

**STATEMENT OF**

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**BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE  
ON TERRORISM, UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS, AND CAPABILITIES**

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Chairman Saxton, Congressman Meehan, members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the future of the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) and the war on terror, along with two men for whom I have great admiration—Wayne Downing and Mike Vickers. I will begin by suggesting what kind of force we need to defeat our Islamist enemies, then review the deficiencies of our current force structure, and finally conclude with a suggestion for how a major organizational overhaul—the resurrection of the Office of Strategic Services--could address some of these shortcomings.

My starting point is the assumption that in the years ahead key competencies for the U.S. armed forces will be knowledge of foreign languages and cultures, skill at counterinsurgency warfare, and the ability to work with a wide range of foreign allies, ranging from advanced NATO militaries and constabularies to primitive militias in places like Afghanistan and Somalia. All of these needs are dictated by the nature of the global war being waged on the U.S. and our allies by Al Qaeda and various other Islamist terrorist groups. Our enemies in this struggle cannot be defeated with conventional military force. Indeed, there is a distinct danger that indiscriminate application of violence will only create more enemies in the future. To defeat this Islamist insurgency we must be able not only to track down and capture or kill hard-core terrorists but also to carry out civil affairs and information operations to win the “hearts and minds” of the great mass of uncommitted Muslims. We are very good at eliminating top terrorists, once they have been found (witness Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s death); less good at finding them (Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri are still at large); and less skilled still at changing the conditions that breed terrorism in the first place (look at the continuing violence in Iraq and Afghanistan).

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## **Focus on Counterinsurgency**

We are paying the price for this skills-deficit in places like Iraq where it has been difficult for a conventionally focused Army and Marine Corps—to say nothing of the Navy and Air Force--to pivot to counterinsurgency operations. There is widespread concern, including within the armed forces, that a predilection for “kinetic” solutions has made the situation in parts of Iraq worse, not better. In this regard, I was stuck by an op-ed published recently in the Baltimore Sun (“Military Must Share the Blame,” June 20, 2006) by a Marine officer named Erik Swabb who served in Fallujah in 2004-2005. He writes that prior to deployment, “We did not understand certain dynamics at play, such as the notion that excessive force protection alienates the populace, reduces intelligence and, therefore, makes one less secure. We knew how to raid a house but not how to build local relationships and learn where insurgents were hiding. We did not know these crucial aspects of counterinsurgency because we had never received training about them.”

Keep in mind that Swabb went to Iraq more than year into the guerrilla war, and that he served in the Marine Corps, which has traditionally placed more emphasis on “small war” skills than have the other services. And yet, by his own testimony, he did not understand the most basic tenets of counterinsurgency warfare—especially the fundamental paradox that too much aggression can be counterproductive, and that a “softer” approach can actually produce better results.

The armed services, in particular the Army and Marine Corps, are now doing a better job of training for such missions--but not good enough. That is why General George Casey Jr. felt compelled to set up his own counterinsurgency school in Iraq for newly arriving officers, a job that should have been done before they shipped off to war. Clearly there is a need for more training focused on this critical subject, as there is for more language training. Anything this Committee could do to further prod the armed forces in this direction would be extremely useful. The Quadrennial Defense Review made the right noises about the need to focus on stability operations, language training, and related areas, but the defense budget remains overwhelmingly focused on conventional programs. Much more needs to be done to turn the rhetoric about irregular warfare into reality.

No one suggests that we go too far in the opposite direction and focus our military exclusively on waging “small wars.” There is still a need to be able to fight large, conventional conflicts against potential adversaries like China and North Korea, if only to prevent them from happening in the first place. And while the regular armed forces must gain greater competence in counterinsurgency and related disciplines, they should not become the main focus of most soldiers, sailors, airmen, or marines.

The bulk of this task should fall to specialists—the men and women who will be on the front lines of the war on terror for decades to come. They must be experts in such fields as ethnography, linguistics, geography, history, economics, politics, policing, public relations, public administration, diplomacy, low-intensity conflict, and human intelligence collection and analysis—preferably at the same time. Merely to state the list is to make obvious our shortcomings in all of these areas. We do not have nearly enough Gertrude Bells, T.E. Lawrences, Charles “Chinese” Gordons, or Richard Francis Burtons, to name only a few of the area experts from the heyday of the British Empire who immersed themselves in foreign cultures in order to advance Whitehall’s interests across the globe.

### **Experts Needed**

Such learned men and women can be invaluable “force multipliers.” Consider the case of Colonel Robert Warburton, who spoke fluent Persian and Pashto and spent 18 years (1879-1897) as the political officer in the Northwest Frontier province of what is today Pakistan. He kept this volatile region (now a Taliban and al Qaeda stronghold) quiet through his personal influence. “In an area where every male was habitually armed at all times,” historian Byron Farwell wrote in *Queen Victoria’s Little Wars*, “he went about with only a walking stick.” Within a month of his retirement, the area was swept by an Islamic fundamentalist revolt that took thousands of British soldiers to put down. I daresay we would have more luck pacifying the Northwest Frontier—now a key task for our forces in Afghanistan—if we had more Warburtons of our own.

Unfortunately the personnel system employed not only by the armed forces but also by State Department, CIA, and other government agencies makes it practically impossible to develop such expertise. Diplomats, soldiers, and spies alike are shuffled from post to post with dizzying rapidity. The average army officer spends an average of only 18 months at each assignment over the course of a 25-year career. The army rotates units out of Afghanistan and Iraq every year, the Marines every six to seven months. The State Department and the CIA move their employees just as often, if not more so. So just when our people on the spot start to figure out what’s going on in these complex cultures, that’s when it’s time for them to go home and for novices to replace them.

The logic behind this system is that soldiers and other government employees are supposed to be nearly interchangeable cogs in a giant machine—a tank driver ought to be able to drive an M-1 whether in Alabama or Anbar. But cultural knowledge cannot be so easily taught or transferred. In tribal societies, influence is entirely personal; the relationships cultivated by one soldier, spy, or diplomat cannot easily be passed along to a successor.

Our personnel system further places a premium on moving officers from slot to slot—from line commands to staff jobs and schools, from

combat to garrison duty—in order to develop a corps of generalists from which eventually the senior leaders of the services will be selected. There is a lot to be said for this system, but there must also be a way for some experts to opt out of the endless rotations—to stay for years, even decades, in one job or one place and thereby gain the kind of specialized expertise that we so desperately need in the war on terrorism.

### **SOCOM's Shortcomings**

In theory, the place where much of the expertise which I have previously described ought to reside, at least as far as the armed forces go, is the U.S. Special Operations Command. SOCOM has been designated the lead combat component in the war on terror for this very reason. In practice, however, SOCOM falls far short of what we need. It is overly focused on what is known in the trade as Direct Action—on rappelling out of helicopters, kicking down doors, and capturing or killing bad guys. This strategy can occasionally pay off, as with the capture of Saddam Hussein and the killing of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, but the aftermath of these celebrated accomplishments shows the limitations of the “manhunter” model of counterinsurgency. In both cases, the immobilization of major enemy leaders proved to be only temporary setbacks for a large-scale, decentralized terrorist movement. Making real progress, whether in Iraq or other locales, will require accomplishing much more difficult, less glamorous tasks such as establishing security, furthering economic and political development, and spreading the right information to win over the populace.

Above all, it will require working with indigenous allies who must necessarily carry the bulk of the burden in this type of conflict. Native recruits have been key to America's most successful counterinsurgencies, whether the Apache scouts who helped track down the renegade chief Geronimo in 1886 or the Macabebe Scouts who helped capture Philippine rebel leader Emilio Aguinaldo in 1901. Reliance on these native helpers is necessary because few if any outsiders can be expected to match guerrillas' knowledge of local topography and society. Nor is it likely that the U.S. will ever be able to send enough soldiers overseas to win a major insurgency on their own; our resources are sufficiently limited that it will always be necessary to rely in great part on locally recruited soldiers and constables when waging an insurgency or counterinsurgency.

In the modern Special Operations lexicon, such tasks fall under the rubric of “unconventional warfare” (i.e., helping indigenous allies to carry out guerrilla operations, psy-ops, intelligence-gathering, and related activities) and “foreign internal defense” (helping friendly governments defeat guerrillas and bandits), and they are two of the primary missions of the Army Special Forces, popularly known as the Green Berets, who are supposed to work closely with psychological operations and civil affairs specialists. But there is widespread concern within Army SF

circles that their “softer”, but no less vital, missions are being shortchanged by SOCOM in favor of sexier SWAT-style raids.

One recently retired SF colonel wrote to me a few weeks ago: “The current problem with SOCOM is that it is unbalanced. Most of the leadership and planning staff have come from the DA [Direct Action] side. They have no understanding of UW [Unconventional Warfare]. To the degree that they are starting to develop an appreciation for it, it is only as an enabler for DA operations. In other words, they want to cherry pick techniques developed to wage unconventional war and use them to support conventional commando operations.”

Another more senior, retired SF officer emailed to complain of the “total USSOCOM preoccupation with raiding--SOF orientation on Special Operations and absolutely none on Low Intensity Conflict. OSD-SOLIC [Office of the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict] only has fulfilled 1/2 of its charter. Low Intensity Conflict died around 1990-91.”

Similar concerns have been aired in print—for instance in Sean Naylor’s Armed Forces Journal article, “More Than Door Kickers” (March 2006), which quoted yet another retired SF officer (Lieutenant Colonel Mark Haselton), complaining, “My concern is that all we’re focused on is direct action, to the absolute exclusion of all other things.... If we the spend the rest of our lives ‘capturing and killing’ terrorists a the expense of those SF missions that are more important—gaining access to the local population, training indigenous forces, providing expertise and expanding capacity—we’re doomed to failure.”

When I hear such complaints coming from so many “snake eaters” for whom I have such high respect, I take them seriously, and I think the members of this Committee should too. SOCOM has created the best commando forces in the world, but it will take more than commandos to win the war on terror.

### **An Unconventional Warfare Command?**

The question is, what to do about this? Is it possible to get SOCOM to refocus more on Unconventional Warfare and less on Direct Action? Probably not. Already SOCOM has transferred most of its psy-ops and civil affairs capabilities—areas of scant interest to most Navy SEALs, Army Rangers, or Delta Force operatives—to the regular army. And, as Naylor noted, of the eight top flag officers at SOCOM’s headquarters at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida, not one spent his career in Special Forces. (General Bryan “Doug” Brown, the SOCOM commander, once served on an A-Team as an enlisted man many decades ago, but his specialty as an officer has been special operations aviation.) The institutional culture of SOCOM is so firmly fixed in favor of “kicking down doors”—and so much of its funding is directed for such purposes—that it is doubtful that any amount of outside pressure, even from this

Committee, will change the dominant mindset very much, especially when the Office of the Secretary of Defense remains so fixated on such missions.

For this reason there is growing interest within the U.S. Army SF community in creating a new Joint Unconventional Warfare Command within SOCOM—a UW equivalent to the Joint Special Operations Command which encompasses units like Delta Force (a.k.a. 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta) and Seal Team Six (a.k.a. Naval Special Warfare Development Group, or DevGru), and focuses on Direct Action missions. An Unconventional Warfare Command could bring together Army Special Forces, civil-affairs, and psy-ops by essentially expanding the role of the Army Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. According to a paper commissioned by the Army Special Operations Command Futures Center, this new command “could fight the GWOT [Global War on Terror] by organizing, training, equipping and/or leading indigenous assets to conduct subversion, sabotage and intelligence activities directed against groups practicing terrorism or against nation-states supporting terrorism directed against U.S. interests throughout the world.”

This strikes me as a good idea, but I would also urge the Committee to consider going further and removing the Unconventional Warfare mission from SOCOM altogether. I would like to conclude my testimony with a bold idea for how this could be accomplished: by resurrecting the Office of Strategic Services that was created in 1942 to gather and analyze intelligence as well as to conduct low-intensity warfare behind enemy lines in occupied Europe and Asia.

## **OSS Redux**

OSS was disbanded after World War II; both the Green Berets and the CIA trace their lineage to this august ancestor. My proposal is to re-create OSS by bringing together under one roof not only Army SF, civil-affairs, and psy-ops but also the CIA’s paramilitary Special Activities Division, which has always been a bit of a bureaucratic orphan at Langley (and which is staffed largely by Special Operations veterans). This could be a joint civil-military agency under the combined oversight of the Secretary of Defense and the Director of National Intelligence, like the Defense Intelligence Agency or the National Security Agency. It would bring together in one place all of the key skill sets needed to wage the softer side of the war on terror. Like SOCOM, it would have access to military personnel and assets; but like the CIA’s Special Activities Division, its operations would contain a higher degree of “covertness,” flexibility, and “deniability” than those carried out by the uniformed military.

One of the key advantages of OSS II is that it would be able to employ indigenous personnel on a much larger scale than is practicable today. There is currently a legal prohibition on recruiting into the U.S.

armed forces anyone who is not an American citizen or permanent resident (Green Card holder). The CIA also looks askance upon non-American officers (as opposed to agents). These are considered “security risks.” But the greater risk is that we will lose the war on terror because we don’t have enough understanding of the societies in which terrorists operate. Such knowledge can be acquired in one of two ways: either by long-term immersion in foreign societies or by simply recruiting from the societies in which we fight. OSS II could facilitate both approaches, in the first place by junking the military’s overly restrictive personnel rotation policies, and in the second place by junking its overly restrictive citizenship requirements.

The Green Berets recruited non-citizens in the 1950s when the Lodge Act allowed the enlistment of Eastern Europeans who were considered vital for operations behind the Iron Curtain. Something similar should be tried today to recruit from Muslim societies around the world, starting with the Middle Eastern immigrant community right here in the U.S. (The most reliable recruits would probably be ethnic or religious minorities within Muslim societies—Egyptian Copts, Moroccan Jews, Lebanese Druze, Iranian Azeris, Saudi Shiites, Iraqi and Iranian Kurds, etc.—just as the U.S. has previously made use of minorities such as the Philippine Macabebes and the Vietnamese Montagnards.) I bet there would be plenty of high-quality recruits who would be willing to serve in return for one of the world’s most precious commodities—U.S. citizenship.

It might even make sense to create an entire brigade or even a division of foreign fighters led by American officers and NCOs. Call it the Freedom Legion, in homage to the French Foreign Legion. Such units have been successfully raised by every great power in history. Think, for example, of the Gurkhas who still serve in large numbers, and with considerable distinction, in the British and Indian armies. Some Americans may recoil from the idea of enlisting “mercenaries” but these men and women would be a lot more useful and a lot more disciplined than most of the “security contractors” we employ en masse today in places like Iraq. More specialized indigenous units could be formed specifically to work in areas like Somalia, Syria, North Korea, and Iran, where there is either no effective local government or the government is hostile to the U.S. OSS II would be a natural repository for such outfits, considering the success of the original OSS in running indigenous forces such as the Kachin tribesmen who battled the Japanese in Burma.

It would be a bit more of a stretch to designate OSS II as the primary repository of nation-building expertise within the U.S. government, but given the unwillingness of other agencies, civil or military, to fill this yawning gap, this might be the most convenient expedient. The new OSS could cultivate a corps of experts, civil and military, coming from both government and the private sector, who would be skilled in the difficult task of rebuilding stateless or war-torn societies in cooperation with other federal departments, international agencies, American allies, and non-governmental organizations. These skills are

closely related to those needed for counterinsurgency, because the most effective way to counter any insurgency is not to kill a bunch of guerrillas but to create an effective government that can provide for the needs of the people better than can the guerrillas' shadow government. We have paid a heavy price in Iraq for not having such a nation-building (or, more accurately, state-building) capacity on tap; Jay Garner's Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance and Jerry Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority were last-minute expedients that could not possibly have succeeded because they did not spend nearly enough time preparing for the daunting task of running a country of 25 million people.

I realize that the creation of a new OSS is a radical notion that could not be implemented tomorrow. It would require the most sweeping legislation since the 1987 Nunn-Cohen Amendment that created SOCOM in the first place. Obviously such a step needs a good deal more study and discussion. But if we are to be successful in the Long War, we need to think outside of the traditional bureaucratic boxes, because the U.S. government as currently set up—and that most assuredly includes SOCOM—simply is not adequately configured for the tasks ahead. Given the potential threat posed by our enemies—a threat of which we were reminded by news of an Al Qaeda plot to release poison gas on the New York subway—that could turn out to be a very dangerous deficiency.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

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## MAX BOOT

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His last book, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (Basic Books) was selected as one of the best books of 2002 by The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times and The Christian Science Monitor. It also won the 2003 General Wallace M. Greene Jr. Award, given annually by the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation for the best nonfiction book pertaining to Marine Corps history. He is now completing his next book, *War Made New: Technology, Warfare, and the Course of History, 1500 to Today*, which will be published in October 2006 by Gotham Books, an imprint of Penguin (USA).

Boot is a frequent public speaker and guest on radio and television news programs, both at home and abroad. He has lectured at many military institutions, including the Army and Navy War Colleges, the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare School, the Army Command and General Staff College, Marine Corps University, West Point, and the Naval Academy. He is a member of the U.S. Joint Forces Command Transformation Advisory Group.

Before joining the Council in October 2002, Boot spent eight years as a writer and editor at *The Wall Street Journal*, the last five years as editorial features editor. From 1992 to 1994 he was an editor and writer at The Christian Science Monitor.

Boot holds a bachelor's degree in history, with high honors, from the University of California, Berkeley (1991), and a master's degree in history from Yale University (1992). He grew up in Los Angeles and now lives with his family in the New York area.