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STATEMENT OF
LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL W. WOOLEY, U.S. AIR FORCE
COMMANDER
AIR FORCE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND
BEFORE THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM, UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS AND
CAPABILITIES
ON CURRENT MANNING, EQUIPPING, AND READINESS CHALLENGES FACING
SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES
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Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor and privilege to report to you on the state of the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC). As you are well aware, the men and women of AFSOC continue to be actively engaged in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), both on the ground and in the air. As America's specialized airpower, our number one priority is to support the mission directives of the United States Special Operations Command.

Introduction

Today our AC-130 Gunships, one of the most highly tasked air assets, continue to provide precise fire support to conventional and special operations forces on the ground. In the past 6 months we have delivered over 6,100 rounds of 105mm howitzer ordnance, 15,000 rounds of 40mm, and 38,000 rounds of 25mm. To accomplish that required 791 sorties, encompassing 4,398 flying hours. In that same period, our MC-130 Combat Talons and Combat Shadows have flown over 987 sorties encompassing 1,695 flying hours while our MH-53 PaveLow Helicopters flew 661 sorties and 1,045 hours to provide direct support to special operations ground force movements, positioning joint teams on the battlefield and extracting them once their missions are complete.

In addition to the aerial missions, AFSOC Battlefield Airmen (Combat Controllers, Pararescuemen, and Combat Weathermen) have been instrumental in creating an air-

ground interface, linking the awesome firepower from air platforms directly to forces on the ground. These Airmen are embedded with ground forces -- they train and operate as members of those ground teams -- and are equipped to designate targets and control ordinance delivery from B-52s thousands of feet above the battlefield, to fighters dropping guided weapons, to low flying helicopter gunships. They also provide a battlefield triage/rescue capability, along with a unique, remote weather observation and forecast capability. In the past 6 months, combat controllers have controlled air assets in nearly 2000 missions, resulting in delivery of over 320,000 pounds of ordinance in support of combat missions.

Our role in GWOT is expanding, resulting in new mission areas to prosecute the war today and tomorrow. These plus-up areas include not only airframes and associated crews, but increased Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capability teamed with Unmanned Aerial System technology to process, exploit, and disseminate actionable intelligence to our coalition forces seeking to kill or capture our nations enemies. AFSOC Airmen fly the Predators and AFSOC Airmen implement an AFSOC-developed analytical methodology that focuses on constant observation of persons or locations of interest. This analysis has greatly improved the “find” ability in targeting terrorists in today’s environment, and has lead to “finishing” (capture or kill) of hundreds of high value individuals.

Personnel end-strength requirements

AFSOC’s total force is a little over 13,000 active duty, Reserve, Guard, and civilian personnel. This equates to only 1.8% of Air Force manpower. Of this number,

our current end strength is 9,825 active duty personnel, with a fill rate of 96%. The most recent QDR recommended the addition of 771 additional positions to meet increased global demand for AFSOC forces. This increased capability is in three mission areas: Unmanned Aerial Systems, Intelligence, and Aviation Foreign Internal Defense (AFID).

To execute the QDR recommended growth, we have activated a Predator squadron (3 SOS), sourced the initial cadre, and are currently controlling missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. We will receive 123 of the 248 new authorizations in FY08, the remaining positions in FY09, and are actively working with the Air Force's Air Education and Training Command (AETC) to ensure sufficient training slots to support this growth. The primary aircrew training challenge remains initial training slots. The speed at which the UAV force buildup has occurred has resulted in an overload on initial training resources.

Operating Predators is just one piece of the puzzle. Our SOF operators also need uniquely skilled personnel to process, exploit and disseminate (PED) the data gathered by UAVs and other intelligence sources. To meet this need, we have activated the 11th Intelligence Squadron (11 IS) with the majority of authorizations programmed for FY08 and FY09. As of today, we have already filled 58% of the initial allocation. Our biggest challenge will be filling the authorization vacancies. With the operational experience we have gained so far, the command has identified a requirement for additional growth in personnel to meet the desired QDR capability. This growth will be addressed in future POM submissions.

Lastly, we are expanding the size of our unique Aviation Foreign Internal Defense (AFID) capability, an elite squadron that works directly with coalition partner

militaries to help them defeat internal terrorist threats. As recommended by the QDR, the unit will double its ability to provide teams to partner nations. To date, 161 of the unit's 225 authorizations have been filled and it is projected that the remaining positions will be filled by the end of FY07. This is a major accomplishment based on the unique requirements for the 6 SOS. Personnel assigned to this unit require exceptional teaching skills and a developed maturity to operate as a representative of AFSOC, the Air Force, and the United States. This is an all-volunteer unit and often requires a priority fill at the expense of other organizations.

Bottom line is the QDR growth is being executed. We are dealing with unique challenges and manning the force with required experience by using intra-command cross-flow.

Selection standards and challenges in recruiting and retention

AFSOC selection standards and application vary with different units. Some unique units like the 6 SOS have very specific selection standards (instructor qualification, language qualification) others, such as Combat Controllers, Pararescuemen, and Combat Weathermen have demanding physical qualifications (timed run, pull-ups, sit-ups). For the rest, rigorous Air Force training and evaluation standards for basic aircrew training provide initial screening. From the time aircrews enter the training pipeline for AFSOC weapon systems they are constantly evaluated through initial qualification and recurring checkrides, as well as observation and assessment by their supervisors and commanders.

The most significant challenge AFSOC faces in obtaining the personnel we require, is our ability to train. While we rely on the Air Force to provide initial skills training, AFSOC forces typically require 4-12 months of additional training to get new accessions to the entry level in an AFSOC unit. While most of the initial qualification courses have high completion rates, our SOF skills training courses tend to be very demanding and lengthy. This contributes to higher washout rates and longer lead times to replace losses. Our Combat Controllers and Pararescuemen currently experience 60-70% washout rate due largely to self-initiated eliminations, injuries incurred during training, and failure to pass the water phase of training.

In the past, Combat Controller training took 3-4 years from accession to fully mission ready status. After 18-24 months of initial qualification training, they were assigned to operational units, but still required an additional 18-24 months of training to be mission ready. To reduce the stress on operational units, improve and standardize training, and reduce overall pipeline length, AFSOC and Air Education and Training Command (AETC) re-engineered the entire training pipeline. Key to this re-engineering was the creation of an Advanced Skills Training (AST) program. This initiative has reduced the length of the training pipeline to an average of 24 months, improved the quality of instruction and provides operational units with fully qualified personnel — that is a 50% cut in the length of the training program while maintaining the high quality that we have always had.

In a time of extremely high operations tempo and frequent deployments, AFSOC's FY06 first-term reenlistment rate for Battlefield Airmen and enlisted aircrew member was 64 percent, which exceeded the Air Force average of 55 percent. The

career Airman reenlistment rate for this same group was 98 percent. We believe our Air Commando's sense of mission accomplishment coupled with appropriate compensation to include special pays and bonuses have made this possible.

The SOF Truth of "Special Operations Forces cannot be mass produced" rings true. For the first time, we are able to project that available resources will match requirements because of streamlined training pipelines.

Expediting the training pipeline

AFSOC continually reviews recruitment and training standards to maximize the efficiency of the training pipeline. At this time, I feel that those standards are valid. Our analysis indicates that the best way to reduce the length of our training programs and increase operational readiness is to invest in new training facilities specifically designed to meet the command's unique requirements and to provide high-fidelity simulators at our schoolhouses and operational bases.

An AST facility is currently under construction at Hurlburt Field, Florida. When completed in April, our future Battlefield Airmen will have a state-of-the-art facility that will maximize the quality of their training and allow for future growth. The Air Force has also identified a need for a new training facility at Kirtland AFB, New Mexico to support increased Pararescueman training. This new facility is currently an unfunded MILCON project.

For aircrews, the most significant limiting factor on our ability to increase training is a lack of resources to establish an industrial-strength training capability. For example, within AFSOC our AC-130 schoolhouse competes for the same aircraft

currently deployed to the battlefield. With over 60% of the AC-130 fleet deployed, our ability to train replacements or surge for combat operations is limited. To reduce the demand on all of the command's limited airframes, additional Level-D simulators are needed to provide initial qualification, upgrade, and continuation training for the operational units. These high-fidelity simulators will allow aircrews to complete many of their required currency training events at home station regardless of the availability of actual aircraft.

Conclusion

The bottom line on end-strength is that while AFSOC does have some challenges ahead in order to meet requirements, I do not believe that our situation is unmanageable. We have worked closely with the Air Force to fill the most critical requirements and are working to develop long-term fixes to our manning shortfalls. Processing personnel through the training pipeline is our challenge. In order to reduce the training timeline, while maintaining high standards, we will continue to improve and invest in our training equipment and facilities.

Before closing, I want to address my #1 concern. Many of the aircraft that the command flies today began their service in the Vietnam war. Our MC-130P and MC-130E aircraft have an average age of 40+ years and our AC-130H average 37 years. The ability to provide specialized airpower depends on the unique airlift and firepower capabilities of these aircraft. These aircraft must be recapitalized in order to meet current and future requirements, as well as increased airlift requirements (driven by QDR growth) in other components of USSOCOM. We have begun the process to

program replacement the MC-130Ps and MC-130Es. We are also in the process of refining the requirements for the next Gunship, which will be required to operate day or night, and in high threat areas to provide close air support to our troops on the ground. The replacement of our aging fleet has become more urgent due to the Center Wing Box issues we have on our remaining aircraft, which average 25 years old. Your support will be required to make this recapitalization plan a reality.

I appreciate the opportunity to meet with you today. I am very proud of the Air Commandos and I hope that I have been able to provide you with a better understanding of AFSOC's unique needs. I can assure you that every member of the command is dedicated to improving the efficiency of our operations. The Air Force has a tradition of embracing new technologies and capabilities to improve effectiveness. AFSOC may be a small command, but we are at the forefront of transformation.

Again, thank you for your time. I look forward to answering your questions.