SOCOM and for the augmentation of Indirect Action engagement missions, which may include civil affairs, stability operations, or humanitarian assistance in areas that terrorists and other bad actors may seek to exploit.

This is not to diminish in any way the importance of Direct Action missions for U.S. SOF; obviously, Direct Action training and deployments are fundamental to SOF’s core competencies, which include: Direct Action, Special Reconnaissance, Civil Affairs (CA), Foreign Internal Defense (FID), Information Operations (IO), and Psychological Operations (PsyOps) to support stability operations, Unconventional Warfare (UW), counter-terrorism (CT), counter-insurgency (COIN) and combatting-weapons of mass destruction (C-WMD) mission sets. In this regard, the special mission units under Joint Special Operations Command’s (JSOC’s)

control should, in my view, remain principally postured to implement kinetic Direct Action missions as tasked by our National Command Authority (NCA). The growing importance of Indirect Action, however, arises from the need to prepare and shape the security planning environment in a very deliberate way, as well as from the fact that the SOF soldier, sailor, airman, or Marine has specialized skill sets that are particularly well-suited to the Indirect Mission set. Both factors have led to the increased demand for Joint Combined Exchange and Training (JCET) deployments of U.S. SOF, as well as to the desire by indigenous SOF and national Ministry of Interior forces to work more closely with U.S. SOF units to interdict enemy networks that are threatening national or regional security interests.

Without question, recognition of the need to prepare and shape the planning environment in a very deliberate way, as well as an appreciation of the fact that the U.S. defense budget is coming down and our overseas force and basing presence is changing mandates a broader use of SOF for Indirect Action and engagement activities. Because of its unique force attributes, U.S. SOF have an ability to position themselves in environments that are not conducive to effective general purpose force (GPF) operations or interventions. To a large extent, this means having a capability that is culturally attuned and able to understand and operate in the developing world, especially in the densely-populated, poorly governed, urban environments that are taking shape in key coastal areas, and that will likely pose multiple security challenges for years to come. This is what U.S. SOF are increasingly being trained to do.

For this reason, U.S. SOF quite likely will find themselves deployed forward more frequently and focused on missions that seek to train and equip friendly SOF units, build partner capacities to achieve capabilities that can operate seamlessly with U.S. forces or by themselves, if need be. Indeed, one of the key imperatives for future U.S. SOF deployments and operations is a requirement to operate with indigenous forces, using common tactics, doctrine, and procedures. This emerging reality demands new thinking about security force assistance (SFA) and the amalgamation of tools to facilitate Indirect Action missions, which for U.S. Special Operations Forces might include training and exercising with partner SOFs, information collaboration and fusion, and the development of educational opportunities to promote common doctrine, tactics, and procedures, synergistic acquisition/material requirements, and a shared awareness of “lessons-learned” from operational experiences. Indeed, the objective of this Indirect Action approach is to get to an end-state in which partner capacities can operate seamlessly with U.S. forces and be leveraged to support shared interests. Interoperability is a key objective of partner engagement and it should be the focus of a large percentage of U.S security cooperation activities.

With a force slated to grow to about 71,000 troops, SOCOM will have the resources to implement these two lines of operation, i.e., Direct Action and the Indirect Approach. To do so as effectively as possible, however, the Commander of U.S. SOCOM must be able to oversee the global management of U.S. SOF forces, to include the deployment of CONUS-based SOF overseas to satisfy presence missions and to meet emerging contingency requirements. This, inevitably, leads to the conclusion that SOCOM needs the authorities and flexibility to posture SOF for Indirect Action and contingency-specific missions. Practically, this means that a larger percentage of U.S. SOF forces deployed in CONUS — around 90% of all U.S. SOF — needs to be deployed overseas, perhaps, at a minimum on a rotational basis, to ensure that they remain culturally attuned, regionally-focused, and strategically positioned to respond to any contingency.

To do this, however, U.S. SOCOM must be given new authorities to manage and resource global contingency deployments and theater SOF forces. In this connection, it seems to me that the Unified Command Plan (UCP) should be adjusted to provide the SOCOM commander with the flexibility to move forces from one theater to another and to increase his responsibility for peacetime planning, training, and exercising

of theater SOF units. At the same time, I believe that Congress should take another look at Goldwater-Nichols with respect to DoD's functional commands — i.e., TRANSCOM, STRATCOM, CYBERCOM and SOCOM — with the objective of addressing the command relationships and responsibilities of these “global” commands in relation to the Regional Combatant Commands (RCCs).

Against many emerging threats, the United States must be able to act quickly and to transcend RCC Areas of Responsibility (AORs). We must be more agile in anticipating and responding to looming security challenges and in positioning U.S. SOF forces to be more proactive in shaping and influencing strategic perspectives and allied/partner decision-making. From my perspective, this necessitates giving U.S. SOCOM combatant command (CoCom) authority, in peacetime, over the Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs) and all forward-based U.S. SOF, as it already has for U.S.-based SOF. Right now the RCCs have this authority over the TSOCs and with it comes the responsibility for manning, training and resourcing forward-based SOF units. From my perspective, this has created tensions with other RCC priorities and has resulted in the under-resourcing of the TSOCs. In some instances this has contributed to less focused TSOC training as compared to that of other joint SOF commands, such as JSOC, which is flourishing under SOCOM's authority. Giving SOCOM CoCom authority over the TSOCs will address resourcing and training shortfalls and it will focus the TSOCs on regional priorities in support of broader U.S. national objectives and interests. It will also provide a more effective means for managing global SOF forces and allow the Commander of SOCOM the necessary agility to move forces from theater to theater to address an emergency. Global force management is a necessity, not a luxury, in the current strategic environment.

In addition to revising Goldwater-Nichols, I believe that Congress needs to address SOCOM's resourcing. Specifically, I believe that SOCOM would benefit from multi-year authorities to build partnerships with key SOF units. However, until Congress and the Executive Branch resolve the issue of “who owns” the security assistance and security force assistance mission sets, DoD, by default and in practice because of its resources, will be given the bulk of the Security Force Assistance (SFA) missions. In the SOF arena, if the Command is tasked to take on SFA missions as part of a broader U.S. security assistance and engagement strategy, it ought to emphasize training with MoD and MOI units for persistent presence missions beyond counter-terrorism planning, for which some authorities already exist. I recognize, in this regard, that Congress has set forth a “Global Contingency Authority” in the expectation that SOF might use it to support SOCOM activities overseas, but as presently legislated this “authority” may not work as well for smaller, peacetime engagements and in support of persistent presence deployments in areas where threats may not be immediately apparent but looming on the horizon.

Providing SOCOM with this type of responsibility for the TSOCs in peacetime would in no way undermine the RCC commander's wartime command and control of operations in his theater; it would simply provide SOCOM, as a global and functional command, with greater flexibility over the assignment and utilization of U.S. SOF forces. In other words, in an operational contingency, this would not change the supported/supporting command relationship between a regional theater command and SOCOM, but it would enhance the SOCOM commander's ability to employ U.S. SOF according to their regional expertise and in light of their specific skill sets. Effective resourcing of SOF also requires greater flexibility with regard to acquisition and material financing and with respect to some military construction (MILCON) activities. The intent here would be to provide U.S. SOCOM with the capacity to compress the timelines and expedite R&D and procurement when necessary. These “authorities-related” issues are not well understood outside of SOCOM circles and deserve more study, especially when considering a collaborative approach between State and DoD for SFA funding and activities.

SOCOM's embrace and promotion of the Indirect Approach places it in a unique and fortuitous position relative to other U.S. government entities, especially in light of the administration's ongoing strong support for the Command, as reflected in the FY13 DoD budget request. This is due largely to the fact that SOCOM, as a functional command, is able to transcend COCOM areas of responsibility in working with both traditional and non-traditional partners, a strategic advantage that is especially valuable in the conduct of counter-WMD (C-WMD), counter-insurgency (COIN), and counter-terrorism (CT) operations, SOF's priority mission sets that cross national boundaries and even traditionally defined "regions." Security Force Assistance missions, moreover, constitute an "operational space" that has yet to be definitively claimed by any one government agency or military branch, but for which SOCOM is also particularly well suited. Other government agencies, such as the State Department, and the various RCCs, of course, look at issues regionally, but there is no one entity (with the possible exception of National Counter-Terrorism Center on the intelligence side) responsible for examining these broader, networked, transnational issues that go to the very heart of SOCOM's functional capabilities. For this reason, I believe that SOCOM should move forward and complement its "Global SOF Partnership" concept with the notion of a "Global SOF Network," which would position U.S. SOCOM to track more effectively and disrupt/interdict cross-regional threats that increasingly have become more problematic for U.S. security planning. Given the current absence of a synchronizing entity to do just that, U.S. interests are not being adequately advanced and defended. In the "ways, means, and ends" equation, SOCOM, therefore, can fill an all-important "means" gap that has thus far plagued whole-of-government strategic planning in the field of transnational threats.

While SOCOM has the greatest SOF capabilities in the world, global problems require global partners and solutions. For SOCOM, this means forging ahead with the Global SOF Network concept noted above, to include securing buy-in from across the Interagency, the RCCs, and key regional allies and partners. This approach to 21st century security planning and SOF engagement will demand new thinking about frameworks for collaboration with allies, partners, and the U.S. Interagency to achieve common and shared national security objectives. One approach to achieving interoperability with key allies and partners and in support of a whole-of-government approach to regional engagement embodies the development of Regional SOF Coordination Centers, or RSCCs. The model for RSCC creation lies in the NATO SOF Headquarters (NSHQ), which began its existence as the NATO SOF Coordination Center, established by NATO at the Riga Summit in 2006. Late in 2009, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) approved the evolution of the NSCC to become the NATO SOF HQs, and in March 2010, this entity became "operational". As an MOU organization, with the United States as the lead nation, the NSHQ operates as a "coalition of the willing" organization, including in Afghanistan where its intelligence fusion center operates, using Battlefield Information Collection and Exploitation System (BICES) technology, to provide timely information to operational units on the ground. The NSHQ has established a lessons-learned center at Chièvres air base outside of Brussels, where it is building a professional military education curriculum for NATO SOF forces and interested Interagency participants, such as members of the intelligence community, and it has reached out to non-NATO European and extra-European partners for participation in NSHQ programs. This may be among the most exciting aspects of the NSHQ — that is, its ability to reach out and to work with non-NATO and Interagency partners, and this is precisely what we should be doing in other theaters, even without the benefit of the broader alliance networked umbrella that NATO provides for the NSHQ.

A similar lead-nation/MOU construct is envisaged for the RSCCs. While differences are evident across regional theaters — the most glaring being the absence of a multilateral, collective defense umbrella that resides at the heart of NATO — the RSCC construct is applicable, with modifications, to other geographical regions in which U.S. SOF are operating. One of the main purposes of the RSCCs would be to engage

regional SOF organizations to help them prioritize and harmonize SOF planning and requirements, to extract and apply lessons learned from SOF deployments, and to improve information sharing and fusion, perhaps using the NSHQ's BICES network and technologies. By leveraging lessons learned from the NSHQ's Professional Military Education (PME) programs at Chièvres, the RSCCs can also contribute to SOF PME, training, and development on a wider global scale that is nonetheless tailored to specific regional needs and sensitivities. By focusing on training and education, the RSCC construct aims to achieve interoperability, one key objective of any SOF partnership activities. Enhanced intelligence collaboration and eventually fusion could emerge as a by-product of the RSCCs' training and education activities, as it has in and for the NSHQ. While each region would develop their RSCC in a unique, geographic-specific fashion, the core elements of a SOF coordination center would be constant, with its objectives of promoting interoperability and building partner capacities that can be leveraged by the United States in emergencies.

Creating regional RSCCs and empowering the Theater Special Operation Commands (TSOCs) for both Direct Action and the Indirect Approach is an indispensable part of implementing a Global SOF Network. Re-assessing the role of the functional commands in an updated variant of Goldwater-Nichols and giving the SOCOM combatant command authority over the TSOCs, as discussed above, would allow him to allocate resources and deploy forces to priority regions/contingencies in a timely fashion, and to ensure that the right forces (i.e., those with relevant linguistic skills and cultural expertise) are identified, earmarked, and prepared for specific regional deployments/contingencies. Mandating SOCOM combatant command authority over the TSOCs in peacetime would not impede a GCCs' wartime/operational control over SOF forces in his theater, nor would it undermine, on the State Department side, the chief of mission's authority in his or her respective embassy. In country, all U.S. SOF personnel would still operate under the aegis of the ambassador, with full disclosure of TSOC activities in both the Direct Action and the Indirect Action realms. Giving SOCOM combatant command authority over the TSOCs and all forward-based SOF would only facilitate SOCOM's capacity to move forces from one theater to another, leaving operational control of the TSOCs in the hands of the GCC commanders. Indeed, giving SOCOM CoCom authority over the TSOCs is not an attempt to sideline the RCCs, but rather reflective of an effort to develop a streamlined process for providing the regional commanders with the resources they really need, particularly when time is of the utmost importance.

Finally, for U.S. SOCOM, the real wildcard in its planning is Afghanistan. After 2014, it is not clear which allies will remain in theater, or how large the American contingent will be. However, regardless of the size of American forces left in Afghanistan, it is clear that U.S. SOF will be an essential element of that commitment, and that all of the projected mission-taskings fall within SOF's core competencies. Moreover, U.S. and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) SOF activities in Afghanistan are the clearest illustration to date on the interlocking nature of Direct Action and Indirect Action missions. The NATO/ISAF mission makes it clear that the training and establishment of Afghan national security forces are vital metrics for determining Afghanistan's ability to "stand on its own" and subsequently set the conditions for a drawdown in the ISAF mission. At the same time, U.S. SOF's counter-terrorism operations continue to provide the quick, decisive measures to provide the time and space that is necessary for these training and broader village stability operations to succeed. What has become clear after a decade of deployments is that the Direct Action approach was largely successful due to SOF's Indirect Action engagements. Stability after 2014 will depend in no small measure on how well we have succeeded in building our Afghan partners' capacities and on how effective SOF Direct Action operations continue to be, including with respect to interdicting trans-national networks and threats.