

**STATEMENT OF COL VINCENT M. REAP
TO
THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM,
UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS AND CAPABILITIES
'CLOSING THE GAP: ADDRESSING CRITICAL ROTARY WING SHORTFALLS
FOR U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS IN FISCAL YEAR 2011 AND BEYOND'
27 APRIL 2010**

Good afternoon, Madam Chairwoman, Congressman Miller, and distinguished Members of the Committee. Thank you for the invitation to appear before you to highlight US Special Operations Forces' (USSOF) rotary wing aviation program. Thanks to the foresight, advocacy and strong support of this body, we remain well positioned to meet the Nation's expectations of its Special Operations Forces.

US Special Operations Command's (USSOCOM) unique responsibilities include providing SOF with specialized equipment to perform their worldwide missions. An essential portion of this equipment are the Command's vertical lift aircraft, assets capable of operating at extended ranges and under adverse weather conditions to infiltrate, resupply, reinforce, and extract SOF. For example, our rotary wing aircraft – MH-47, MH-60, and A/MH-6 - and tilt rotor aircraft CV-22 provide organic special operations aviation support for worldwide contingency operations and full spectrum conflict.

Due to the realities of fighting multiple conflicts in exceptionally challenging environments, the value of vertical lift aircraft in support of Special Operations Forces cannot be emphasized enough. Helicopters and tilt-rotor aircraft provide a unique and potent military capability, one which spans all Services within the Department of Defense (DoD).

Despite their prominence and necessity, deployable rotary wing assets remain limited. Several DoD-wide studies over the past 18 months – most notably the Joint Staff’s Review of Helicopter Assets (ROHA) and a Department of the Army sponsored RAND Study - substantiated this rotary-wing lift capacity shortfall. The Operational Availability Study 08 (OA 08), the Joint Staff Global Force Management Persistent Shortfall study and COCOM Integrated Priority Lists (IPLs) all corroborated the need for additional rotary wing lift capacity.

Shortages aside, the Command’s inventory mix of MH-47, MH-60, A/MH-6, and CV-22s continue to provide the right capabilities that SOF sorely need: fire support, long range, night-vision and targeting, over the horizon communications, force protection, and precision navigation. Simply put, the improved survivability equipment, advanced training, and extended ranges of Special Operations aviation empower mission profiles unattainable by any other fleet.

An elite fleet continues as such only through proper nurture. USSOCOM’s modernization efforts first began with the MH-47G, and extended to transformations of both legacy MH-60L and MH-60K aircraft to an upgraded MH-60M. This current transformation incorporates improved engines and avionics, producing increased performance in high altitude and high temperature environments. The results are aircraft capable of supporting SOF and Geographic Combatant Commanders for years to come.

As a global force provider, this support is paramount to USSOCOM’s strategy for its aviation fleet. The Command continuously evaluates its aviation capacity, carefully tailoring each to Geographic Combatant Commanders’ prioritized needs. The result is

an ideal mix of capabilities for troop and cargo movement, aerial refueling, and surveillance or penetration of and/or into denied areas.

SOF force structure growth remains rapid and unprecedented. But the time required to manufacture and modify Special Operations Aviation airframes plus train the special operations pilots who will operate them created an imbalance of required lift for SOF. This capacity imbalance grew larger with the obsolescence and retirement of the MH-53, fielding of the CV-22, and finally the overall modernization effort and growth in inventories of MH-47 and MH-60 aircraft. All occurred with units engaged in continuous combat operations. The FY 2011 budget request attempts to address these realities, requesting continued support for a program aimed at achieving required capacity by the end of the Future Years Defense Plan.

In tandem, USSOCOM is working closely with the Services to mitigate rotary wing lift shortfalls. Partnering with General Purpose Forces aviation and increased Service support of helicopter operations of deployed SOF combine to provide a critical enabling capability to our deployed Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Airmen.

For instance, the Navy is coordinating with USSOCOM to align two Navy helicopter squadrons with SOF support as their primary focus. Related, the Army dedicated resources to increase production of Army helicopter pilots, assets used to increase the helicopter pilot training cadre at Fort Rucker while improving its corresponding training support. The Army is simultaneously consolidating aircraft into an additional Combat Aviation Brigade, and will eventually add a 13th Combat Aviation Brigade to its Force Structure. The downstream effect of this combined Army growth will be an increase in the manning of Army SOF rotary wing units, plus expanded

conventional force capacity to support SOF. As always, and like the Services, USSOCOM does not normally exercise operational control over its deployed units; employment and allocation of in-theater supporting assets remain directed by the Geographic Combatant Commanders.

It takes time, however, to glean the benefit of programmed growth. With DoD acting on the recent Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)'s recommended addition of eight MH47 helicopters over a five-year period, USSOF will see an increase in Chinook inventory from the 61 by end of this year to 69 MH47s once the Service Life Extension Program is complete. The Command's Blackhawk fleet will grow in unison, with 10 more of this aircraft to be added to inventory by the completion of the modernization program.

A key hurdle to expansion of SOF capacity and accompanying capabilities is the training and professional development of personnel. As relayed by Admiral Olson before this committee, the Command's growth rate is carefully managed at three to five percent annually to maximize production while keeping the highest standards expected of SOF. Sound stewardship, however, results in an accompanying tradeoff in the number of key units and capabilities within SOF organizational structures and training pipelines. The rotary wing program is no stranger to this tradeoff, with programmed expansion of this capacity at the upper boundary of the Command's maximum supportable growth rate. This capacity, of course, must also be weighed against other critical needs.

The USSOCOM FY 2011 budget request includes three key aviation funding items: \$79.8 million for rotary wing upgrades and sustainment, \$108 million for the

Service Life Extension of the MH-47 helicopters, and \$179 million for MH-60 modifications. Replacements of aircraft lost in combat and training accidents round out requests in the FY 2010 Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) request.

Desired outputs from this funding are substantial. To begin, this funding offers ongoing survivability, reliability, maintainability, and operational upgrades as well as sustainment costs for fielded rotary wing aircraft and subsystems. Second, it includes procurement of 16 additional MH-60 helicopters plus the advance procurement of long-lead items for an additional eight MH-47G helicopters. Last, supporting plans and programs yield the resources necessary to support growth in airframe numbers and the pilot training pipeline required to man them.

With sustainable growth and peculiar force requirements, commanders consider many variables when making decisions on how to allocate aviation assets, respecting the finite amount of personnel and equipment from which to draw. In the short-term, USSOCOM will continue to evaluate competing regional requirements, make prioritized recommendations on the allocation of limited rotary wing resources, and investigate initiatives to mitigate shortfalls.

The FY 2011 budget request exists as a good starting point for a longer term look at this valuable asset. In doing so, it proposes a transition from shortfall to upward momentum in the SOF rotary wing and tilt rotor aircraft programs. Targeted upgrades include substantial capability and capacity gains for both SOF and the Geographic Combatant Commanders they serve, crucial stepping stones in reversing a capacity and capability gap toward one of increased outcomes for our special operators. Controlled growth, proper stewardship and highly trained operators are the SOF tenets we extend

to rotary wing and tilt rotor aircraft. All are made possible through the continued support of this Committee. Speaking on behalf of U.S. Special Operations Command, I thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I look forward to answering any of your questions.