

[H.A.S.C. No. 116-76]

**NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES AND  
U.S. MILITARY ACTIVITIES IN THE  
GREATER MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA**

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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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HEARING HELD  
MARCH 10, 2020



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U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

43-478

WASHINGTON : 2021

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ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

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# CONTENTS

	Page
STATEMENTS PRESENTED BY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS	
Smith, Hon. Adam, a Representative from Washington, Chairman, Committee on Armed Services .....	1
Thornberry, Hon. William M. "Mac," a Representative from Texas, Ranking Member, Committee on Armed Services .....	2
WITNESSES	
McKenzie, Gen Kenneth F., Jr., USMC, Commander, U.S. Central Command .	4
Townsend, GEN Stephen J., USA, Commander, U.S. Africa Command .....	6
Wheelbarger, Kathryn, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Department of Defense .....	3
APPENDIX	
PREPARED STATEMENTS:	
McKenzie, Gen Kenneth F., Jr. ....	62
Townsend, GEN Stephen J. ....	79
Wheelbarger, Kathryn .....	47
DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD:	
[There were no Documents submitted.]	
WITNESS RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED DURING THE HEARING:	
Mr. Gallagher .....	101
Mr. Gallego .....	102
Ms. Houlahan .....	101
Mr. Rogers .....	102
Ms. Torres Small .....	101
QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING:	
Mr. Gallego .....	108
Mr. Golden .....	111
Ms. Houlahan .....	110
Mr. Kim .....	110
Mr. Lamborn .....	105
Mr. Scott .....	106
Mr. Vela .....	109



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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,  
*Washington, DC, Tuesday, March 10, 2020.*

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:03 a.m., in room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Adam Smith (chairman of the committee) presiding.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ADAM SMITH, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM WASHINGTON, CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

The CHAIRMAN. Good morning. We will call the meeting to order.

This morning we are hearing about national security challenges and U.S. military activities in the greater Middle East and Africa as part of our ongoing posture hearings as we prepare for the fiscal year 2021 budget. This is basically the presentation of the President's budget for these regions.

And we have witnesses this morning. Ms. Kathryn Wheelbarger, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. I think this is the first time we have seen you since the job change, so congratulations and welcome back. General Kenneth McKenzie, who is the Commander of the U.S. Central Command [CENTCOM]; and General Stephen Townsend, who is the Commander of the U.S. Africa Command [AFRICOM].

Welcome, all of you. Look forward to hearing from your testimony about the very important regions that you are responsible for.

And I think the big challenge as we are going through this posture hearing is the sheer number of challenges. And, you know, AFRICOM sort of got a lot of attention here recently because, as we focused on the pivot to Asia, the focus on great power competition, there was the notion that, well, what can we sort of not do anymore, and Africa popped up, mainly because I guess you are first in the alphabet for the blank slate review there. I don't think they did it that way, but you came up first anyway.

But it did prompt a very interesting discussion about how the world is interconnected. And having just returned from a CODEL [congressional delegation] to Africa a few weeks ago, the great power competition is alive and well on the continent of Africa. So when we are looking at how we meet the national security challenges we have, we have to look at them in a broad, broad geographical way. Russia and China are certainly very active in Africa, as we are as well, so how do we meet our interests there? And

I know there has been a lot of interest in that subject, and we will look forward to those comments from the members who ask questions about that.

Obviously, Central Command has been the central focus for going on 20 years now. Between Afghanistan and Iraq and various activities in the Middle East, it continues to be a challenge. And while we are focused on great power competition, that great power competition, of course, is present in the Central Command as well, but we also have to continue to be worried about the threat from violent extremist organizations. And, you know, the lesson learned right back to 9/11 started in Afghanistan. An ungoverned space became fertile ground for a dangerous terrorist organization to find safe haven and plot and plan attacks against us and our interests, and that risk is still there. If we do not find partners in regions like the Central Command represents to deter those groups from forming, they will form, and they are still there; ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria], al-Qaida, and various other offshoots.

So we have to have a plan to meet all of our challenges in a reasonable way within our budget. And I think these two regions are particularly ripe for a discussion of how we do that, because you can sort of look at the needs there and it can very quickly overwhelm you in terms of the resources we have available.

Let me say I am a hundred percent confident with the best U.S. military the world has ever seen, with the number of partners that we have and the capabilities that we can bring to bear that we can absolutely meet those challenges, if we are smart. If we make the right resource decisions, if we manage risks in an appropriate way, and if we, you know, give our troops the support they need, I am a hundred percent confident that we can meet those challenges, even in complex parts of the world like the two that you gentlemen represent.

Lastly, given what is going on in the world, we will need to hear from you about how the coronavirus is impacting your regions. Obviously, Iran is one of the most impacted countries, and how that affects things and how it is affecting your operations as we have seen, you know, various cancellations, travel restrictions, difficulties. Your perspective on how that is going to impact your areas of responsibility will be very helpful to informing us how we can help you do that. And that is all I have.

With that, I will turn it over to Ranking Member Thornberry for his opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF HON. WILLIAM M. "MAC" THORNBERRY, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM TEXAS, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

Mr. THORNBERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And let me join in welcoming each of our witnesses here today.

And, General McKenzie, let me begin by expressing condolences at the loss of two Marines in Iraq within the past couple of days. My understanding is they were working with Iraqi forces to clear out ISIS from some tunnels in a complex there and have given the ultimate sacrifice to protect us here at home.

I support the National Defense Strategy. I completely agree—and I think it makes sense to put greater emphasis on great power

competition. I completely agree with the chairman that great power competition takes place all over the world. And his recent trip, as well as these two maps that are in front of us, show Russia and Chinese activity in Africa as one example. Also takes place in the Middle East and South Asia. It occurs all over the world.

But the rest of the story is the job against terrorism is not done yet. They are certainly not finished with us, and we cannot wish it away and just presume that if we say peace has broken out, that they are going to leave us alone. And I think it is—you know, we get focused on different issues as time goes on. I think it is an important reminder that every day there are men and women risking their lives to protect us here at home from terrorist threat, and that is true in Afghanistan, it is true in Iraq and Syria, and it is true in Africa. It is true in a variety of places around the world. And so as we talk about great power competition, I don't think we can forget the other issue, and we certainly can't afford to walk away from it. And in y'all's two AORs [areas of responsibility], that is particularly true.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Before we begin, two quick programming announcements. We are again going in reverse order on our questions, so we will start with me and Mr. Thornberry, and then we will go in reverse order. Second, we have a classified hearing after the public hearing, so we will stop exactly at noon and head upstairs to 2212 for the classified portion of this hearing.

And with that, I will turn it over to Ms. Wheelbarger for her opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF KATHRYN WHEELBARGER, ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Good morning, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, distinguished members of this committee. We are grateful for the opportunity to testify today.

I would like to start by thanking the men and women of the Department of Defense whose dedication and sacrifices enable us to achieve our objectives in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere. I would also like to recognize the strong collaboration and bipartisan support provided by this committee. As I said last year, as a former professional staffer on multiple committees in Congress, I understand that this is a vital institution, ensuring our military has the resources, oversight, and political legitimacy to succeed at the hard missions we give it. Congress also helps ensure we have civilian control of the military, as enshrined in the Constitution and required for the preservation of our democratic values. So thank you for all you do.

As you know, our approach to the Middle East and Africa policy is guided by our National Security Strategy and our NDS [National Defense Strategy]. Our overall goals are to protect the American people, defend the homeland, and promote prosperity and peace from a position of strength. As you have heard numerous times, our NDS directs the Department to focus on near-peer competition, while remaining vigilant and countering threats from rogue states

like Iran and North Korea and continuing to address violent extremist organizations like al-Qaida and ISIS.

The need to address near-peer competitors requires us to make adjustments to our posture and avoid prioritizing near-term problems at the expense of building readiness and capacity for high-end conflict in the future. As we do so, though, we must also deter and confront current adversaries while avoiding miscalculation or escalation that would distract and undermine our national security interests.

In the Middle East, the United States strategy is to keep the region from being a safe haven for terrorists or dominated by any power hostile to the United States. The Department is focused on ensuring continued success against ISIS and al-Qaida, strengthening deterrence and our defenses against Iran, and competing with China and Russia. This requires investing in sustainable partnerships as a whole-of-government effort.

As to Afghanistan, our mission is guided by the President's South Asia strategy. As you are aware, on February 29, the President announced an agreement with the Taliban that is a major step toward political settlement, but it is just a first step. We have insisted to the Taliban that they abide by their counterterrorism commitments negotiated in good faith with all Afghan stakeholders and not restart violence. However, we are prepared for all eventualities. Our presence in Afghanistan is conditions-based, and future posture will be based on the facts on the ground.

In Africa, the United States maintains a whole-of-government approach to advancing security and stability on the continent. Our commitment to the Africa continent includes diplomatic, military, and economic efforts, and persistent U.S. presence is not the only measure of DOD's [Department of Defense's] commitment. Our commitment is demonstrated by our counterterrorism training and operations, our dynamic force employment, military training, exercises, foreign military sales, intelligence sharing, crisis responses, and emergency humanitarian assistance.

So I will close by saying I think the Department is well positioned to address all the range of threats that we face. Our approach helps us meet a variety of present and future threats, while enhancing the strength and agility of our forces. Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Wheelbarger can be found in the Appendix on page 47.]

The CHAIRMAN. General McKenzie.

**STATEMENT OF GEN KENNETH F. McKENZIE, JR., USMC,  
COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND**

General McKENZIE. Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, distinguished members of the House Armed Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. I am proud to testify alongside General Steve Townsend from AFRICOM and Ms. Katie Wheelbarger from OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] Policy. It is this partnership within DOD, across COCOMs [combatant commands], and between the interagency that ensures synchronized execution of the National Defense Strategy. My senior



enlisted leader, Fleet Master Chief Jamie Herdel of the Navy, is also here with me today.

Before I begin, I would like to recognize the sacrifice of Captain Moises Navas and Gunnery Sergeant Diego Pongo, who were killed in action against ISIS last Sunday in the Qara Chokh mountains in Iraq as part of Joint Task Force-OIR [Operation Inherent Resolve]. They will be remembered.

Today, there are nearly 90,000 men and women serving within the 20 nations comprising Central Command as well as the headquarters in Tampa. I am proud of their remarkable dedication and humbled by their personal sacrifice. It is my honor to serve with them. They are young Americans in the line of fire, working to prevent attacks on the homeland, counter destabilizing regional influence, prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and ensure the freedom of navigation through international waterways. Your annual and timely passage of both the National Defense Authorization Act and the defense appropriation bills honors their courage and sacrifice. I encourage you to maintain this tradition.

Keeping a pledge from my confirmation hearing in December of 2018, I appear before you and offer my best military advice. My written statement highlights several nations and areas of interest within the Central Command, but my opening statement today will focus on Iran.

The National Defense Strategy directs us to work with partners to deny the Iranian regime all paths to a nuclear weapon and to neutralize Iranian malign influence. This is no easy task. Iran is persistent and is growing its arsenal of ballistic missiles despite international condemnation.

Iran remains the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism. Since May 2019, Iranian proxies and Shia militia groups in Iraq have increased attacks on U.S. interests and conducted scores of unmanned aerial system [UAS] reconnaissance flights near U.S. and Iraqi security force bases. The Iranian regime has attacked or seized foreign vessels in the Gulf, sponsored attacks by Houthi forces from Yemen into Saudi Arabia, continued the export of lethal aid to destabilizing groups across the region, and carried out an unprecedented cruise missile and UAS attack in September against oil facilities in Saudi Arabia.

In early January, Iran launched more than a dozen ballistic missiles in a deliberate attack against U.S. and coalition forces at two bases in Iraq. This state-sponsored missile strike crossed the threshold compared to previous attacks and has probably set a lower bar for future actions by the regime. While periods of decreased tension may provide the illusion of a return to normalcy, ample intelligence indicates the regime's desire to continue malign activities that threaten lives, destabilize sovereign nations, and threaten freedom of navigation, regional commerce, global energy supplies, and the global economy itself.

At CENTCOM, we recognize that so long as the U.S. applies diplomatic and economic pressure, the joint force must be postured to deter Iran from employing the military element of power to counter our actions. Our presence sends a clear signal about our capabilities and our will to defend partners and U.S. national interests. Going forward, it is CENTCOM's objective to posture forces in the

region with the operational depth to achieve a consistent state of deterrence against Iran and be adaptable to future Iranian threats. The fiscal year 2021 DOD budget supports CENTCOM's ability to keep our forces agile, lethal, and adaptable.

As we work with our partners to safeguard our mutual interests, we do so with the knowledge that we are stronger together. Key to building and maintaining regional partnerships is the authorization, the funding, and the employment of security assistance programs. Additionally, the National Guard State Partnership Program currently cultivates relationships and improves interoperability with six nations across the CENTCOM AOR with more considering entry. Again, the fiscal year 2021 budget supports building new partnerships and forming an enduring Middle East coalition.

As CENTCOM continues ongoing operations, we appreciate the efforts of our DOD civilian leadership. We acknowledge the teamwork of the interagency and thank the Members of Congress and your staffs without whose consistent backing we would be unable to accomplish our mission. In order for America's Armed Forces to sustain all-domain dominance, the Department requires your support as well as predictable, adequate, and timely funding.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and committee members, thanks again for all you do for our troops and our families, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General McKenzie can be found in the Appendix on page 62.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

General Townsend.

**STATEMENT OF GEN STEPHEN J. TOWNSEND, USA,  
COMMANDER, U.S. AFRICA COMMAND**

General TOWNSEND. Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, and members of the committee, good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to appear today. It is a privilege to be a part of and lead America's exceptional men and women of U.S. Africa Command, who are dedicated to protecting America and advancing her interests on the African continent. This morning, I am accompanied by my State Department foreign policy advisor, Mr. Russ Schiebel, and AFRICOM's new command senior enlisted leader, Marine Sergeant Major Richard Thresher.

I would like to take a moment to honor the memories of three Americans: U.S. Army Specialist Henry J. Mayfield, Jr., Mr. Bruce Triplett, and Mr. Dustin Harrison, who lost their lives in the service of our Nation on January 5 at Manda Bay, Kenya. To their families, our thoughts and prayers are with you. Your loved ones died while protecting the American people from the very real threat of the al-Qaida and Al Shabaab terrorist groups.

I am here this morning with my battle buddies and friends, Ms. Wheelbarger and General McKenzie, to discuss shared challenges and opportunities in our areas of responsibility, while furthering joint force readiness. Africa overwatches a global crossroads with strategic chokepoints and sea lines of communication that are essential to global commerce and critical to U.S. operations in the world. Our future security and prosperity rests on our strategic access and influence in Africa in times of crisis.

U.S. Africa Command is engaged in an ongoing blank slate, now COCOM review. In concert with the Department of Defense, we have developed a prioritized list of objectives and actions to protect the homeland and secure our strategic interests in Africa, while focusing the American taxpayers' investments in the right areas.

Africa is key terrain for competition with China and Russia, who are aggressively using economic and military means to expand their access and influence. I believe Africa offers America a competitive edge over China and Russia, and we should take advantage of it. We will grow more efficient to contribute to higher defense priorities and refocus resources to global power competition, but we cannot take pressure off major terrorist groups like ISIS and al-Qaida. These groups and many others remain an inconvenient reality in Africa. While we should not try to confront each one, we should remain resolute in confronting those who threaten American interests in the region and the American homeland.

Today, AFRICOM does that using a very light and relatively low-cost footprint by supporting African and international partners who are leading these efforts.

In my first 8 months on the job, I have learned that small investments, a few troops and a few bucks, can go a long way and make a real difference in Africa. Our whole-of-government and partner-centric approach acts as a force multiplier to address Africa's many complex challenges. What AFRICOM accomplishes with a few people and a few dollars on a continent 3½ times the size of the continental United States is a bargain for the American taxpayer and low-cost insurance for America. A secure and stable Africa remains an enduring American interest. U.S. Africa Command remains ready to protect and advance American interests and respond to crises in Africa.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thanks for your continued support to our Armed Forces. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Townsend can be found in the Appendix on page 79.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

General McKenzie, and actually, Ms. Wheelbarger as well, if you can answer a question about the Taliban peace treaty, and understand the negotiations that we have had with the Taliban, but the key part now is the Taliban negotiating with the Afghan Government. That seems problematic. And I support the effort to try to find a peaceful solution here to enable us to reduce our footprint and rely more on partners, but how do you see that negotiation between the Taliban and the Afghan Government going? What needs to happen in order for this peace agreement to go forward?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. I will begin, recognizing this is largely a State Department lead and my colleagues in IPSA [Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs] as well, but from our perspective, from the Secretary's perspective, as he said, the peace agreement is not perfect, but it is a good first step, and the inter-Afghan dialogue is a key component of that. We do have suggestions as late as this—or this morning before I left that there might be somewhat an offer from President Ghani to provide some prisoner releases. That is a basic part of the initial agreement be-

tween the U.S. and the Taliban. That was not part—you know, the Afghans were not in that piece of—the Afghan Government was not a piece of that part of the agreement, but I do think we might have actual successful, good-faith efforts, maybe even today, that we will get the intra-Afghan conversation started.

The CHAIRMAN. And, General McKenzie, how is it affecting operations at the moment?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, thank you. The Taliban need to keep their part of the bargain, and they are continuing attacks. Those attacks are relatively low in scale. They are not directed against coalition forces. They are not occurring in city centers. They are occurring at isolated checkpoints, but those attacks are occurring, and they are not consistent with a movement toward a negotiated settlement and they are not consistent with the undertaking they made.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

General Townsend, focusing on West Africa in particular, I was alarmed when I was there at the growing threat from the violent extremist organizations in the region. Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, to varying degrees, their governments are all under pressure. There are portions of their country that are increasingly outside of their control. How do you see that fight going in those three particular countries, and what do we need to do to stop the spread of those groups? And I guess the other question would be where do you see the risk that those groups will use those safe havens to plan larger operations?

General TOWNSEND. Chairman, in West Africa in the Sahel region, I think that the Western and international and African efforts there are not getting the job done. ISIS and al-Qaida are on the march in West Africa. They are having success and international efforts are not.

So why is that? I think that there is—you know, the African partners there don't have a lot of capacity or capability. There is a lot of Western assistance going in there, European-led, French-led and European-led, with the U.S. in support. I think it is insufficient and it is uncoordinated. I think the French and the Europeans have recognized this and they are taking steps to make it better coordinated. Those efforts might actually be sufficient if they were better coordinated.

If we don't turn this around in West Africa, I think it becomes a growing threat in the region. I think the threat will begin to impact on the littoral states. It has already started to reach the northern fringes of the littoral states. I think that Europe can and should do more before America should do more in this part of the world. I think the problems that manifest from West Africa will manifest in Europe before they manifest in America. But I do believe that if ISIS can carve out a new caliphate or al-Qaida can, they will do it, and they will attempt to do it in West Africa.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Thornberry.

Mr. THORNBERRY. Let me just follow up on the chairman, really, and General McKenzie and General Townsend, would each of you give us a thumbnail sketch of the terrorist threat in your AORs? I know we will have more detail when we go to classified setting,

but I think it is important for all members and the American people to know, is this threat still there? Kind of what does it look like, how is it evolving, that sort of thing?

General MCKENZIE. Thank you, sir. I will begin and go from east to west. So in Afghanistan, the principal threat that could threaten our homeland or the homelands of our allies and partners is either ISIS-K [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria-Khorasan Province] or elements of al-Qaida. Both of those forces are under considerable pressure now from us. They are pushed up into the east of Afghanistan. If unrelenting CT [counterterrorism] pressure is maintained, it is likely they will find it very hard to achieve a degree of coordination necessary to attack us. We believe that if that pressure is relieved at some point in those ungoverned spaces, they would regain that capability. So that is one thing.

The next thing I would note is the Taliban actually does not entertain attack plans against the United States. They are a regional entity. There are good reasons why we are conducting and have been conducting operations against them because of the fact they host two other organizations that actually have sworn to destroy us. But the Taliban themselves are not poised or have any background of attacking, you know, certainly not attacking our homeland.

I would tell you in the far west end of the theater, in the Idlib pocket, there are remnants of al-Qaida and remnants of ISIS that do entertain attack plans against us. They are being compressed right now. It is hard for them to generate those attacks at the moment because of the conflict that is going on out there. And that conflict, while it does have the effect of limiting their ability to operate against us, is also going to have profoundly horrific humanitarian outcomes in the western part of Syria. So we watch that carefully.

In the south, in the Arabian Peninsula, AQAP [al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula] still has visions of attacking the United States. They are under pressure and find it hard to realize that, but if left unconstrained, undoubtedly they would regenerate and present a threat to us as well.

Last, I need to mention the largest state-sponsored terror organization in the theater, the Iranian Threat Network, whether it is Shia militia groups in Iraq, Lebanese Hezbollah, or Kata'ib Hezbollah. All of those entities entertain, to some degree, a desire to attack Americans generally in the theater, but Iran's reach is not only regional, it is global, and in fact, as you know, has been manifested a few miles from where we stand right now.

General TOWNSEND. I will go from west to east. In West Africa in the Sahel, as I was just discussing a moment ago, the threat there is both ISIS and al-Qaida. Al-Qaida has an arm, a branch there called JNIM, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam. That group is as part of al-Qaida as any group is on the planet, and they are a growing threat there. And what is the interesting dynamic that we see in West Africa that we don't see in other parts of the world, there, al-Qaida and ISIS cooperate with one another. I can't really explain that, and I have been asked before if I thought that might be something new that we would see growing. I don't think so. I think it is a local phenomenon, that these folks have grown up with each

other, known each other all their lives, one joined one gang, one joined the other, and so they cooperate with one another.

This threat, if it grows, if it continues to grow at the pace it has—and we are seeing a fivefold increase since last year just in the Sahel alone—we are going to see that threat emerge and manifest in the littoral states of West Africa. I think unchecked, this threat becomes a threat beyond the region.

Moving to the north, we have ISIS there in Libya. That threat has been significantly reduced, and we are keeping close watch on that to ensure that it stays that way. And we have been able to do that with work with both sides of the Libyan Civil War. They have both supported our counterterrorism efforts there.

Moving to the east, there is a small presence of ISIS in Somalia and East Africa, but it is not of great operational concern, but Al Shabaab is. Al Shabaab is the largest and most kinetically violent arm of al-Qaida, and they are a serious threat to not only the Somali people but the entire region. One example is a recent attack in Kenya. Another example is their threats to embassies in the region outside of Somalia. I can discuss more about the threat of Al Shabaab in a closed hearing.

I will just say that I am of the belief that Al Shabaab today poses a significant threat to American interests in the region, and that threat would continue whether we were in Somalia or we were not in Somalia. And I also believe that if left unchecked—and we have been putting a fair amount of pressure on Al Shabaab—if left unchecked, I believe that that would manifest into an international threat.

The CHAIRMAN. Mrs. Luria.

Mrs. LURIA. Well, thank you.

And it is great to go at the beginning so we can talk about aircraft carriers up front. So I wanted to start with General McKenzie. Recently, the *Abraham Lincoln* completed the longest deployment for a carrier since the Vietnam war, and that was due to a casualty on the *Harry S. Truman* which made it unable to deploy on time. I was just giving that background to focus on how vital is it to your completing your mission to have a continuous carrier presence in the Gulf?

General MCKENZIE. So the aircraft carrier brings mobility. It brings offensive firepower, it brings defensive firepower. We can position it, we can move it around. It complicates an adversary's targeting, so it is a uniquely American piece of capability. Additionally, the virtue of the aircraft carriers, there are no access basing and overstrike restrictions that operate on forces that launch from that carrier, so that gives me great flexibility. Having said all of that, it also has a profound deterring effect, principally upon Iran. They know where the carrier is. They track the presence of the carrier. And I view a carrier as a critical part of a deterrent posture effective against Iran.

Mrs. LURIA. So that actually leads into what the next part of my question would be is, if you were to deploy Air Force assets to the region, would you feel that you could have an equivalent deterrent effect by Air Force and a combination of other assets in the region if you were not to have a continuous carrier presence?

And then secondly, has the carrier presence or any of our presence actually deterred any of the recent Iranian aggression? Because they continue to harass, aggress, even though we are putting more forces there, so I was wondering what your assessment of that was.

General MCKENZIE. Sure. So I tend to think of land-based air power as complementary to sea-based air power. Again, we can use them both. They both bring unique capabilities. Again, the particular and unique advantage of sea-based air power is it launches from a piece of United States sovereignty, so there are no restrictions that will be placed on where those airplanes go or what they do, which gives the Commander in Chief significant flexibility as we look at what we might want to do. So that is the military component of it.

It is my best judgment that we have reestablished a form of rough deterrence, what I would call contested deterrence with Iran in the wake of the strike on Qasem Soleimani and the attack on our bases. And part of that is based, and part of that deterrence is obtained by our obvious force presence in the theater, force presence that was not there in the spring of 2019 that led them to undertake the cycle of violence that culminated in January.

Mrs. LURIA. Thank you. And pivoting more on that continuous presence, and I would switch to Ms. Wheelbarger. Recently, and in your statement here, you discuss dynamic force employment. And in January, as the *Lincoln* was heading home, a spokesman for Naval Air Forces, San Diego, said the new Navy deployment model of dynamic force employment means less predictable deployments will become more routine, so less predictable will be the routine.

And the statement went on to say the length of this deployment is not ideal or something that is going to become a regular thing, but they are not going to be as predictable as they were in the past. Our crews and family should, prior to deployment, discuss the possibility of something like this, i.e., an extended deployment happening. Do you think that the extension of the *Lincoln* was an example of what you really mean by dynamic force employment, and should we expect deployments to be of longer duration, 8 months, such as the *Lincoln*, in order to satisfy these requirements in these AORs?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Thanks for the question. I don't think we saw that particular example as a key example of dynamic force employment. We want—

Mrs. LURIA. So you think that was a misstatement by the spokesman for—

Ms. WHEELBARGER. No. I think what we want to see is that dynamic force employment allows us to be, as I think the spokesman was trying to say, strategically predictable but operationally unpredictable, but we have to have the kind of forces that can respond to current events, both, you know, based on the adversary, but also based on the situations within our forces.

Mrs. LURIA. Would you say that—

Ms. WHEELBARGER. So I wouldn't say that the extension is—that is common, but it is something we are going to need to be prepared for.

Mrs. LURIA. So would you say that we have been able to respond adequately when we had the delay in the *Harry S. Truman* and the extension of the *Lincoln*? For the combatant commander specifically, and specifically for CENTCOM, have you felt that the Navy and the carrier fleet has been able to respond adequately to meet your needs for deterrence within the region?

General MCKENZIE. Through heroic efforts and just tremendous flexibility, yes, they have been able to do that. I am keenly aware of the total burden that places on the Navy in particular and the joint force in general when they meet these requirements.

Mrs. LURIA. Thank you.

And I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Waltz.

Mr. WALTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I certainly share the condolences for the two Marines that we just lost fighting ISIS. And I think that dynamic, fighting ISIS right now, a resurgent ISIS in Iraq and what we just went through in Syria, is exactly what we want to prevent happening in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

General McKenzie, you just mentioned a moment ago, you just testified that we have sufficient pressure on ISIS and al-Qaida to keep them on their back foot, but if we relieve that pressure, they could be and would likely be resurgent.

So let's just fast-forward a bit. Let's presume the Taliban is sincere about peace. They enter into a process with the Afghan Government. They meet all of our conditions for a full withdrawal in 14 months, although I have a lot of questions about what those conditions are, which I will hold for the classified setting. But let's presume all of that happens. I am struggling to wrap my mind around how the Taliban has the military capability, even partnered with the Afghan Army, which I think we would agree is not independently operable at this point, to keep that sufficient pressure on half the world's terrorist organizations in one of the most difficult places in the world.

So how does that—help me understand. Help all of us understand how that happens in the absence of U.S. forces. Does the Taliban have the military capability along with the Afghan Army to keep sufficient pressure?

General MCKENZIE. So over the last several months in eastern Afghanistan, we have watched the Taliban compress and crush ISIS presence on the ground in the southern Nangarhar Province, and they have been very effective doing that. That is some of the worst terrain in the world. They paid a very steep price in their own fighters.

Mr. WALTZ. Was that independent of our support?

General MCKENZIE. There was very limited support from us, and I would characterize that as very limited support from us. So they have demonstrated capability to do it. It was a bloody mess, but they did it. In fact, ISIS really now no longer holds ground in Nangarhar Province. They are trying to reestablish themselves up to the north in other provinces, and it remains yet to be seen if they are going to be successful doing that, and we will know over time if they are. But they have demonstrated the capability to do that.



Frankly, sir, it is more a question of will than capability, and that will have to be developed in the fullness of time. I defer to no one in my distrust of the Taliban, but we will have the opportunity—

Mr. WALTZ. Just to be clear—sorry, I have limited time. You believe in the absence of all U.S. forces, your military advice, the Taliban and the Afghan Army have sufficient military capability to keep all of those, not just ISIS, al-Qaida, everything that exists in Pakistan, to keep them at bay, to keep the homeland safe. And I would just remark that we all know that if we have to fight our way back in, that we will be tending, I think, many more funerals than a current sustained pressure campaign with limited forces.

General MCKENZIE. First of all, I share those concerns. I think those are very reasonable concerns. It is less a capability than it is a question of will, and it is less a question of will against ISIS than it is against al-Qaida. And those are things that we are just going to have to see in order to believe as we go forward, as conditions are set or they either meet those conditions or they don't meet those conditions.

Mr. WALTZ. If we shut down Bagram Air Base, I think it is important to have on the record here, in Syria and Yemen and other places, we have basing capabilities around those countries, whether it is Incirlik, Idlib, Djibouti. What do we have around Afghanistan should those presumptions, should they not have the capability, the Taliban and ANA [Afghan National Army], what other bases do we have in terms of a plan B to be able to conduct operations into Afghanistan and the FATA [Federally Administered Tribal Areas] or western Pakistan?

General MCKENZIE. Well, sir, so right now, we are executing the withdrawal—

Mr. WALTZ. In the absence of Bagram. I mean, assuming playing this all out, we withdraw all forces.

General MCKENZIE. So we have no plans beyond going to 8,600 right now. No one has given me any guidance to go to a lower number.

Mr. WALTZ. There is a public statement of zero forces, full withdrawal, in 14 months.

General MCKENZIE. There is; however, we have not developed military plans to that end yet.

Mr. WALTZ. Okay. I think it is also worth noting that we still have an American hostage held by the Taliban, just taken in the last few months, so I would be extremely concerned to see Taliban prisoner releases while the Taliban and Haqqani network are holding a U.S. citizen, former Navy diver, hostage.

And then the last piece. In terms of great power competition, I can't think of another American military base or coalition military base now that Manas is gone besides Bagram on China's western flank. Can you talk to the western flank of China and what platforms we have there?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, the platforms we have are intermittent platforms as we go in and conduct joint training, but we have no permanent platform up in the Stans as you noted, sir.

Mr. WALTZ. Thank you, everyone, for your service. I appreciate your testimony.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Escobar.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and let me——

The CHAIRMAN. I am sorry. I apologize. I am sorry. I was right. Ms. Escobar, go ahead. Sorry. We will start over.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And many thanks to our witnesses for your presence here today and for your service. And I just want to say at the outset, obviously we all want to see peace happen. We are hoping for successful conversations between the Taliban and the Afghan Government, but I do have some serious concerns, General McKenzie. Secretary Esper has authorized the drawdown to the 8,600 troops. That is happening. That is happening before the deal between the Taliban and the Afghan Government is sealed and worked out.

Given recent events, especially our need to strike against Taliban fighters just days after we signed the peace deal, what confidence do you have in the Taliban honoring their commitments to us? You keep saying it is not a question of capacity but that it is more a question of will. What confidence do you have in that will?

General MCKENZIE. So I have no confidence, because I am going to be driven by the observed facts. Either they will draw down the current level of attacks or they won't. And if they are unable to draw down the current levels of attacks, then political leadership will be able to make decisions based on that. But it doesn't matter whether I am optimistic or I am pessimistic; we will see what happens on the ground.

To date, Taliban attacks are higher than we believe are consistent with an idea to actually carry out this plan. That may be because the Taliban has made a decision at the top to continue those attacks and press us. It may be because the Taliban's leadership is fractured, and it takes a while to get all this down to the subordinate leaders. Their command and control is not as effective or as rapid as ours. We will know very soon on that.

But I would say, first of all, right now, attacks are higher than we want, although they have not chosen to attack coalition forces. They have not chosen to attack inside the major urban areas, although ISIS has conducted some of those attacks. So we will see what happens going forward.

The last point is we are going to go to 8,600, and we are going to achieve that here by the middle of the summer. It is my best judgment and the judgment of the commander on the ground, General Scott Miller, that we can be very effective in our CT efforts at that force level.

Ms. ESCOBAR. What is our plan specifically, and who makes the determination about when that line is crossed, when we have had enough, when we are not seeing enough progress? Are there specifics? I understand you may not be able to divulge those in an unclassified setting, but are there very specific measures that we will be using? Is it somebody's sense?

General MCKENZIE. So we have a very sophisticated system for tracking attacks, how many were initiated, how many casualties were caused as a result of those attacks, where those attacks occur. We report that, and I have a recommendation on that. General Miller has a recommendation on that. It goes to the Chairman or the Secretary. The decision about what is tolerable and what is not tol-

erable is not a military decision. That is a political decision, a policy decision. I defer that to Ms. Wheelbarger to talk about.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. I will just add what I have heard the Secretary, and I think you have probably heard the Secretary say in response to Mr. Waltz' question as well, 14 months of going to zero is an aspirational benchmark based on the conditions being achieved. The Secretary is well prepared to look at the terrain in a few months and see what the Afghans and the Taliban have come to. And he is prepared, as he has said to me, and I think he has said to the committees, to readjust our force posture up or down based on what the conditions require to achieve our objectives, which are to continue to ensure Afghanistan is not a safe haven for terrorists who could particularly hit the homeland. So he is prepared to look at the truth on the ground and make decisions accordingly.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you. And, Ms. Wheelbarger, we know that we are at the beginning of the process, and understandably, we have got to wait and see and have high hopes, but, you know, obviously keep close watch. But the intra-Afghan dialogue phase, which was supposed to start today, has been delayed. How do we know this is not just the Taliban trying to run out the clock?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Sure. I mean, like I said, before I arrived this morning, I did ask if there were any updates, and it did seem like there might be sort of a fig leaf from Ghani coming down. We actually will start those conversations today. I think all of us have to remain somewhat skeptical that this is going to work precisely as planned but remain open and flexible to the Afghans over time working this out with themselves. But again, our interests are continuing to put political pressure on them to achieve that objective, while continuing to have the military platforms and posture to allow us to achieve our national security requirements.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Perhaps not beginning the withdrawal so soon would have helped provide some leverage for the Afghan Government.

I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Mitchell.

Mr. MITCHELL. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

First, let me start by thanking you all for your service. For those you command, you are in a tough neighborhood some days, many days, and I appreciate it.

Let's stay on the subject of Afghanistan which seems to be significant. If I have time, I will hop to Syria just to keep us entertained here. I think Mr. Waltz' comment, which I want to reinforce, is that General McKenzie, correct me, but I think with the ability to manage or to keep ISIS under control in Afghanistan very much depends upon the Taliban working with the Afghan Army in some cooperative manner to manage that or to keep that under control. Yet we haven't exactly seen that the Taliban seems interested in doing that. Am I mistaken in my impression at this point in time?

General MCKENZIE. You are correct, we have not seen any movement in that direction. I would agree that coming to some ability to operate together or at least in a complementary fashion is going to be critical to their movement forward.

Mr. MITCHELL. Well, in keeping with Mr. Waltz' question, the reality is, is while zero may be an aspirational goal, the point that he makes which, with all due respect, sir, you avoided, was if we withdraw from Bagram, if they run out the clock, don't attack coalition or U.S. forces, continue the current mode they are at, we then have to face going back in, because it is my impression we don't have an alternative kind of staging in that area. Is that incorrect? Leaving Bagram is a problem.

General MCKENZIE. If we were to pull out completely from Afghanistan, you are correct. We have looked at all kinds of over-the-horizon options, and none of them are particularly good. Back in 2001, 2002, it was very difficult to get into Afghanistan in the first place. Those problems would present themselves again, so I acknowledge that.

The only point I would make is—and again, I emphasize I am not optimistic or pessimistic; I am just going to be driven by the facts here as we see it. Over a 14-month period, the Taliban are also going to be acted upon by the Afghans, so it is not strictly that the Taliban have a perfect secret plan to take over. You know, there are a lot of people in Afghanistan that have a strong view of the Taliban, and the Taliban consistently polls at about 12 percent popularity in Afghanistan. So they face their challenges too, and we should not assume that they will run to victory as we withdraw.

Mr. MITCHELL. Ms. Wheelbarger, if you could relay, I think, to Secretary Esper, and maybe if you get a chance to relay to the Secretary of State, I am not sure it is an adequate standard to say so long as the Taliban dial back or stop attacks on coalition and U.S. forces, that we are comfortable saying it is all good in Afghanistan. I support we don't want to be there. We have been there far too long now, but the idea that so long as you don't bother us, we will go away and hope you don't bother anything in the future is—let me put it this way. I told my management staff when I ran a company, hope is not a plan; it is the last step before desperation. And we need to have more indication that the Taliban and Afghans can actually work in some manner cooperatively before we just walk away and say we are done with it, because we do not want to have to go back in. That would be catastrophic.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Understood. I will relay that back. I do think part of the conditions that we expect the Taliban to live up to is ensuring that they are not renewing their counterterrorism activities that brings insecurity and lack of stability to the entire country. I mean, I have heard the Secretary say numerous times that he is prepared to ensure that we will defend our interests. And that is, again, going after the terrorist elements that will now or in the future pose an external operations threat to us.

Mr. MITCHELL. Well, our interests also included the one U.S. Armed Forces hostage that the Taliban hold.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Understood.

Mr. MITCHELL. And if I were in a different seat, and I am not, I am in this seat, there is no way in God's green Earth I would sign off any agreement until that hostage was put in front of me in good condition. The idea they are holding a member of our Armed Forces and we signed some agreement offends me, and I

think, frankly, if I asked privately the gentlemen sitting to your left, I am not sure they wouldn't be equally offended. We want him back, and we want him back now, and we want him back in good shape.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. There is one thing I will add. I think this administration has been very, very focused on hostage releases and rescues, so it continues to be a priority, but I take your point.

Mr. MITCHELL. Well, focused is one thing. Somebody needs to relay the message that it is not acceptable. I am offended by it.

Quickly, if I can make a comment about Syria. I think someone needs to explain to—I am not sure our commanders as well, but also to the forces on the ground and the American people what our objectives are in Syria. They seem to keep changing dramatically, and it is not helpful. It is not helpful to our allies. It is not helpful to our forces on the ground. I am not sure we understand them here. I was pretty blunt about my assessment that these mercurial changes simply do not allow for an effective command in Syria and leave us vulnerable. So someone needs to explain to Congress and remind the gentleman sitting to your left what our objective is in Syria and when we define that we have met that objective and we are prepared to leave. So I will ask simply, someone sometime, please, because that would be helpful.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. The gentleman is out of time.

Mrs. Trahan.

Mrs. TRAHAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General McKenzie, thank you for being here. You recently indicated that your biggest concern in the near term was not necessarily a direct Iranian attack; it is their proxies in areas like Iraq and Syria where they could come against us. And in your written testimony, you also indicated that ample intelligence points to Iran's desire to continue malign activities that threaten Americans' lives. So can you please describe the threat of Iranian retaliation as you understand it, conventional or by proxy forces, to us, our soldiers, and to our allies?

General MCKENZIE. Certainly. So we believe that Iran has a long-term vision of ejecting the United States from the theater, from the Central Command region, and specifically the place where they would like to see that first would be in Iraq. That is the place that they would like to start. So they would believe they can apply considerable pressure on us, raise the level of pain high enough so that we would come out. They have a lot of tools to do that in Iraq. They have a large Shia militia group there, numbering in the tens of thousands, that is responsive in varying degrees to Iranian control. But nonetheless, they hold everything from explosively formed penetrators, which killed a lot of people in Iraq in the 2007–2010 period, to large rockets and precise missiles that they can employ.

The Iranian desire, I believe, would be to try to do that in a manner that is not completely attributable to Iran. They may be wrong in making that guess because we are pretty confident we can determine attribution. But, you know, what we have seen are a number of attacks at the U.S. Embassy, some as recent as just, what, less than 2 weeks ago. Rockets fell very close. Rockets have fallen inside the embassy compound.

We have a variety of things that we do to protect ourselves, and we have been good so far in doing that. That luck is not going to hold out forever. And at some point, the degree of Iranian command and control over those Shia militia groups may be tested.

I have always said that Iran can certainly direct attacks in Iraq. Iran may not be able to prevent attacks from occurring in Iraq. And frankly, you know, the fact that Qasem Soleimani is no longer there to tie it all together makes it a little more difficult for them to affect command and control, even though I think the threat is less with his death.

Mrs. TRAHAN. Sure. Thank you. So as we draw down troops in Afghanistan, I am wondering, are we expanding our military footprint in the region? Are we reshuffling troops? I ask because I am concerned with force protection, but I would also like visibility into what our troop presence is going to look like or as you project it through the year.

General MCKENZIE. Certainly. So we are on a glide slope to draw down to 8,600 in Afghanistan. We will reach that goal by the middle of the summer. We will have, in my judgment, adequate force protection for those forces that remain there.

On the other end of the theater, in Iraq, you know, we have got around 5,000 U.S. forces there. We have got a number in Syria, and I will be happy to talk about that in the closed session just a little bit later. But we believe that in general, we have adequate force protection measures there. We are also in the process of bringing air defense systems, ballistic missile defense systems into Iraq in particular to protect ourselves against another potential Iranian attack. So we will look at those. I balance those two active theaters all the time.

Now, there are other forces, obviously, in the theater as well. Over the last few months, as you know, we brought forces into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, both to assure them and to add operational depth to our force presentation against Iran in order to deter them. Our buildup at Prince Sultan Air Base, or PSAB, is indicative of that. The beauty of that base is it is out of short-range ballistic missile range of Iran but yet is close enough for our various types of fighter attack aircraft to operate out of there. It is well defended and provides significant additional depth in the theater.

We talked a little bit earlier about naval presence in the theater. Naval presence is always the most effective and flexible form of presence because you can dial it up and down, and you don't have to worry, again, as I have noted earlier, about access basing and overflight as you bring those in. So we constantly balance forces in the theater.

And I would just close by saying, I was the director of the Joint Staff when the NDS was written. I am very much aware of the larger priority we need to place against the China threat, the Russia threat, and other threats. So I know the cost that we ask when we bring forces into the CENTCOM AOR.

Mrs. TRAHAN. Thank you. I appreciate that. In my remaining time, and I know I don't have much, but I am wondering if the Secretary could just comment on the diplomatic efforts that are riding alongside our military presence.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. With respect to Iran specifically?

Mrs. TRAHAN. Yes.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Our major policy continues to be an economic and diplomatic pressure campaign. None of us see that decreasing anytime soon, and we think that pressure is going to gain over time. Economically we do think, you know, that Iran economy faces a lot of challenges. They are resilient, but we think that over time, the goal is to bring them back to the negotiating table for a more comprehensive deal.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Bacon.

Mr. BACON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for being here today.

Americans want to see a positive, peaceful outcome in Afghanistan, especially after 18½ years of war, but we also can't afford to have Afghanistan return to a pre-9/11 capability where the Taliban are providing safe haven for al-Qaida. I think today we have a minimal presence there at a cost that is much less than what we have had in years past. However, if we withdraw, and the Taliban find themselves dominant in Kabul to provide safe haven again, I think it will be a much higher cost later. So those are some of my concerns.

So my question to General McKenzie is what evidence do you have that the Taliban have severed their close ties or alliance with al-Qaida?

General MCKENZIE. So we think in terms of two groups that threaten the United States. We are confident of the Taliban's picture on ISIS-K, as an example.

Mr. BACON. Right.

General MCKENZIE. We have talked a little bit about that. I am less optimistic about al-Qaida. That is something they are going to have to demonstrate. That has not yet been demonstrated. The—not the beauty of it but the fact of it is as we go forward, we are going to have ample time to see if they actually do that, and that will be before we become irrevocably committed to a force presence that would not allow us to have adequate leverage in Afghanistan. We don't need to trust them. We don't need to like them. We don't need to believe anything they say. We need to observe what they do, and we have the capability to do that.

Mr. BACON. That would be the chief concern is that alliance with al-Qaida. Let's say in 2½ years, the Taliban are largely in control of Kabul and they are providing safe haven to al-Qaida. What is our options at that point? How do we respond? I think the cost would be much higher than what we have, what we are putting in now. Just curious for your—I know it is a hypothetical, but I am just curious for your response. Where do we come in from and how do we hold them in check?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, and so without getting into a hypothetical, I would tell you that we know how we got in in 2001, so we have an object lesson on how to enter Afghanistan. It is difficult. It is painful. It is very expensive to do that, but we did it.

Having said that, again, I come back to we talk about this a lot. I think we are going to have a lot of opportunity to see the way this goes forward and the dynamic between the Taliban and the

Government of Afghanistan. And I am just not prepared to assume that the Taliban have good intentions, no, but I am also not prepared to assume that the Government of Afghanistan is defenseless and unable to assert themselves and come to a workable agreement with the Taliban. We don't know the answer to that question. We are going to have good opportunity to observe and get the answers to those questions.

Mr. BACON. I would say the strength of this is it is delayed, an agreement where we can watch and monitor and turn up the thermostat or lower the thermostat based on Taliban response. So I do appreciate that.

Ms. Wheelbarger, I want to ask your thoughts on missile defense coordination and integration. As we know, Iran has approximately 1,000 ballistic missiles, and a lot of the countries in the region need to have some capability to respond. How are we doing it, helping them integrate a capability so it is not every man or woman for themselves?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Right. One of our key priorities at the moment is helping Saudi Arabia in particular be more capable and integrated with their own missile defense assets. They do have significant numbers of them, but I do think over the last few decades, we have been trying to get them to improve their integration to advance their capability.

With respect to integration within the region writ large, that I would say is aspirational at best. I mean, you can see these countries eventually improving their defenses by working together, but we have many interagency efforts to try to get our Gulf partners in particular to work more cohesively across the numerous lines of effort, and it is a long-term project. I will just put it that way. But the key—and I defer to General McKenzie as well to talk about what the military has been able to achieve in advancing particularly Saudi Arabia's capabilities.

Mr. BACON. When we look at Iranian capabilities, this is probably their primary capability to hold us at threat and our allies.

General MCKENZIE. Sir, it is, and I would say Iran actually has about 2,500 to 3,000 ballistic missiles.

Mr. BACON. Okay. Thanks for the update.

General MCKENZIE. But the point that Ms. Wheelbarger made is integrated air defense, the ability to sit—for example, if I go and look at a console at one of my ballistic missile defense sites in UAE [United Arab Emirates], or I go up into another location far west of the theater, we are going to see the whole theater in a common operational picture. That is the strength of the United States approach to war and with our NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and coalition partners. We would like to have that capability replicated in the Gulf. We are working hard to that end. We begin with small steps. It has taken us a long time.

When I was the J5 at U.S. Central Command in 2011, we said the same thing. So I am very much aware this is something we have not been very good at. However, the fact that there is a clear, obvious, evident threat tends to focus people, and I think in particular, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is now focused on this.

Mr. BACON. And I had a question for General Townsend, but this will be the close of the comments because I am running out of time.



I just want to commend you for starting Task Force Somalia. Especially after Manda Bay, I think it is needed. So I just applaud the effort of your command for doing that. Thank you.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Slotkin.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Hi, everyone. Hello. General McKenzie, can you just answer for me, is the U.S. engaged in hostilities against Iran or Iranian forces?

General MCKENZIE. No, we are not.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Do you believe, as CENTCOM commander, that you have authorization for military force against Iran?

General MCKENZIE. No, I do not.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Does the 2001, or 2002, authorization of military force give you authority to get into hostilities with Iran?

General MCKENZIE. With the caveat that you always have the authority to defend yourselves.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Of course, self-defense, but from the authorization.

General MCKENZIE. No. No, it does not.

Ms. SLOTKIN. According to the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] quarterly report that just came out on March 2nd, Tehran now has enough enriched uranium to produce a nuclear weapon. They reported 220 pounds of enriched uranium, which is three times what they reported in November 2019.

Today, in addition to more uranium, we have more spinning centrifuges. The U.N. [United Nations] has been kicked out of many facilities. In addition, as you noted, Iranian proxies have become more active. We have had—as you say, we crossed a critical—I forget your term—a critical threshold with the attacks, the ballistic missile attacks on the al-Asad Air Base, which is personally sensitive to me, since my son-in-law's unit is on that base. Are we more or less safe as a country from Iran, and are our allies more or less safe than a year ago?

General MCKENZIE. So, I think I would go from the period of the exchange in early January. I think since then, we have established a rough deterrence.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Just from a year ago, though. I mean, I respect your best military advice. In terms of a force protection matter, our allies in the region, ourselves, our partners, when you look at Iran in totality, particularly the nuclear file, which we know is the existential threat, are we more or less safe? Are your forces more or less safe in theater?

General MCKENZIE. So I would say we are more safe in theater now, because last spring, there weren't many forces in theater. And the fact that the force density was so low was a major part of the Iranian calculus to act out in the kinetic sphere.

I think that by the posture we have established in the theater, really beginning since May of last year, they are far more constrained than they were a year before then. So yes, I believe we are safer.

Ms. SLOTKIN. From the nuclear threat, are our allies and partners more or less safe from a year ago?

General MCKENZIE. I would defer to Ms. Wheelbarger on the nuclear threat.

Ms. SLOTKIN. I will take that. I want to ask a couple of questions on Iraq and Syria. We did lose two Marine special operators. My understanding is it took 6 hours to get to these guys. Can you help me understand, since I know many of us are concerned about the golden hour and making sure we get to forces. What happened? Do we have enough on the ground to actually protect the forces we have?

General MCKENZIE. Sure. The terrain was vertical. It is some of the worst terrain in the world. I monitored it hour by hour, along with General Pat White. There is no way to do it any faster than we did it. It is a very tough, difficult tactical situation. The problems we encountered were not problems of resources.

Sometimes you fight on hard ground. Sometimes someone falls a long way and has to be recovered. What you don't want to do is get somebody else killed in that recovery, or put yourself in a situation where you are going to put more lives at risk. I am completely confident the commanders on the ground did everything they could to get these two folks out as quickly as possible.

Ms. SLOTKIN. So should we expect additional—I mean, hopefully not—but killed in action because of the terrain?

General MCKENZIE. So there are different kinds of terrain in Iraq. As you know, this is northeastern Iraq. Terrain is particularly bad up there. That is partially why ISIS is up there.

We will continue to operate there. Any time something like this happens, we take a look at our tactics, techniques, and procedures to make sure we are going at it at the most effective way. But, as you know, combat is a clash of human wills, and sometimes the bad guys are going to have a good day.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Can you tell me, there are reports in Syria of drones dropping mortars and grenades on our troops near or around oilfields. Can you help me understand what is happening there, and do we have adequate force protection?

General MCKENZIE. Sure. So we have reports—I don't think as many as are in the NPR [National Public Radio] report, but yes, people work Group 1 UASs, which are the small UASs. They will try to find a way to carry an explosive and fly over either not necessarily us alone, but the Russians have had some significant casualties in this regard, as have other nations that are operating there.

So yes, it is a problem. We look at it very hard. It is one of my highest priorities.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Who is operating those drones?

General MCKENZIE. So, I think probably, in this case, ISIS, but we are still working that. But if I had to judge today, I would say it was possibly ISIS, but probably not a state entity operating the drones.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Okay. I yield back. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Gallagher.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Just a quick follow-up. Are those commercial off-the-shelf DJI drones that they weaponize?

General MCKENZIE. That would be my guess. As you know, they are universally available.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Another follow-up to Ms. Slotkin's questions. I think we are getting ready later this week to vote on H.J. Res.

[House Joint Resolution] 68, which directs the President to terminate the use of Armed Forces, use of Armed Forces for hostilities against Iran, but you have just said we are not engaged in hostilities against Iran.

So one could say this legislation is unnecessary, but, in your professional military judgment, what do you assess would be the impact of this legislation, particularly when it comes to our deterrent posture with respect to Iran?

General MCKENZIE. So, sir, I have to confess, I am not familiar with the—I know the legislation exists. I have not done a detailed study of it. I know that our ability to deter Iran effectively comes from two things: our capability and our will. And so, the ability to demonstrate those two things are what provides a cognitive effect in the mind of the person you want to deter that, no, you don't actually want to do something now.

Mr. GALLAGHER. I will ask the same question to Ms. Wheelbarger.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. I think I would follow up similarly, that a signal to any potential adversary that we don't have support of Congress to defend ourselves, if necessary, would send a signal that would not be helpful to deterrence.

Mr. GALLAGHER. And just to reiterate, we are not engaged in hostilities with Iran, though we retain, as always, inherently, under Article II, the right to defend ourselves if attacked?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Yes.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Similarly, are you aware of anything you are doing today exclusively because of the 2002 AUMF [Authorization for Use of Military Force]? Not the 2001, the 2002 AUMF. Are you aware of anything you are doing that relies on the 2002 AUMF?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. As you know, that 2002 AUMF provides budgeting authority for what we are doing in Syria, because the threat of ISIS emanating from Syria has been a supplemental justification for our military activity there. Our coalition forces, for example, rely on the defense of Iraq for their justification. So it is a mutual sign that we see the threat from ISIS from Iraq.

I will say, that I think the notification you all received on the Soleimani strike did include an additional 2002 AUMF justification for domestic legal basis.

Mr. GALLAGHER. At the time, we got vague assessments about, perhaps, some detentions we have related to the 2002 AUMF. For the record, I disagree with that. I am with you on opposing an attempt to undermine our deterrent posture with Iran, and I think that legislation was unnecessary. I think it is far past time for us to repeal the 2002 AUMF. I think it is doing no work at all, and it would be a good matter of congressional hygiene when it comes to war powers, but that is a debate for another day.

Quickly, I know we have had a lot of discussion about Afghanistan. General McKenzie, in the PB-21 [President's budget 2021] budget request, it looks like the request for Operation Freedom's Sentinel is \$14 billion, while the request for enduring OCO [overseas contingency operations] requirements is \$28 billion.

So, to clarify, if all U.S. service members left Afghanistan, would that \$14 billion go down to zero while that \$28 billion would stay

roughly the same as other forces stationed within the CENTCOM AOR would continue to conduct CT operations?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, I will have to come back to you on the details of that. I can tell you, it is my understanding that that budget does reflect a proposed force level of 8,600 in OFS [Operation Freedom's Sentinel] going forward from, like, July of this next year. But I will have to take that one for the record and come back with you with the detailed question that you just asked.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 101.]

Mr. GALLAGHER. And then for those who are concerned about the rapidity of our withdrawal from Afghanistan, I guess to put it, what vital interests are at stake, if any, in Afghanistan, and what is the geopolitical importance of Afghanistan?

General MCKENZIE. So the vital national interest that threatens us from Afghanistan is the ability of al-Qaida and ISIS-K to generate attacks against the homeland of the United States, and against the homelands of our allies and partners. So we have seen that happen. We know that is not something that we are talking about as a conditional future possibility. We know that it has happened in the past.

The best intelligence estimates tell us that if we do not maintain pressure on those two entities, that in a period of time—and you can say a year, you could say 2 years, you could say somewhere in between—they are going to generate the ability to do external attacks again. And that will manifest itself here in the United States. That is a vital national interest.

Mr. GALLAGHER. And then finally, and most broadly, and I only have 25 seconds, I know no theater commander is ever going to argue for less attention and resources, but do you understand the basic premise of the NDS, which is that, because China is the pacing threat, INDOPACOM [U.S. Indo-Pacific Command] is the priority theater, not CENTCOM?

General MCKENZIE. I was the Joint Staff J5, Director of Strategic Plans and Policy, and the Director of the Joint Staff during the creation of that document. I was present at the creation. I am intimately familiar with it.

Mr. GALLAGHER. A great title for a memoir.

General MCKENZIE. It is.

Mrs. DAVIS [presiding]. Ms. Torres Small.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you, Ms. Chair, thank you, Ranking Member, and thank you all so much for your service.

General McKenzie, I really appreciated your comments during your opening statement about how important it is that we be adaptable to future Iranian threats. And DOD has spent billions of dollars on kinetic and nonkinetic counterdrone systems to that effect. These systems are often tested at White Sands Missile Range, which is in the district that I represent. However, they have yet to be fielded widely.

And I remain concerned that our operators are under significant threat from especially small drones and enemy drone swarms, especially from Iran and its allies and proxies.

Is it accurate that your command is experimenting with new and more effective counterdrone capabilities that utilize artificial intelligence and autonomous systems?

General MCKENZIE. We aggressively pursue anything that will improve the capabilities, particularly against those Group 1 and 2 UASs, as you mentioned. That is one of the things that worries me the most in the theater every day, is the vulnerability of our forces to those small UASs.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. And specifically to the question about AI [artificial intelligence] and autonomous systems.

General MCKENZIE. So I am aware of some experimentation on that. I will have to come back to you on more details on that.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Okay. I will take that for the record.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 101.]

General MCKENZIE. I will tell you that we have a very broad set of joint requirements to drive that, so it is possible there is something there.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. We will take that for the record.

General MCKENZIE. Certainly.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. It is my understanding there has been specific testing with WSMR [White Sands Missile Range]. I would love to look into that further. And I will submit this question to the record as well, but can you please provide us a plan for fiscal year 2021 that would enable us to accelerate the efforts that you are taking?

General MCKENZIE. Absolutely, I would be delighted to do that.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 101.]

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Fantastic. And are your command's needs for effective counterdrone systems being met currently?

General MCKENZIE. I am convinced the system is generating as much as it can. The Secretary and I have talked about this. I own a lot of the systems that are available across the entire United States inventory. I am not satisfied with where we are, and I believe we are at great risk because of this.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Fantastic. So you are also exploring options that we do not currently own, correct?

General MCKENZIE. That is correct. We are open to anything. And a lot of smart people are looking at this. We are not there yet, but I think the Army having executive agency for this will actually help in a lot of ways. It will provide a focus to these efforts. This is a significant threat.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you so much.

Switching over to Africa briefly, it is estimated that over the next decade, 7 out of 10 of the world's fastest growing economies will be in Africa. Against the backdrop of tremendous opportunity on the continent, China has ramped up its engagement—and this was distributed to all of us, I think it is a pretty clear example of China's ramped-up engagement—not only surpassing the United States as Africa's largest trading partner, but also expanding its military presence through an overseas base in Djibouti and increased arms sales. And what is interesting is this also shows that Djibouti has one of the largest debts to China on the continent.

So, General Townsend, is it accurate that strategic investments in development and diplomacy support defense to demonstrate that the United States is a better partner for developing countries than China?

General TOWNSEND. Absolutely, they do. At AFRICOM, we work every day, hand in hand, with our diplomatic partners and our development partners.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you so much. And likewise, what are the national security costs of ceding ground to our competitors like China, especially in continents like Africa?

General TOWNSEND. Well, as you can see from the diagrams, Russia and China are competing really hard on the African continent. I don't believe that we have to outcompete them in all 53 countries of the AFRICOM AOR, 54 if you include Egypt on the continent.

You don't have to outcompete them everywhere, but we have to pick and choose where we need U.S. access and influence in the future. And there are probably some places where maybe if they have the edge over us, it is okay. It is not critical for our national security. So I think that it is very important that we look at the continent and decide where we are going to prioritize our efforts.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Where do you think we are not investing now that we really should be?

General TOWNSEND. I think in global or great power competition.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Within Africa?

General TOWNSEND. Yes. I think we are appropriately focused right now, and the whole point of this blank slate, or a COCOM review, that the Secretary is running with the entire Department is to focus all of our efforts more at global power competition than we have been in the past. So I think we have got the right focus.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. I can take that for the record if you want to supplement any specific locations.

General TOWNSEND. Sure.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 101.]

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you. I yield the remainder of my time.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you.

Mr. Byrne.

Mr. BYRNE. Let me follow up on that last line of questions, General. You said we need to prioritize. What would you say the priorities are?

General TOWNSEND. Well, the Secretary of Defense has given me clear guidance. The first is to maintain our U.S. ability to implement our war plans in the world. The second is to compete with China and Russia. Third is to focus on the violent extremists, the violent extremist groups that threaten U.S. interests and U.S. homeland. And fourth is to be prepared to respond to crises on the African continent.

So those are my priorities from the Secretary of Defense. They are clear, and we are working through how we adequately ensure those are adequately resourced.

Mr. BYRNE. Maybe I misunderstood what your answer was before. I thought you were talking about priorities with regard just

to trying to measure up in the competition with Russia and China. Are there priorities that you have within that?

General TOWNSEND. There are, and they basically revolve around ensuring we have access and influence in selected parts of the continent. And I would prefer to take the rest of that into classified session.

Mr. BYRNE. Fair enough. Let me just follow up one more. If you need to save this for classified as well, that is fine. Do you feel like you have the resources that you need to meet those priorities?

General TOWNSEND. Today, I think AFRICOM is adequately resourced to do what we have been told to do.

Mr. BYRNE. Let me ask you about—and maybe you are not the right person to ask. Let me just ask it anyway. Where are we on Libya right now?

General TOWNSEND. I will defer to my colleague from the Department of Defense.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. If I could just respond to your previous line of questioning real quickly, I just want to highlight that our overall competition with Russia and China on the continent is a whole-of-government effort more than just the military tool. We are looking, and we have Prosper Africa, which is a White House-driven effort to increase economic activity from our private sector in Africa, find ways for the African economies to adjust better to, sort of, private sector entities in the Western model and less just the sort of predatory funding that the Chinese provide, as well as supplemented by diplomacy and development aid. So, we do have a very strong whole-of-government effort that prioritizes more than just the military component.

I lost your second question. I am sorry.

Mr. BYRNE. Libya.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Libya, yes. We are very concerned with events in Libya. Obviously, it is a location of numerous other powers competing with each other. You see Russia. You see Egypt. You see Turkey. Our overarching strategy is to continue to be able to address the terrorism threat that we see there, and I think we can effectively address that, while bringing the diplomacy to bear to bring both sides of, basically, the civil war together, recognizing that the military tool in Libya needs to be part of a functional government, and not actually running that government. So we continue to work with, sort of, both competing factions, and also try to call on other powers to not continue to destabilize and ignore arms embargoes that are in place.

Mr. BYRNE. Have things gotten worse or better in the last year in Libya?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. I would assess they have gotten worse.

Mr. BYRNE. What are we doing about that?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Well, we are, again, number one priority for us is the counterterrorism effort. Number two with respect to the ongoing strife, it is a diplomatic-led effort from our State Department colleagues, trying to work with our European partners as well to bring the conflict to an end, given, as I think General Townsend said earlier, the threat emanating from Northern Africa is most acutely a European challenge.

But we are very cognizant, especially from the Department of Defense's perspective of what we see as sort of Russian encirclement in the eastern Med [Mediterranean Sea], and it is something that is complicating and a challenge.

Mr. BYRNE. With a minute and 10 seconds left, can you tell me where we are in Yemen?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Yemen. Yes. Once again, the U.S. is trying to support our diplomatic colleagues at the State Department and the U.N., led by Martin Griffiths, in his efforts to bring those competing forces together. We have seen some successes in the Sweden agreement between the two sides, and some efforts to have, I wouldn't call it a ceasefire, but minimizing violence. The Houthis, like the Taliban, are not easily trusted, but we do see that there is renewed interest, I think, from the Saudi-led coalition to find an end to the conflict, that we continue to believe there is no military solution to it, it has to be a diplomatic/political solution.

And I will just also add, we continue to support our Saudi and UAE partners and how they need to defend themselves against the UAV [unmanned aerial vehicle] and ballistic missile challenges coming out of Yemen.

Mr. BYRNE. Thank you. I yield back.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you.

Mr. Crow.

Mr. CROW. Thank you, Chairwoman.

Thank you to all of you for your testimony and continued service.

I would like to start by clarifying a timeline issue that I have been struggling with a little bit. The administration directed General Miller to conduct an assessment of troop withdrawal in Afghanistan last year. Is that correct?

General MCKENZIE. [No verbal response.]

Mr. CROW. And based on that assessment, he came up with an 8,600 number, is that correct? I am sorry, I can't hear you.

General MCKENZIE. That is correct. That is correct.

Mr. CROW. General Miller told a group of us when we were in Afghanistan in October, and then again during testimony in December, that that 8,600 drawdown was going to occur regardless of whether or not there was an agreement with the Taliban. Is that your understanding as well?

General MCKENZIE. No, that is not my understanding. Our understanding is this was driven—this was a branch plan that we held. We could adopt it if directed to do so, but we didn't have clear guidance to do it until recently.

So we were not planning to do this until we received Presidential direction. That may seem like a very fine point, but it is actually a big deal. We have plans for a lot of things. We had a plan to go to 8,600.

Mr. CROW. It is a big deal. So you are saying that the 8,600 drawdown was only going to occur if there was a peace agreement with the Taliban. Is that what you are saying?

General MCKENZIE. What I am saying from the military side, we were going to go to 8,600 when directed to do so by national leadership of the United States. I defer the rest of that, actually, to Ms. Wheelbarger here.



Ms. WHEELBARGER. I will just add, I do think, based on General Miller's advice, we were prepared and planned to go to 8,600. And the Secretary was prepared to adjust the force posture, in the absence of an agreement, if that was in our national security interest, but no decision had been made to do so.

Mr. CROW. Independent of an agreement with the Taliban?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Yes. He was prepared to do that if it looked like it was necessary, or appropriate for us, given our desire to instill readiness in the force, and being able to achieve the mission.

Mr. CROW. As of October of 2019, was it your understanding that that drawdown was to occur?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. No.

Mr. CROW. Okay. How about December of 2019?

General MCKENZIE. It was a contingency, but it was—we didn't have a date to start it and no intent to execute it until directed. We had no direction to do so.

Mr. CROW. Well, then the folks in this committee are getting contradictory information, and I would recommend that you clear it up within the Department of Defense.

Secondly, I had the opportunity to review the entire agreement, including the annexes. Two thousand four hundred Americans have given their lives in Afghanistan. Over 20,000 have been wounded. This is America's war, not any one administration's war.

Are there plans within the administration to release the entire agreement so the American public can see under what terms we are going to be withdrawing from Afghanistan?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. My understanding is the two side agreements, or annexes, are not public for operational requirements, and I would defer to my colleagues on why that is the case, and that they are not intended to be secret from the committees, but continue to be not public to the public.

General MCKENZIE. I would echo that.

Mr. CROW. I have read the entire agreement, and I see no reason why they could not be released. And I just want to be very clear that I believe, as do many people on this committee, that the American public deserve to know under what terms we are withdrawing from Afghanistan.

Lastly, in October, when a group of us was in Afghanistan, it was very clear to us by everybody that we talked to that the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces was incapable of standing up on its own any time in the next couple of years, yet under the plan, we will completely withdraw, including support services and contractors, within 14 months. If that occurs, will the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces be capable of standing up on its own?

General MCKENZIE. That is going to be another discovery-based process as we go forward. So we are going to go to 8,600 by the summer. Conditions on the ground will dictate if we go below that. If conditions on the ground are not permissive, my advice would be not to continue that reduction. That would not be my decision, that would be my advice.

So that will be based on performance of the Afghan military, their ability to incorporate the Taliban if the Taliban is going to be incorporated at all. I will have an opportunity to give advice on

this. I had an opportunity to give advice on the decisions that have just been made. So these are not things that will happen in and of themselves.

Mr. CROW. So if 14 months from now, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces are not capable of standing up on their own and defending Afghanistan and the government, it will be your advice not to withdraw those support services?

General MCKENZIE. Absolutely, that would be my advice, but that is a future contingency and there are a lot of—it is far more complex than just that. But, yes, and I will have an opportunity to give that advice.

Mr. CROW. And what are we doing—pivoting to Iraq very briefly, what are we doing now to protect the Syrian Kurds, stateless persons, and Syrian nationals who fought with us and make sure that them and their families are secure against attacks in the region?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, as you know, the area that we control in Syria with our Kurdish partners is generally what we call the eastern Syria security area. We have trained and continue to train significant internal security forces to maintain local security. We can be answerable for that through our SDF [Syrian Democratic Forces] partners and through our other partners there. I am confident that we have measures in place to protect them now. I am obviously less confident if you go into western Syria, because we don't have the ability to reach out to there.

Mr. CROW. Thank you. I yield back.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you.

Mr. Brooks.

Mr. BROOKS. Thank you. I have got four quick points before I get to my questions. Point number one, General McKenzie, in your written testimony, you state that, quote, "All wars have a political end," end quote. I think that is very insightful.

Number two, the United States has been in Afghanistan the time equivalent of a little bit more than five World War IIs, five World War IIs. That is a remarkable statistic.

Number three, in my judgment, our military has performed superbly, and we won in Afghanistan. We effectively destroyed al-Qaida's operational capability in the early years of the war, we toppled the Taliban government, and we killed Osama bin Laden.

Number four, I am skeptical that the Afghan people adequately appreciate America's sacrifice of American lives and treasury on their behalf. Perhaps you have a different view on that, but that is my view is, I don't think that we are properly appreciated for the sacrifices that we have engaged in in Afghanistan.

With that kind of as a backdrop, the question: The text of the Afghan Peace Agreement appears to commit the United States to withdrawing its forces within 14 months, subject to conditions on the ground.

General McKenzie, why was 14 months chosen?

General MCKENZIE. I would defer to the negotiator to arrive at that, to arrive at that point. I cannot answer the question why 14 versus 13 versus 22 months. I do not know the answer to that question, sir.

Mr. BROOKS. Does 14 months allow America to withdraw its forces and equipment from Afghanistan safely?

General MCKENZIE. It does if conditions are applied to that withdrawal, and we hold to the conditions.

Mr. BROOKS. What is the least amount of time needed to safely withdraw American forces and equipment from Afghanistan?

General MCKENZIE. I prefer to talk about that in a closed session, and I would be happy to do that.

Mr. BROOKS. Ms. Wheelbarger, the same three questions. First, why was 14 months chosen?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Unfortunately, I do have to defer to the State Department negotiators as well. I don't have insight.

Mr. BROOKS. Do you have a judgment as to whether that 14 months allows America adequate time to safely withdraw our forces and equipment?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. I would trust my military colleagues to do all they can to ensure any removal or retrograde of our troops is done with force protection being their number one priority.

Mr. BROOKS. And do you also have no opinion that you are willing to express in this setting about the minimum amount of time required for us to safely withdraw our troops and our equipment, salvageable equipment, from Afghanistan?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. I would assess that 14 months is probably enough time to withdraw safely. I just want to second what we have said before, which is 14 months is aspirational. Trying to set sort of a timeline suggestion that both sides can see their objectives potentially being fulfilled and, therefore, giving us the conditions that we feel is in our national security interest to actually withdraw.

Again, all of this is going to be based on whether the commitments are made and the security situation is such that we can continue to defend our own interests.

Mr. BROOKS. General Townsend, moving to Africa, what, in your judgment, are the most important flashpoints, or critical areas, in Africa at this time that we should focus our primary efforts on?

General TOWNSEND. First, I would say Somalia and specifically southern Somalia in the Kenya border region in southern part of Somalia. Secondly, I would say in West Africa, in the Sahel region, in the tri-border region that is formed by Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, and where that descends down to the littoral states.

Mr. BROOKS. Back to General McKenzie, if the Afghan talks do not begin as scheduled, will the United States delay its troop withdrawal and, if so, for how long? And perhaps Ms. Wheelbarger would be better to answer that, but I will defer to each of you.

General MCKENZIE. Sir, I would defer to her. But I would also point out to you that that withdrawal has begun.

Mr. BROOKS. About 3,000 troops, more or less?

General MCKENZIE. It is a small number. It is not linear. It will go—you know, it won't be a certain number every week as units come and go, but it has begun.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Again, in my conversations with the Secretary, his comfort level with that withdrawal decision was not just based on the agreement, but based on the assessment that we can continue to achieve our missions with that force posture. If something on the ground changes in light of the Taliban not keeping its

commitments, not just on the inter-Afghan agreement but on their use of violence, it is a decision he is willing to readdress.

Mr. BROOKS. Well, I pray that we will not be there indefinitely. Thank you for your service.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you.

Ms. Houlahan.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you, and thank you all for being here today.

My question has to do with women and girls, the beginning part to my question. The Women, Peace, and Security Act reflects the growing body of evidence confirming that the inclusion of women in the peace process helps to reduce conflict and to advance stability.

Research shows that higher levels of gender equality are associated with lower propensity for conflict. Data from countries around the world demonstrate that women's inclusion in peacekeeping units, police forces, and in the security sector improves accountability and decreases abuse against civilians.

So one of my first questions—and this goes along with Mr. Crow's question is: Can you first comment on whether or not there was any aspect of the agreement with the Taliban that related to women and to girls?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Based on my conversations with my State Department colleagues, the focus on this being an inclusive inter-Afghan agreement would include the necessity that women, in particular, are part of the peace negotiations, inter-Afghan peace negotiations.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Gentlemen, do you have any—

General MCKENZIE. I would associate my remarks with that. The only other point I would say is I particularly agree with you, the inclusion of women in policing activities and low-level tactical activities is extremely helpful. It is difficult to achieve in Afghanistan, as you are aware. But our inability to better—than we are having—the results we are getting is not from a lack of trying. We are trying very hard on that.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Sir? I know you can't talk on that area.

General TOWNSEND. I can't speak to the Taliban issue.

Ms. HOULAHAN. So my understanding is, that there is no inclusion of women and girls in the agreement, in any of the aspects of the agreement. And, so, I find that really disappointing, and I don't know who to aim my ire at. And so, I just would like to understand that better. And maybe offline, if we have the opportunity to talk about that, I would appreciate it, because it certainly seems that everybody—and I was on the trip with Mr. Crow. Everyone who we were with assured us that that was important. You know, we had opportunities to meet with a lot of folks about that particular issue, and it would be really disappointing if that was the case.

Can you comment, now, on how AFRICOM and CENTCOM have engaged women in counterterrorism efforts in your regions? How are you working to make sure that we do continue to include this important part of our population?

General TOWNSEND. Sure. So women and peace and security is sort of part of our DNA at AFRICOM. I actually have a full-time gender adviser on our staff there. This is an issue that is embedded

in every training event we do on the continent, or in Europe, for example. And so, just three quick examples.

We had a recent communication symposium which I spoke at where we brought women in the armed forces from African nations to Germany for a symposium. We conducted a female intel officer course on the continent, and we just had a fairly large-scale exercise called Flintlock. It is a special operations forces exercise. It had a women's and peace and security component to it. So we worked as hard to impress upon our African partners the importance of this.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you, sir.

General MCKENZIE. So I would echo what General Townsend said. You know, we have two tactical areas of operation where ability of women to interact at the tactical level is critical to obtain cultural entry into locations. So on the U.S. and on the coalition side, fully embedded. It is a critical capability that we simply cannot do without. And I am referring specifically to Afghanistan, Iraq, and parts of Syria as well.

Outreach to our partners, it is better in some areas than others. Afghanistan, there are profound cultural barriers to doing it. We work it across the entire theater. It is integral to all our training activities, and so, I am a very big supporter of it.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you. Ms. Wheelbarger.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Sure. I will just add I myself have visited the female commandos that work with Scotty Miller, and they are impressive and important. I will also add, from my perspective from my position, one of the things I try to put a lot of energy to is meeting with parliamentarians, particularly female parliamentarians, around the world, because including female voices in more than just security structures, but, actually, in representational democracy is part of what we should be pushing forward. So that is a key point that I strive to do.

Ms. HOULAHAN. And I couldn't obviously agree with you more. And I did have the opportunity when I was over with the CROWDEL [Congressman Crow congressional delegation] is what we called it to have the opportunity to meet with our side, who is leading the charge on women and girls issues.

I only have 30 seconds left, so I will just ask this question for the record. General Votel, your predecessor, General McKenzie, stated that cyber will be integrated through all operations. However, CENTCOM continues to be challenged by constrained resources, including trained cybersecurity personnel.

I was wondering if you could comment on whether or not you continue to feel the effects of constrained cyber resources and trained personnel, and how you would propose to solve that issue. And the same for, you know, both theaters. And I only have 4 seconds, so if it is okay, I will just take that for the record.

General MCKENZIE. We will come back to you on the record.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 101.]

Ms. HOULAHAN. I yield back.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you.

Mr. Scott.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam and gentlemen, thank you for being here. One thing I do want to mention, I am a little taken aback that we have left Sudan on the State Sponsors of Terrorism list along with countries like Iran. That country has come a long way since the incidents with Darfur. And I am disappointed that the State Department put additional conditions on them coming off of that list as we look to work by, with, and through countries in that region. If we leave them on the State Sponsors of Terrorism, they are left with no choice but to move towards China and Russia. And so, I hope that any assistance you can give us with helping to resolve that you will do.

As we talk about China, I am extremely concerned, especially about the natural resource extraction. And as we met with you in peacekeeping mission in Mali, they expressed concerns that, effectively, the theft of the natural resources of many of the countries would in the end lead to civil war in many of those countries, and I hope that we are attempting to make sure that the people of those countries get a square deal as much as possible.

General Townsend, thank you for your hospitality as some colleagues of mine visited AFRICOM. I have been in that area a couple of times. One was with General Furness at Djibouti for approximately a week, went to Manda Bay, spent some time in Somalia, Mogadishu.

I am a little taken aback at the lack of assets at that base for it to be under the command of somebody. I believe he was a two-star at the time. There are just very few assets in Djibouti, and I am concerned about the lack of assets available to our teams in the region.

General Townsend, you were very kind in providing resources to my colleagues and I to travel to see a couple of your ODA [Operational Detachment-Alpha] teams in Africa. We saw one ODA operating with the 127 Echo program, one team operating without. Could you speak to the members of the committee about the differences in the teams that operate with the 127 Echo program, and those that operate without it?

General TOWNSEND. Sure. Congressman, first, you know, you asked about—let me kind of double back to something you said a moment ago about we hope that we are helping these countries get a square deal with the Chinese.

The Department of State has an initiative where they review contracts with these countries. It is a free service. Bring your contracts in. We will read the Chinese version, we will read the version in your language, and we will tell you where the traps are, and if there are differences in the versions. I think this has gone a long way to help some of the countries on the continent avoid the debt trap diplomacy problem.

To your question about resources in Africa, you know, I have served around the globe, a lot of time in CENTCOM. In AFRICOM, our troops and our efforts there are the most thinly resourced of any I have ever encountered, or had to contend with. That said, we are not in the lead in any place on the African continent. We support our international partners, African partners, European partners, et cetera, AMISOM [African Union Mission in Somalia], U.N., AU [African Union] partners.

So I think if our troops are frustrated, could they do more if they had more? Absolutely, they could, but it is not their place to do more. It is their place to support our partners. That is our role. And sometimes that is a little hard to get our more junior leaders to understand, because they know what they can do, especially veterans of other theaters know what they could do if they had more resources. So we are constrained, but I think it is by deliberate choice.

Your specific question about 127 Echo and, for example, a triple 3, 333-resourced force are significant. The 127 Echo essentially has full resourcing, because it is a force that is operating with U.S. oversight and control, and the 333 program is a partner force. They are just different sections authorized by Congress as to what we can provide those forces.

Mr. SCOTT. General, I am very short on time. I, again, want to thank you, but I do want to mention this, and this is not a military mission. It would be more of a State Department mission.

We are bringing men in, predominantly men in that area, and we are training them in military tactics, and they have effectively, a third-grade education level. And we have them 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. I do think that it would be worthwhile for the United States, with other governments, through some type of aid program, to provide educational resources for those men while they are there on those bases. Otherwise, we are training somebody and then releasing them without an education.

The CHAIRMAN [presiding]. Thank you.

Mr. Brown.

Mr. BROWN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me just preface by stating the obvious. Africa is a large continent, 3½ times the size of the United States, 54 nations, very diverse in its challenges and opportunities. So as I ask my questions, I don't want anyone to think that I am confused that it is, you know, one nation and homogeneous or monolithic.

General Townsend, I think you are right, you know, that our soldiers may not be—you know, I am quoting you—not their place to do more, but I will say that after meeting with you in Stuttgart with Representative Scott when we went to Africa, USAID [United States Agency for International Development] said they could do more if there were more of you. The State Department mission said that they could do more if there were more of you. So there is a lot more that could be happening in Africa, in terms of development and diplomacy, with a larger military presence.

Let me ask you this question: You know, and I really appreciate this place mat that you provided. You provided a classified version when we were in Stuttgart. It is scary when you look at the trendline of China's presence, both, you know, the infrastructure, the business investments, the arms sales. African nations don't want to be caught in the middle between the United States and China or Russia.

But my question is, what will the DOD, AFRICOM, do to ensure, and ultimately deliver, on the desire to be the preferred partner for African nations? And while you are answering that, maybe you can, once again, just define great power competition with China in Africa.

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Congressman. So the first part of your question about great power, or global power competition, as I like to refer to it. Really, it is all about gaining and maintaining influence. That is what that competition is all about. So on some future rainy day, we have the access and influence that we need. So we are in a struggle with China and Russia to gain and maintain that influence.

What they want from us—we can't compete with China. We are not going to build stadiums and railroads and ports and palaces, which are all things China builds on the continent. But what they do want from us is they want help building their capacity, their security forces, and they want our help with the counterterrorism problem that they have.

So even though some people may not necessarily agree with this, I believe in Africa, building partner capacity and counterterrorism efforts, or counter-VEO [violent extremist organization] efforts, are a way we do global or great power competition in Africa, because that is what our partners are hungry for. They come to us because of our capacity to do that, they come to us because of our skill, and they come to us because of how we treat them and our values.

Mr. BROWN. Let me interject with another question. Can you briefly describe how you are going to deploy the 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade that you now have in your AOR?

General TOWNSEND. Sure. So I can cover this in more detail in the classified session, but we have them. They are already—some of them are already on the continent doing—they have been leaning forward since about October, and they moved very quickly once we got approval.

We are going to deploy them in some countries with persistent presence. In some of our highest priority countries, we will have persistent presence with those partners, and in other countries, we will have sort of an episodic or a scheduled presence.

And so, in some places they will take up—they will elevate our game, because they can advise and train at a higher level than some of our soft forces that are actually training, you know, units of action at the small unit level.

Mr. BROWN. Let me see if I can get this one in. I know it is an austere environment. And when I was there in August, I mean, it takes weeks to get major end items in place, I mean, if not months. It takes weeks to get repair parts to the ODA teams.

Now that you are bringing in the SFAB [Security Force Assistance Brigade], I mean, what infrastructure needs, what are the unmet infrastructure needs or logistical support needs on the continent?

General TOWNSEND. I don't think that the SFAB has any additional requirements that other elements of DOD have on the ground. Theirs are basically the same. We will make sure they have the right support, the right security. Wherever we send them in Africa, they will be properly supported.

I think they are going to probably—if any of them are veterans of Afghanistan or Iraq, they are going to be shocked when they first arrive by the level of resourcing I was referring to earlier, how thinly resourced Africa is. It is going to be—it is very austere, very expeditionary, as you have seen with your own eyes.



Mr. BROWN. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I just want to emphasize a point that General Townsend made, Mr. Brown elicited, is, what is the value add that we have to build relationships in Africa? China is throwing all kinds of money around. But it really is, during my trip to Tunisia, actually, this is a huge point. I mean, they want us and need us as the most reliable partner on security. That is something that Russia and China really can't offer. They don't have the sustainable equipment. They don't have the training. It is a skill set that we bring that helps us build that relationship. Obviously, there are other things that we do with diplomacy and USAID and all of that, but that security relationship is a way to build partnerships in Africa without a question.

Mr. Rogers.

Mr. ROGERS. First, let me thank all of you for your service to our country and for making yourself available today.

General McKenzie, in your unfunded priorities list, you address a need for more drones and surveillance to increase your ISR [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance] capability for base resilience and defense. Is that something, are you trying to fill a gap or you just don't have enough ISR capability at present?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, every combatant commander wants more ISR capability. Their current plans to reduce the number of particularly MQ-9 drones that are available, we would like to see if there is a way that we can keep those in the theater and continue to use them.

I recognize that there is a pressing requirement for those drones worldwide, and there are other places that they can be used. Nonetheless, we believe we have a genuine requirement for them, both in the VEO fight, as well as positioned against Iran, even though the MQ-9 is a vulnerable platform against some Iranian capabilities. Nonetheless, particularly in places like the Strait of Hormuz and other areas, it gives us visibility and intelligence-gathering capabilities that we might not otherwise have.

Mr. ROGERS. Was this a request that you put in your base request list, and was pushed to UFR [unfunded requirements] list, or was it initially put in the UFR list?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, I will have to come back to you on the details of that. I believe we are responding to a very reasonable, understandable desire by the Air Force to divest its legacy systems in their request. So we were reacting to that. I will have to come back to you with a detailed answer to that, and I will.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 102.]

Mr. ROGERS. Great. And I very much appreciate your Birmingham, Alabama accent. I am glad you haven't lost it in all your years of service around the world.

General MCKENZIE. Sir, thank you.

Mr. ROGERS. I picked up on it real quick.

General Townsend, your recent completion of the Flintlock exercise 2020 with your African partners, tell me what, if anything, that did to increase your capability to combat violent extremists in the region?

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Congressman. I would like to also join General McKenzie in his comments about the ISR. We are in the same boat as CENTCOM. So we understand that those resources could be used elsewhere in the world. We also know that the Air Force would like to transition to hire in more capable platforms, and they are going to have to divest some of the lower-end stuff. But the lower-end stuff works really well for us in AFRICOM and in CENTCOM.

On your question about Flintlock, so Flintlock is an exercise for special operations forces, and it is very much directly focused on counterterrorism. It is about improving and building partner capacity. So these countries come together, and we operated this year in Mauritania and in Senegal were the two main areas of focus.

And I think that—well, you can just read from some of the quotes from some of the press reports of the participants how much they thought they got out of Flintlock. Flintlock is one of our more successful exercises, and I think it helps build capacity for counterterrorism operations in Africa writ large.

Mr. ROGERS. And it is an annual exercise?

General TOWNSEND. It is.

Mr. ROGERS. How many years has it been taking place?

General TOWNSEND. I am sorry, I didn't hear the question.

Mr. ROGERS. How many years has it been taking place?

General TOWNSEND. I don't know. I will have to take that and get back to you on that.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 102.]

Mr. ROGERS. Ms. Wheelbarger, tell me about the Department's objectives with Syria, and how they comply with the overarching objectives of CENTCOM AOR?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. The military's objectives or the Department's objective in Syria remains the D-ISIS, enduring defeat of ISIS. The U.S. Government has broader objectives in Syria, which includes also political settlement along the lines of 2254, the U.N. process, as well as having fewer Iranian forces in Syria.

But the military component is the D-ISIS campaign. And we have, you know, never—we have continued that fight continuously, even while we repositioned our forces, based on Presidential guidance over the years.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. We are going to do Mr. Carbajal and Mr. Gallego, and then we are going to go do the classified brief.

So, Mr. Carbajal.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to all the witnesses.

China has steadily increased its influence in Africa through its Belt and Road Initiative, BRI, showing the effectiveness of soft power. China has pledged \$60 billion in new financing for African countries, and is now the continent's biggest trading partner, with Sino-African trade topping \$200 billion per year. While there is bipartisan criticism for BRI, the U.S. must be able to offer an alternative narrative.

Secretary Wheelbarger, what actions has DOD taken in conjunction with other Federal agencies to offer an alternative to BRI in

Africa? I know this was raised earlier, but I am not sure the answers were as substantive as they can be.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Of course. So, the administration does have a policy to increase trade and development on the continent. It is called Prosper Africa. I think the efforts are primarily focused, again, other agencies, but the idea is how can we make the economic models within Africa comport more with our industry standards, or our economic way of doing business rather than just sort of the Chinese way of just sort of flowing in money.

We do, of course, recognize that a lot of this has to do with how we speak to our partners and how we can highlight that their short-term economic gains in the near term might result in long-term loss of sovereignty. And we have seen this in other countries.

And I think many of our African partners are actually starting to see that that is affecting them, that the economic benefits that they think they are going to get rapidly aren't necessarily accruing to them specifically. Many Chinese companies that are there, they don't hire a local workforce. They are really just extracting the resources and not providing a lot of benefit to the countries themselves.

So it is not just what we can do in addition to bringing economic might in, but, also, highlighting that they are actually setting themselves up for a long-term challenging relationship if they are going to rely on Chinese monetary investment.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

General Townsend, has BRI undermined or threatened partnerships or security cooperation on the continent?

General TOWNSEND. I think the short answer is yes. I think that BRI is just part of a larger strategic approach that China has not only to Africa, but the world, but in Africa it is playing out.

Their approach is Belt and Road Initiative, bilateral engagement, multilateral engagement. It is very much a whole-of-government approach. It is easier for them to orchestrate their whole-of-government, maybe, than it is for us to do so. And they are putting a lot of money in.

So, without question, they are able to buy influence in Africa, not only from partners maybe who are willing to take bribes, but they are willing to buy—they can buy influence from even pretty strong partners, because they are partners in need.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

I want to turn to climate change and its nexus with our national security. Nine of 10 most climate change vulnerable states are in sub-Saharan Africa, and in a region whose total population is expected to double between now and 2050.

General Townsend, I am sure you have considered how the changing climate will impact security needs and operations. How are you managing the risk of regional instability due to the impacts of climate change, such as increasingly dangerous natural disasters and food and water insecurity?

General TOWNSEND. Well, Congressman, as you said, we see the effects of climate change all over Africa today. Desertification, the creeping southward of the Sahara Desert is one of those. Competition for water, which has a potential to erupt into state-on-state conflict in a couple places. And we are dealing with locust swarms.

Not only do we have coronavirus, we have locust swarms on the African continent in East Africa right now.

So these are all problems that we have to deal with. And they don't really have military solutions. This is where we have to work with our partners, not only in our own State Department, in our own USAID, but, also, NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] and international partners as well.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Do you feel we are being effective, taking a whole-of-government approach with all these different agencies, addressing this issue?

General TOWNSEND. Well, I think some of these challenges defy solutions by any one nation, desertification and the water competition, for example. With the smaller scale problem of Ebola and locust swarms, I think we are.

There is an international effort to help, and I know the United States is contributing to both of those. And, in fact, in the case of Ebola, the countries that are dealing with that have developed a self-capacity to handle that problem without a lot of outside assistance. That is an example of where we have helped.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, General.

Mr. Chair, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Gallego.

Mr. GALLEGO. Thank you.

Ms. Wheelbarger, we have heard a number of data points about our African partners, AFRICOM itself getting less attention and funding. What is the risk that we are accepting in doing so?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. I will take this opportunity to highlight that the Secretary has not made any decisions other than moving the SFAB into the continent. He is continuing to review all options, weighing that against the risk. And I think, from my perspective, one of the primary ones is the long-term risk of the evolution and metastasization of terrorist organizations. They may look one way today, but if you don't maintain the pressure where they exist, they may evolve in the future where they have both the capability and the will to attack us in the homeland. So our ability to maintain focus across the continent is really necessary in this risk calculation.

Mr. GALLEGO. Thank you.

General Townsend, what is your opinion on this increased risk that she identified?

General TOWNSEND. I think I agree with her assessment of the risk, and I also agree with her characterization that so far, no decisions have been made other than we have gained an SFAB for Africa, AFRICOM.

Mr. GALLEGO. To follow up, General Townsend, I noticed on the front page of your testimony you have a statement that says: "A secure and stable Africa is an enduring American interest."

So would you agree that scaling back our already modest Africa presence will mean that your command will do less—and will be less resourced to fight for the national interests, our national interests on the African continent?

General TOWNSEND. Congressman, I agree that if we have less resources, we will be able to do less.

Mr. GALLEGO. So then just to follow up, and this could be to anyone at the table here, if AFRICOM is realigning to deal with the great power competition, why is the security cooperation budget for the continent planning for a \$72 million cut? Where will these programs be cut? What parts of the continent will these be cut from? Because it seems it is contradicting everything that we are hearing. If we are going to realign to, you know, focus on big power competition, then we should show that in the budget also.

Ms. Wheelbarger, do you want to start?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. I will start by just highlighting again, the zero-based review that the Secretary is doing looking at resources in Africa, his intent is to see if the missions that we recognize are critical and need to achieve can be done in more efficient or effective ways. This doesn't necessarily mean absorbing more risk. It could mean just is there a better way to do the mission that we are already doing.

With respect to security cooperation writ large, we have a lot of global requirements on security cooperation. My perspective is, particularly the theaters that have low posture, you need to look at other tools that you have at your disposal. And, therefore, security cooperation assistance, 333 programs, for example, are invaluable to maintaining the security partnerships we have. With respect to the specific programmatic numbers that you brought up, unless General Townsend has specifics, I think we are probably going to have to take the specifics for the record.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 102.]

Mr. GALLEGO. General Townsend.

General TOWNSEND. I would just add, I think some of the most important programs that we have are programs like FMF [Foreign Military Financing], IMET [International Military Education and Training], FMS [Foreign Military Sales], 333 programs, State Partnership Programs. A lot of those programs I am advocating for are not even Department of Defense programs. Those are tremendously valuable for us, especially in global power competition.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 102.]

Mr. GALLEGO. It just seems like \$75 million compared to how big our budget is seems like, you know, it would be very naive for us to just cut that funding, considering I think it does do good work.

Just last question, because they are probably our closest allies on the continent and have the most experience. Have you had discussions with our French allies about their posture if we make decisions about our posture in Africa altogether? Ms. Wheelbarger.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Yes. The Secretary has had several meetings with his counterpart Minister Parly. She understands the Secretary's need to restore readiness to the force and review all missions and all support to foreign partners. The French do highlight, of course, the importance of U.S. enabling support to their operations. Just some capabilities they simply do not have. And what we have been doing is trying to encourage them to speed up their decision making on having those capabilities for themselves so they no longer are reliant on United States support.

Mr. GALLEGO. Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. That will conclude this portion of the hearing. We will give you like a 10-minute break and we will reconvene at 12:10 at 2212.

Thank you, we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:01 p.m., the committee proceeded in closed session.]

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# **A P P E N D I X**

MARCH 10, 2020

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**PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD**

MARCH 10, 2020

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Statement by

Kathryn Wheelbarger

Performing the Duties of Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

Office of the Secretary of Defense

Before the 116th Congress

Committee on Armed Services

U.S. House of Representatives

March 10, 2020

**Introduction**

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on policy matters related to the USCENTCOM and USAFRICOM theaters, alongside Commanders General McKenzie and General Townsend. I would also like to thank the women and men of the Department of Defense, whose dedication, talents, and sacrifices enable us to execute our policies and achieve our objectives in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere.

I would also like to recognize and thank you for the strong collaboration and bipartisan support you provide the Department. Given my time serving as a senior staff member with national security committees in both the House and Senate, I appreciate for this committee's role in overseeing the Department's efforts to defend our country. It is a privilege for me to be here today to explain our defense policy toward the Middle East and Africa to ensure you have the information you need to properly provide congressional oversight of the Department of Defense.

Our approach to Middle East and Africa policy is nested within the guidance from the 2017 National Security Strategy and the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS). The overall goals of the National Security Strategy are to protect the American people, defend the Homeland, and to promote prosperity and peace from a position of strength. The National Defense Strategy supports our National Security Strategy by focusing on three key aspects of U.S. power: our lethality, our partners and allies, and our institutions. The NDS also directs the Department to focus on Great Power Competition with China and Russia, while remaining vigilant in countering threats from rogue states like Iran, North Korea, and violent extremist organizations like ISIS. To compete effectively in this environment and defend against rising near-peer competitors, our forces must remain dominant by increasing modernization, technological adaptation, and readiness;

we must also ensure increased lethality while being responsible stewards of taxpayers' contributions; and, we must strengthen our partnerships and alliances around the globe. The need to address near-peer competitors now and in the future requires us to make adjustments to our posture and avoid unnecessarily prioritizing near-term problems at the expense of building readiness and capacity for potential high-end conflict in the future. As we do so, we must deter and confront adversaries, while avoiding miscalculation or escalation that would distract from and ultimately undermine our national security interests.

In the Middle East and Africa, our policy objective is to increase regional stability and secure U.S. interests by working by, with, and through networks of regional partners and international allies. By enhancing the capabilities and capacity of our partners to provide for their own defense and address regional problems, we reduce the risk to our Homeland while increasing the internal security and stability of potentially vulnerable states. We often consciously play a supporting role to other government agencies and our partners in these regions. We seek to address shared security threats with partners and allies, while maintaining the ability to act unilaterally, if and when necessary.

#### **Middle East**

The United States' strategy in the Middle East seeks to ensure the region is not a safe haven for terrorists, is not dominated by any power hostile to the United States, and contributes to a stable global energy market. For the Department of Defense, this translates into the following six objectives: (1) Utilize a dynamic U.S. military presence with strategic depth to deter and, if necessary, respond to aggression; (2) Strengthen the defensive capabilities of regional partners; (3) Advance partnerships and burden-sharing with allies and partners to address shared security concerns; (4) Protect freedom of navigation; (5) Deny safe haven to terrorists that threaten the

homeland; and (6) Mitigate WMD threats.

To that end, the Department is focused on ensuring continued success in our campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qa'ida (AQ), while also strengthening deterrence and defenses in the face of Iranian aggression, and competing with China and Russia for regional and global influence. This will require investing in sustainable partnerships to reduce the vulnerabilities of weak states as part of a whole of government effort to enhance stability in the region. These policy objectives inform our decisions on the risks and benefits of actions. We understand the importance and trust emplaced upon the Department as good stewards of security for every American. This is our commitment to our national security and prosperity.

#### *Iran*

In Iran, the Department of Defense has played a supporting role to the United States' economic and diplomatic maximum pressure campaign. These efforts seek to bring the Iranian regime back to the negotiating table for a new and better deal that addresses the full range of threats emanating from Iran. Iran has chosen to respond with a campaign of violence that has grown increasingly reckless over the past year with attacks on the U.S. counter-terrorism presence in Iraq along with economic infrastructure and international shipping in the Gulf region. In addition to displaying an increased willingness to carry out direct attacks on our forces and its neighbors, Iran continues proliferating advanced conventional weapons with the purpose of building influence in vulnerable states and undermining the security of our partners.

While DoD's Middle East policy has not changed, Iran's increased aggression has required DoD to temporarily strengthen our defensive posture to protect our forces and regional partners, as well as ensure the President has a wide range of options to respond to future Iranian attacks if necessary. In deploying additional forces to the region, DoD is leveraging new Dynamic Force

Employment concepts to rapidly move forces in and out of the Middle East in reaction to specific threats, keeping adversaries off balance and mitigating the long term burden on the joint force.

DoD will continue to using our force posture to deter Iranian aggression and limit its freedom of maneuver, while building the capabilities and capacity of our partners to address the Iranian threat in the region. As we seek to balance our global responsibilities, our forces remain poised to address any Iranian provocation, while remaining cognizant of the risk of unintended escalation into war and the effects of overall readiness of the force for high-end warfare and NDS priorities.

*International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC)*

We are also internationalizing the response to Iran's aggression, working with allies and partners to improve regional defenses and deterrence through multilateral frameworks. Our participation in the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC) is an example of how we have successfully worked through a multinational maritime force to patrol threatened waterways in the Middle East to dissuade further attacks and deescalate tensions.

*Operation INHERENT RESOLVE and Yemen*

In Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, our sustained support to partner counter-terrorism operations is bringing success. The so-called ISIS caliphate, which once controlled large swaths of Syria and Iraq, no longer controls physical territory and has reverted to an underground insurgency movement. As we turn to consolidating those gains and ensuring the lasting defeat of ISIS, we will continue to work with our Coalition and interagency partners to build local security forces and good governance. In Syria these partners include the SDF and their associated political organization; in Iraq this includes long-time security partners such as the Counter Terrorism Service, the Iraqi Army, and the Kurdish Peshmerga.

ISIS today is not the threat it once was, but the group has survived debilitating setbacks before and remains committed to enduring and achieving its grim vision. If CT pressure were significantly reduced, ISIS would likely attempt to intensify its insurgency throughout Iraq and Syria, expand its influence in Sunni-majority areas, and rebuild its core capabilities. Make no mistake: this is a group that remains committed to attacking the West, and if allowed to regenerate in this way would be better poised to do so. The Global Coalition to Defeat was developed to defeat a global enemy—but we must not lose focus on securing our gains against its core in Iraq and Syria.

Specifically in Syria, the U.S. policy priorities are to ensure the enduring defeat ISIS, support a political solution to the conflict in concert with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254, and seek the withdrawal of Iranian-backed forces from the country. We maintain our leadership role in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, which brings together 77 nations and 5 international organizations to provide an array of military capabilities, funding, and political support to the campaign against ISIS. Specific to the Department of Defense, our military mission remains limited to the D-ISIS campaign, and to that end we are maintaining a military presence in northeast Syria and at the At-Tanf Garrison. We also continue to operate by, with, and through the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to consolidate our military gains and to ensure ISIS is unable to resurge.

We are also working with the Department of State to enable local security forces and prevent the resurgence of ISIS networks in territory liberated from the group. Our drawdown and repositioning of forces in northeast Syria represents a new phase in this continuing mission. The President decided that the United States will maintain a residual force in Syria to support and enable our partners on the ground as they work to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS. We continue



that partnership today, degrading ISIS's capabilities and denying ISIS the ability to retake territory and resources it once controlled and used to generate revenue for global attacks and to administer its so-called caliphate. The United States also continues to believe that the only way to resolve the Syrian conflict is through the UN-facilitated Syrian-led and -owned political process pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254.

The fight against ISIS in Iraq—the territory from which the group first took shape and where it retains its deepest roots—is every bit as critical. We seek a stable, independent, and resilient Iraq that is able to secure its own territory and advance our shared security interests in the region. Our forces remain in the country as part of a Global Coalition to advise, assist, train, and equip the Iraqi Security Forces to secure the lasting defeat of ISIS. In 2014 this terrorist group controlled nearly a third of Iraq's territory, now they have regressed back into a latent insurgency unable to hold ground or challenge the ISF directly. However, we should not make the mistake of thinking they are gone for good; given an opportunity, they will exploit continued instability and popular grievances to reassert themselves in ungoverned spaces across the region. It is vital that we continue our security cooperation and diplomatic engagement with the Government of Iraq to ensure the gains against ISIS, which came a tremendous cost to ourselves, our Coalition partners and most significantly to the Iraqi people, do not slip away.

In Yemen, DoD's military actions and partner support are intended to help end the war and avoid a regional conflict, counter the threat from AQAP and ISIS-Yemen, mitigate the humanitarian crisis, and help our partners defend their territory. The United States seeks a peaceful resolution to the conflict that will bring much-needed security to Yemenis and the region. Together with the Department of State and the United Nations, we are working to facilitate a cessation of hostilities in order to move towards a more stable Yemen. The Department has two lines of effort in

Yemen. First is our fight against terrorist organizations that threaten U.S. national security interests, and have capitalized on Yemeni instability. Along with our partners, we have significantly degraded al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula's external plot capability and ISIS-Yemen's presence. Our second line of effort is to provide limited, non-combat support to the Coalition, which is supporting the recognized Government of Yemen and working to bolster Yemeni infrastructure and institutions where possible. U.S support to the Saudi-led Coalition began in 2015 under President Obama after Iran-backed rebels attempted to overthrow the Yemeni government and began cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia. That support continues under President Trump, based upon 2017 guidance that coupled continued support with efforts to further limit civilian casualties. DoD's support to the Coalition has been a key factor in influencing Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to back the UN process. Supported by Iran, the Houthis are using increasingly sophisticated ballistic missiles and explosive unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) against our partners—including civilian infrastructure, including airports where American citizens are present. Houthis also target military and commercial vessels in the Red Sea threatening a major maritime corridor.

Today, roughly 60 DoD military advisors, deployed to Saudi Arabia, enable the Coalition to address these threats. These advisors are not engaged in offensive military operations against the Houthis. Rather, they help the Coalition defend itself from these external attacks. Fighting between the Saudis and Houthis has resumed in recent weeks, and so I want to emphasize that Yemen is at a critical juncture that has implications for our strategic interests in the region. If the Iran-backed Houthis continue to refuse to negotiate meaningfully with the legitimate Yemeni government and regional partners, the potential for a stable and secure Yemen will continue to diminish. It is critical to continue both of our lines of effort in Yemen in order to protect the interests and

equities of the United States and our regional partners. A change in our approach would work against our efforts to encourage negotiations, a cessation of hostilities, and the means to a legitimate, inclusive government of Yemen. Withdrawing U.S. support would embolden the Houthi rebels, and the worsening of conflict between all parties would further empower AQAP and ISIS in Yemen.

*Partnerships: Levant and Gulf*

Our successes in these immediate conflicts are contingent upon our regional defense partnerships. Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel all play critical roles in our efforts to prevent Syria from once again becoming a safe haven for extremists, just as our long-time partners in the Gulf are instrumental in supporting the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. We continue to support Egypt in its fight against terrorists in the Sinai who threaten Egyptian and Israeli security interests. For decades, we have invested in these bilateral partnerships to advance our collective security. Our national security depends on more than our force posture and our unilateral actions. Through our resources and network of partnerships and alliances, we seek to build local capacity, develop coalitions with the ability to respond to future threats, and ensure the United States remains the defense partner of choice in the region.

Saudi Arabia remains a central pillar of our regional counterterrorism efforts, and is a key stakeholder in the Yemen conflict. The Saudis are a crucial partner for us to help foster stability, security and also counter Iranian influence in Yemen. Despite recent challenges we must address, Riyadh's influence extends through the Muslim world to Central Asia and East Africa; leveraging it serves as a force multiplier for U.S. interests. The UAE has demonstrated it is a willing and capable partner in regional security efforts, including participation in IMSC and joint counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan and Yemen. Oman serves as a critical waypoint for DoD operations in

the USCENTCOM area of responsibility and is a consistent voice for moderation in regional affairs. Kuwait remains a key partner for force-flow and logistic support to U.S. forces throughout the entire region. Qatar, as the second largest customer of Foreign Military Sales and a critical host for U.S. forces, is taking steps to increase its interoperability with U.S. and NATO forces. Bahrain helps to shape the Gulf's security architecture as a key U.S. partner in regional coalitions and U.S.-led defense initiatives, including the Global D-ISIS Coalition. Bahrain also hosts the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, a critical resource in protecting the freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, reinforcing a strong and enduring security partnership.

*Great Power Competition in the Middle East*

Even as we see combat success, we must recognize the importance of fully implementing our NDS guidance on near-peer competition with Russia and China, addressing regional challenges from Iran, and combating the residual terrorist threat to our Homeland. Russia and China seek to expand their influence in the Middle East using similar tools as us, but are otherwise unconstrained by respect for international rules and norms. We see Russian and Chinese defense sales increasingly seeking to drive a wedge between us and our long-time partners. We see Russian military action in Syria as an attempt to increase their influence in the region and negatively affecting how partners balance their security interests. We see Chinese economic activity—along with a corresponding expansion of its military footprint—finding new homes across the region. These actions put our own influence—both military and economic—at risk. In response, we must continue to invest in our regional partnerships to ensure that American will remain the partner of choice in the Middle East.

**Afghanistan**

Our mission in Afghanistan is guided by the President's South Asia Strategy. The South

Asia Strategy identifies our vital national interest in South Asia: to protect the U.S. homeland, citizens, and interests overseas from threats originating from South Asia. Central to protecting our interests is ending the war in Afghanistan through a durable and inclusive political settlement, thereby mitigating the threat of Afghanistan serving as a safe haven for terrorists. Our military mission in Afghanistan has increased pressure on the Taliban, ensuring they understand that they cannot win on the battlefield. Peace will only be achieved at the negotiating table.

The United States conducts two complementary missions in Afghanistan under Operation Freedom Sentinel. First, U.S. forces conduct a counterterrorism mission against al-Qaeda, ISIS-K, and their associates to prevent their resurgence and their potential to conduct external attacks. U.S. Forces - Afghanistan works by, with, and through the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces on the counterterrorism mission.

Second, in collaboration with NATO Allies and partners under the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, U.S. forces train, advise, and assist the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to strengthen their ability to secure their country from insurgent and terrorist threats. Our train, advise, and assist efforts seek to develop institutional capacity in the Ministry of Defense and Interior, integrate capabilities, and improve tactical proficiency.

On February 29, 2019, the President announced that we have achieved an agreement with the Taliban that is a major milestone toward our goal of a durable and inclusive political settlement. The U.S. - Taliban agreement will pave the way for negotiations between Afghans on the future of their country. This was done in parallel with a U.S. and Government of Afghanistan agreement. We are hopeful that the intra-Afghan negotiations that will [soon begin/ began on] will yield positive results. We have insisted to the Taliban that they abide by their counterterrorism commitments, negotiate in good faith with all Afghan stakeholders, and not restart their campaign

of violence. However, we are prepared for all eventualities. If the Taliban do not follow through on their counterterrorism commitments, if they resume attacks against U.S. or Coalition forces, or if they demonstrate that they are unwilling to negotiate in good faith, we will hold them accountable.

Following the signing of the U.S.-Taliban Agreement, we are adjusting our force posture in Afghanistan. U.S. Forces - Afghanistan has conducted prudent planning, in close consultation with NATO, to adjust our force posture, taking into account the developments in the political landscape, while ensuring that we can effectively execute our core missions with fewer U.S. forces. I want to emphasize that our presence in Afghanistan is conditions-based. Our goal remains that Afghanistan will never again be a safe haven from which terrorists can conduct external operations. Further changes in our force posture will continue to be dependent upon conditions on the ground, including all sides' demonstrated commitment to the peace process.

To sustain our mission and achieve our goals in Afghanistan, we will continue to ask for your support. Maintaining funding and authorities for Operation Freedom's Sentinel and the Resolute Support Mission will ensure that our forces can continue their mission as long as necessary. Sustaining a sufficient Afghanistan Security Forces Fund appropriation is especially critical to Afghanistan's stability and security, and to maintaining a counterterrorism capability within the ANDSF, even in a post-settlement environment. Finally, the continued support and contributions of the international community will also remain a vital factor for ANDSF funding.

#### Africa

The Department of Defense (DoD) is reviewing activities and resources across combatant commands; beginning with U.S. Africa Command. We are rebalancing and right-sizing to ensure DoD is aligned to most effectively meet NDS priorities, such as the great power competition and

countering violent extremist organizations that threaten the Homeland. The first decision from this review was to improve upon the training, advising and assisting we provide partners through the announced deployment of a Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) in the coming weeks in place of a conventional infantry battalion currently on the continent. Army SFABs are manned, trained and equipped specifically for our mission in Africa. The deployment of the SFAB is “right-sizing” the mission and reflects our continued commitment to regional partners.

The United States maintains a whole-of-government approach to advancing security and stability in Africa. The U.S. government’s commitment to Africa is demonstrated across the spectrum of national power- including diplomatic, military and economic efforts. Persistent U.S. military presence is not the only measure of the Department of Defense’s commitment in Africa, but we will continue to do our part. DoD’s commitment is demonstrated by counter-terrorism training and operations, bi-lateral and multi-lateral dialogues, dynamic force employment, military training exercises, foreign military sales/financing programs, intelligence sharing, crisis response, and emergency humanitarian assistance.

DoD efforts are primarily concentrated on the Horn of Africa, the Maghreb, Sahel, and Lake Chad regions. DoD is also engaged in central and southern Africa.

The Horn of Africa has made some progress but remains challenged on several fronts, including security. The January 2020 al-Shabaab attack on Camp Simba, Kenya, which killed three Americans, is a serious reminder of the threat that al Shabaab poses to U.S. interests in the region. While Somalia struggles to fully reform its security sector, these threats are a reminder of the need for continued support to the African Union Mission in Somalia and the troop contributing countries to that mission including Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.

The Department is also pursuing activities such as adding a National Guard Bureau State

Partnership Program to support Prime Minister Abiy's transformative efforts in Ethiopia this year. Djibouti, as host to Camp Lemonnier with about 3500 DoD military and civilian members, is a critical, strategically located U.S. partner. China's naval base is only a few miles from our U.S. location and demonstrates one way in which Great Power Competition is playing out in Africa.

In the Sahel, the 250 percent increase in VEO violence since 2018 in Burkina Faso, Mali, and western Niger is threatening to destabilize the West Africa coastal states. As security in the region rapidly deteriorates, African partners are working to focus their collective efforts on addressing this growing threat through regional efforts including the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and in collaboration with European partners.

In the Lake Chad Region, where Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA) operate, years of violent terrorist activity have displaced large populations and created a humanitarian crisis. Niger and Chad, which are facing threats on multiple fronts (e.g., Sahel and Lake Chad Basin), are both increasingly capable and willing partners working to stem the threat these VEO pose for vulnerable populations throughout the region.

### **Conclusion**

Under the guiding framework of the NDS, the Department is well positioned to address the range of dynamic issues facing the United States in the Middle East and Africa. This balanced approach helps ensure the Department can meet a variety of present and future threats while enhancing the strength and agility of our forces. Thank for the opportunity to share my views relating to USCENTCOM and USAFRICOM posture.



**Kathryn Wheelbarger**  
**Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs**

Kathryn Wheelbarger is Performing the Duties of Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. She oversees policy issues related to the nations and international organizations of Europe (including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization), Russia, the Middle East, Africa, and the Western Hemisphere.

Previously, Ms. Wheelbarger served as Vice President for Litigation and Chief Compliance Officer at CSRA Inc. In this position, Ms. Wheelbarger managed CSRA's litigation and investigations portfolio as well as oversaw the company's Ethics and Compliance Office.

From 2011–2017, Ms. Wheelbarger served within Congress as Policy Director and Counsel on the Senate Armed Services Committee, where she specifically handled the Committee's intelligence portfolio for Chairman John McCain; and as Deputy Staff Director and Senior Counsel on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, where she performed budget and policy reviews of IC programs, led investigations, and developed policy positions for Chairman Mike Rogers.

Prior to working in Congress, Ms. Wheelbarger served as Counsel to Vice President Richard Cheney and general counsel to the Vice President's 80-person staff from 2007–2009, and as Counselor to Secretary Chertoff and Associate General Counsel at the Department of Homeland Security from 2005–2007. Before entering the Executive Branch, Ms. Wheelbarger was a litigator with two law firms and served as a judicial clerk on the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in Boise, Idaho. Ms. Wheelbarger is a Summa Cum Laude graduate from UCLA and Cum Laude graduate from Harvard Law School.

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POSTURE STATEMENT OF  
GENERAL KENNETH F. MCKENZIE, JR.,  
COMMANDER, UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND  
BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
10 MARCH 2020

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**Introduction**

When United States Central Command (CENTCOM) formed in the 1980s, the U.S. military trained and equipped to fight high-end warfare against the Soviet Union under conditions of limited communications and the routine employment of nuclear weapons. Times changed; the wall fell. The U.S. welcomed change in Russia while retooling heavy conventional forces to fight an 18-year protracted global counterterror campaign. Simultaneously the Islamic Republic of Iran, emerging from its 1979 revolution, embarked on a deliberate and extended campaign of terror and violence across the Middle East, directly engaging or sponsoring partners in a 40-year-long struggle against the U.S. and our allies.

Today the rise, fall, and rise again of Russia; the continuing asymmetric campaign of violence and coercion by Iran; and the emergence of China as our pre-eminent economic and military power competitor signal that while the nature of war is unchanging, the character of war has evolved. CENTCOM acknowledges our nation does not have the luxury of a single strategic focus. The Joint Force must posture globally with the ability to balance multiple priorities and tasks, from combat with peer competitors to expeditionary counterterrorism operations, understanding that the nation's top defense priority must relentlessly focus on adversarial great powers that possess the power and means to destroy our country.

While Iran lacks the capability to destroy us, its regime's hatred of the U.S and growing arsenal of ballistic missiles, cyber reach, and depth and breadth of its terror networks clearly position it as a priority, although clearly and inarguably not the main one. The U.S. National Defense Strategy (NDS) directs the U.S. to work with partners to deny the Iranian regime all paths to a nuclear weapon and neutralize Iranian malign activity. While this is only one aspect of

the NDS, it is directive for the Department of Defense and a key task for both CENTCOM and EUCOM.

The current U.S. policy of maximum pressure against Iran is supported by the deterrence provided by our U.S. force presence, which helps to stabilize the region and acts as a counterbalance against the Iranian regime's overt and covert military responses. The ramifications of this policy have led to direct and indirect Iranian military threats and actions against U.S. interests in the region, and similar threats to U.S. national security interests globally. Iran's lack of effective economic or diplomatic levers to counter the U.S. maximum pressure campaign has caused it to resort to pursuing overt and covert military options against the U.S. and our partners. The Iranian regime's strategy seeks to undermine international and regional support for U.S. policies with attacks and threats against U.S. interests and those of our partners and allies.

CENTCOM plans and executes missions across its area of responsibility (AOR), but embraces a global planning perspective supporting national objectives and the execution of global military campaigns. Adjustments in U.S. global force posture to support the NDS compels the U.S. to accept greater risk in the CENTCOM AOR. We recognize significant future conflicts will be trans-regional, cutting across multiple global combatant commands, and involving multiple domains. The ongoing global fight against the Islamic State (ISIS) and other violent extremist organizations (VEOs) provides a stark example of this threat.

As CENTCOM approaches its missions, acknowledging priorities outlined in the NDS, we also remain keenly aware that our adversaries in the region retain a willingness to contest our actions. Iran's regime is not a peer competitor to the U.S., but it does possess the ability to

negatively affect global commerce, trade, and the world's energy supply. These malign actions, while not posing a direct threat to the U.S. homeland, significantly threaten our national interests abroad, those of our allies and partners, and negatively affects the U.S. military's long-term posture as we react to immediate threats. During my year in command, I have observed multiple Congressional engagements to the CENTCOM AOR. Your oversight, partnership and advocacy, based on first- hand knowledge, lays the foundation for enduring success.

#### **CENTCOM Priorities**

Deterring Iran. The long-term challenges we face in the CENTCOM AOR are the destabilizing and escalatory actions of the Iranian regime. The Iranian regime's quest for nuclear weapons, coupled with its hegemonic ambitions, misbehavior, and threats to the United States and its regional partners have been consistent elements of its policy for decades. Deterring Iran from its destructive and destabilizing activities in the military domain underpins everything we do, and is CENTCOM's top priority. Until such a time as the regime in Tehran decides to be a responsible member of the international community, CENTCOM must work to establish and maintain military deterrence with Iran, notably within the context of the ongoing economic and diplomatic maximum pressure campaign.

Since May 2019, Iranian-supported groups in Iraq have attacked U.S. interests dozens of times and conducted scores of unmanned aerial system (UAS) reconnaissance flights near U.S. and Iraqi Security Force (ISF) bases. The Iranian regime has attacked or seized foreign vessels in the Gulf, facilitated attacks by Houthi forces from Yemen into Saudi Arabia, continued to export lethal aid to destabilizing groups throughout the region including those aiming to attack Israel, supported the Assad regime's brutal conflict against its own people, and carried out an unprecedented cruise missile and UAS attack in September against Saudi oil facilities that

4

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destabilized international energy markets. In early January, Iran launched more than a dozen ballistic missiles in a deliberate attack against U.S. and Coalition forces in Iraq. This state-sponsored missile attack, in response to the U.S. killing the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force commander, Qassem Soleimani crossed a threshold compared to previous “grey-zone” attacks and may set a lower bar for future actions by the regime. While periods of decreased tension may provide the illusion of a return to normalcy, ample intelligence exists indicating the Iranian regime’s desire to continue malign operations that threaten lives, disrupt the internal matters of sovereign nations, and threaten freedom of navigation, regional commerce, global energy supplies, and the global economy.

CENTCOM recognizes that so long as the United States continues to apply diplomatic and economic pressure against Iran, the Joint Force must be postured to deter Iran from using the military element of power to counter our actions. While our steady-state posture does not require offensive forces in theater to achieve overmatch or unintentionally provoke Iran’s regime, our presence sends a clear and unambiguous signal of our capabilities and, most importantly, the will to defend partners and U.S. national interests. This exemplifies the concept of deterrence.

Deterrence is not a military concept, but a diplomatic and political construct obtained from the effect demonstrated capabilities have on the mind of a potential opponent. Deterrence can be contested – Iran’s regime retains the ability to interfere with our efforts to deter. Historically, Iran has never doubted the U.S. capability to respond, but frustrates our ability to do so by focusing on deniable, hard to attribute activities. Targeting the Kata’ib Hezbollah group and Soleimani clearly demonstrated U.S. will. Our posture – the bases, forces, and activities that we undertake – maintains the other half of the deterrence equation: capability.

Reduction of U.S. forces in the AOR combined with a perception of U.S. disinterest in the Middle East fueled thinking in Iran in the spring of 2019 that the U.S. was no longer committed to defending our national interests in the region. That misperception led directly to the cycle of escalation that crested in January 2020. In order to maintain the contested deterrence our recent military actions have re-established, Iran's regime must continue to see the U.S. has enough forward-deployed forces for a credible military capability, that we are willing to employ that capability for defense of U.S. interests with conviction, and any decision to contest our actions will not yield a positive outcome.

Deterrence can be difficult to establish and measure, and costly to maintain. CENTCOM prosecutes numerous missions simultaneously, scattered across the breadth and depth of the region, all in areas suffused with Iranian-backed forces continuing their decades-long struggles against us. While the cost of regaining and maintaining deterrence is expensive, it is less expensive than the deployment of forces required to fight in full-scale conflict: the failure of deterrence. CENTCOM's objective is therefore to posture forces with operational depth in the region to achieve a sustained state of deterrence against Iran's regime without undue provocation, and to be adaptable to future Iranian threats while the U.S. maximum pressure campaign continues. In addition to posture, a key part of deterrence is intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). While presence can fluctuate based on deterrence needs, consistent ISR is necessary to identify subtle changes that shape posture and ensure we align our presence appropriately.

Negotiated Resolution of the Conflict in Afghanistan. All wars must have a political end. Reconciliation between the Taliban and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan represents the best option for bringing the 18-year-long fight in Afghanistan to a favorable

conclusion, while meeting long-term U.S. security requirements. CENTCOM efforts support the U.S. South Asia Strategy and remain fully aligned with the efforts of U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad.

Our military mission in Afghanistan continues in support of our overriding national interest: preventing terrorist attacks against the homeland from Afghanistan and Central Asia. Safeguarding this means we must remain focused on retaining a counterterrorism platform under any of the multiple political eventualities that may take shape. U.S. Forces-Afghanistan continues to examine efficiencies in force structure to reduce our military footprint and reduce costs while maintaining counterterrorism pressure on VEOs and provisioning the capability to do so in the future. We also continue to help the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces develop and refine their force generation processes for campaign sustainability. Without continued pressure, groups such as the Islamic State-Khorasan (ISIS-K) will regain the ability to mount or sponsor a transnational terrorist attack within a few years. Your support to our critical authorities such as the Afghanistan Security Forces Funding, Commander's Emergency Response Program, Coalition Support Fund, and others have remained paramount during this transition.

Maintaining Defeat-ISIS Campaign in Syria and Iraq. Similar to Afghanistan, most of the U.S. intelligence community predicts that without sustained pressure levied against it, ISIS has the potential to reconstitute in Iraq and Syria in short order, beyond the current capabilities of the U.S. to neutralize it without a capable, partnered ground force. Syria remains a dynamic situation with multiple parties and agendas involved. The Syrian regime, with support from Russia and Iran, continues to seek a military victory. We are seeing this play out in northwest Syria as the Assad regime, Russian, and Iranian campaign of violence has escalated since

7

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December, resulting in almost one million more displaced persons, innumerable people injured or killed, with many more in critical need of assistance, and dangerous clashes between our NATO ally Turkey and the Syrian regime. We likewise see the Assad regime continuing its use of chemical weapons in blatant violation of its commitments to the Chemical Weapons Convention – deterring this use in the future remains a CENTCOM priority. In eastern Syria, U.S. and Coalition forces under command of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve assist with ensuring the lasting defeat of ISIS, including safeguarding energy sources to prevent their seizure by ISIS for revenue generation. Moving forward, we must continue our support to NATO ally Turkey and our D-ISIS partner force, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), while maintaining deconfliction with Russia, which, along with the Assad regime, aggressively challenges the Coalition mission in various ways.

Despite the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in October, ISIS remains a threat in Syria, with most of its activity focused on reestablishing networks; assassinating and intimidating local leaders and security forces; and extending its influence in rural areas throughout eastern Syria and Iraq.

Iraq remains a strategic partner in the fight against ISIS and is key human and geographic terrain. We remain in Iraq at the request of the Government of Iraq (GoI) for one mission: the defeat of ISIS. Hindering our ability to work with the ISF toward this objective are rogue elements of the Popular Mobilization Forces more beholden to Iran's regime than the GoI. Some of these militias smuggle advanced weapons into Iraq from Iran, not to defend the country from ISIS, but to undermine existing security and threaten U.S. and Coalition forces partnered with the GoI. Given ISIS' demonstrated tenacity and ability to reconstitute, we cannot afford to divert focus from the D-ISIS mission, understanding that the territorial defeat of ISIS does not mean

the absence of ISIS. The years ahead will not be bloodless. Attacks may continue in the form of an insurgency, but the goal is to develop and enable the ability of the Iraqi Security Forces to contain and defeat ISIS without external assistance.

Countering the UAS Threat. In the aggregate, the U.S. maintains air dominance across the AOR but lacks a comprehensive joint solution to counter the growing Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) threat. Inexpensive and easy to proliferate, UASs provide adversaries the operational ability to surveil, target, and attack U.S. and partner facilities, providing the means to engage in mass-casualty or large-scale, critical infrastructure attacks with cheap, off-the-shelf technology while affording deniability and a disproportionately high return on investment.

CENTCOM employs current systems and tactics to best equip and enable U.S. forces to meet this challenge, but the growing threat posed by UASs, coupled with our lack of dependable, networked capabilities to counter them is the most concerning tactical development in the CENTCOM AOR since the rise of the Improvised Explosive Device (IED). Just as the IED threat galvanized operational, industrial and scientific communities in the U.S. toward the development of solutions like the Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicle (MRAP), we are fast approaching a juncture requiring a similar mobilization to counter the UAS threat. Your support and funding of Science and Technology is vital to our success in the Great Power Competition.

Weaponization of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Refugees. The manipulation or co-opting of IDPs and refugees by an adversary to gain a political, military, or economic advantage is not historically uncommon. However, in vast swaths of Syria and Iraq the systematic indoctrination of IDP and refugee camp populations who are hostages to the receipt

of ISIS ideology is an alarming development with potentially generational implications.

There is no known, successful methodology of de-radicalization for hard-core ISIS believers. This radicalized population currently numbers in the thousands and preys on the disenfranchised and weak IDP and refugee populations already highly susceptible to extremist indoctrination. The longer these IDPs remain in refugee camps, the more likely they are to become radicalized. While there is no military solution for de-radicalization, the military can set the conditions for stability and security necessary for these populations to return to their original homes and begin the process of regaining power over their own lives. The sheer number of IDPs and refugees presents a challenge to the timeline along which necessary levels of long-term stabilization can take root.

Also concerning are near- and long-term implications of SDF detention facilities in Syria and the disposition of foreign-terrorist fighters (FTFs). While CENTCOM and our coalition partners are working to address and mitigate security challenges at the facilities, this serves only as a tactical-level band-aid, not a long-term solution. The United States can mitigate the risks associated with these populations by facilitating repatriations, training and equipping guard forces, and providing the funding required to improve prison infrastructure. Ultimately, the best way to alleviate this problem is to reduce the numbers of detainees through repatriation. The ISIS detainee and IDP populations represent more than 60 nations. While some countries have made efforts to reclaim their foreign fighters, full resolution requires a comprehensive diplomatic and international effort. This problem will not go away by ignoring it, and can only be addressed by the international community working together to accept its shared responsibilities.

As noted, military solutions do not exist for the issues of de-radicalization and repatriation

of FTFs. They are international problems requiring international solutions. The longer these conditions persist; the IDP population becomes more and more ensconced in ISIS philosophy creating a petri dish of future terrorists. Action now by the international community is imperative to protect our homeland and our allies. Left unchecked, these issues are a ticking time bomb with the potential to spark the resurgence of ISIS, despite the destruction of the physical caliphate we and our allies and partners have worked so hard to accomplish. Your support to increase Special Immigrant Visas in Afghanistan and stabilization funding is much appreciated by me, our troops, and our partners.

**Basing and Posture in the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR)**

Fragile security environments across the AOR reflect a variety of contributing factors, including heightened ethno-sectarian tensions, economic uncertainty, weak or corrupt governance, and exploitation by VEOs which have clearly indicated their desire and intent to attack the homeland, U.S. interests abroad, and the interests of our partners and allies. At the same time, the AOR is growing increasingly crowded with external nation-states, such as a resurgent Russia and expansionist China, pursuing their own interests and attempting to shift historical alliances. These dynamics necessitate that CENTCOM explore options with regional partners to posture itself in depth across our AOR to create efficiencies, and increase strategic depth, resiliency and operational agility. With the enactment of the FY20 NDAA, Section 1263, I look forward to the posture review and reporting back to Congress with the findings.

Over the past year, CENTCOM has re-evaluated its posture, taking action to close, consolidate, or in some cases expand some of its air, land, and sea bases; as well as access, basing, and overflight rights with our partners. Some of these actions represent immediate, near-

term adjustments for survivability and to improve our deterrence capabilities – like the buildup of Prince Sultan Air Base in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Other decisions are driven by long-term efforts to achieve cost savings, and increase interoperability or partner burden sharing – like the establishment of CENTCOM Forward-Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This forward deployed element assesses requirements and integrates U.S. forces into an international collective defense effort.

The Western Sustainment Network is a newly-created logistics system extending from the Red Sea and Mediterranean Ports to the Arabian Gulf, designed to mitigate the potential impact of chokepoint closures at the Bab Al Mandeb and Strait of Hormuz. To build sustainment depth over the last year, CENTCOM has increased deployment and redeployment traffic across the Arabian Peninsula, shipped ammunition to Kuwait from the Red Sea, negotiated movement of materiel and supplies across borders affected by the Gulf Rift, and developed the port of Duqm in Oman. Developing this operational depth enhances protection of critical infrastructure while providing reduced cost options for deployment and obviating the need to transit potentially contested maritime chokepoints. This network increases our agility, enables Dynamic Force Employment, and reduces deployment timelines in the event of a contingency, thereby reducing risk and providing additional strategic options. Taken together, the result is a tailored, responsive basing network, connected by dependable lines of communication with AOR-wide reach, supported by prepositioned equipment and supplies to facilitate the rapid movement and employment, of U.S., allied, and partner forces.

Armed with the knowledge that resources are at a premium, and a pragmatic appreciation that each country is working through its own challenges with economic and social reforms, CENTCOM supports initiatives that approach defense from a cooperative perspective. This is the

only practical way to approach the problem. The reality on the ground is that every partner country cannot afford to have their own Patriot battalion, nor should they; just like every U.S. combatant commander cannot retain their own heel-to-toe carrier strike group.

The International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC), which achieved initial operating capability in November 2019 and full operating capability in January 2020, provides an instructive example of this kind of regional cooperative effort. Participating nations include the U.S., U.K., Albania, Australia, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and UAE, working together to support freedom of navigation and maritime domain awareness in the Strait of Hormuz and assist in attribution of malign actions in these vital waters. The vessels and aircraft of IMSC member nations provide vigilance, surveillance, and assurance, supporting the free flow of commerce through the critical choke points of the region.

In the air domain, CENTCOM operates in an environment where our partners possess and operate the majority of air and ballistic missile defense capabilities in the theater. This compels CENTCOM to lead efforts to establish a framework to coalesce and optimize each Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nation's individual ballistic missile defense capabilities into a regional, integrated air and missile defense construct to defend against the shared threat posed by Iran and the proxies it controls. Our GCC partners contribute to interoperability through purchase and use of Patriot, Theater High Altitude Air Defense, and the development of the GCC Ballistic Missile Early Warning System – a collective system of systems across the Arabian Peninsula designed to establish an effective early warning and supporting architecture to benefit all GCC Partners. The Link-16 system provides a combined, integrated air picture through a shared network of sensors and systems across the AOR to receive, populate, and share information among partners. CENTCOM builds confidence and proficiency among our partners

through combined, distributive IAMD exercises that leverage virtual and simulated technologies to bridge the geographic distances across the region.

As we work with our partners along collaborative lines of effort to safeguard our mutual interests, we do so with the knowledge that we are stronger together, and our strategic strength has never rested on the volume of materiel we bring to the fight, but the partnerships and whole-of-government efforts no other country in the world can match. Key to building and maintaining these partnerships in the region is the enduring authorization, funding, and combined employment of the Department of State's (State) security assistance (SA) and DoD security cooperation (SC) and security assistance (SA) programs. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency administers the Department of State's Foreign Military Sales (FMS) programs, with our partners' capabilities, interoperability, and burden sharing. Foreign Military Sales in CENTCOM totaled nearly \$23 billion in 2019, accounting for more than 42 percent of all FMS globally. The National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP) cultivates relationships and improves interoperability with six nations across the CENTCOM AOR currently, with more considering entry.

CENTCOM supports the execution of over \$2 billion annually in SA funds, consisting of \$1.7 billion in Department of State Foreign Military Financing to obtain articles, services, or training; \$265 million in Department of Defense Section 333 funds authorizing the U.S. to help partner nations build capacity; \$17 million in Department of State International Military Education and Training (IMET) to improve interoperability and establish relationships with future leaders; \$4 million for the Counter Threat and Irregular Warfare Fellowship Program; and \$3.6 million for the Wales Initiative Fund (WIF). Taken together, these State and DoD programs help maintain U.S. influence, improve our posture and interoperability with partners, and create

14

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opportunities to advance U.S. objectives. The State IMET, and DoD WIF and SPP programs in particular often yield a far greater return on investment compared to the resources allocated against them. On average, over 5,500 students receive U.S. military education and training through our SA and SC programs annually.

### **Conclusion**

The U.S. must posture itself globally to contend with an array of security challenges detailed in the NDS. While Iran represents but one of those national security challenges, deterring the Iranian regime is the primary security challenge for CENTCOM and critical for ensuring the Department can focus on near peer competition rather than an expansion of conflict in the Middle East. The rapid escalation from grey-zone conflict to open, kinetic strikes between the U.S. and Iran in January of this year underscores the immediacy of this threat, and the need for vigilance paired with the proper capabilities on hand necessary to deter the Iranian regime.

Readiness and capabilities allocated toward this mission are supportive of the NDS not only with regard to Iran, but also in the context of supporting great power competition as it manifests itself in the Middle East. As the U.S. reorients itself globally, our leadership, presence, and demonstration of commitment to our allies and partners in the region are crucial, now more than ever. We have an opportunity at this moment in history to establish the foundations of collective, effective collaborative security apparatuses throughout the region with the U.S. serving not as the core member, but a contributing member in a burden-sharing construct.

For more than 37 years, the men and women of CENTCOM – about 90,000 uniformed military and civilian strong today – have devoted themselves to securing U.S. national interests in the Middle East that help protect the homeland. They operate in real time, against real



enemies. Across 18 years of extended combat operations, the missions they have executed yielded tangible results. The steadfastness and sacrifice of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, Civilians – and their respective families – is both humbling and inspirational. Public support for our mission, troops, and families is precious and not taken for granted. Your communication with your constituents is key in maintaining public support that serves as the bedrock and fosters morale, enabling the mission going forward.

As CENTCOM continues to fulfill its ongoing missions, we appreciate the efforts of our civilian leadership at the Department of Defense, acknowledge the teamwork of the interagency, and thank the members of Congress and their staffs, without whose consistent and timely support we would be unable to accomplish our mission.

**General Kenneth F. McKenzie, Jr.**  
**United States Central Command Commander**

A native of Birmingham, Alabama, upon graduation from The Citadel in 1979, Gen McKenzie was commissioned into the Marine Corps and trained as an infantry officer.

He has commanded at the platoon, company, battalion, Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), and component levels. As a LtCol, he commanded First Battalion, Sixth Marines. As the Commanding Officer of the 22d MEU (SOC), he led the MEU on combat deployments to Afghanistan in 2004 and Iraq in 2005-06. In 2006-07 he served as the Military Secretary to the 33rd and 34th Commandants of the Marine Corps.

In July 2007, upon promotion to BGen, he served on the Joint Staff as a Deputy Director of Operations within the National Military Command Center. In June 2008, he was selected by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to be the Director of the Chairman's New Administration Transition Team (CNATT). In this capacity, he coordinated the efforts of the Joint Staff and the combatant commands in preparing for and executing a wartime transition of administrations.

In June 2009, he reported to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul, Afghanistan to serve as the Deputy to the Deputy Chief of Staff (DCOS) for Stability. Upon his return from Afghanistan, in July 2010 he was assigned as the Director, Strategy, Plans, and Policy (J-5) for the U.S. Central Command. In August 2012, he reported to Headquarters Marine Corps to serve as the Marine Corps Representative to the Quadrennial Defense Review. In June 2014, he was promoted to LtGen and assumed command of U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Central Command. In October 2015, he was assigned to the Joint Staff to serve as the Director, J-5, Strategic Plans and Policy, Joint Staff. In July 2017, he was named the Director, Joint Staff. Gen McKenzie was promoted to his current rank and assumed command of U.S. Central Command in March 2019.

Gen McKenzie is an honors graduate of the Armor Officer Advanced Course, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, and the School of Advanced Warfighting. He was selected as a CMC Fellow in 1999, and served as a Senior Military Fellow within the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University. He has a Masters in Teaching with a concentration in History.

STATEMENT OF  
GENERAL STEPHEN J. TOWNSEND, UNITED STATES ARMY  
COMMANDER  
UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

10 MARCH 2020

*A secure and stable Africa  
is an enduring American interest*

## **INTRODUCTION**

### ***A secure and stable Africa is an enduring American interest.***

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, and distinguished members of the Committee: I am honored and privileged to represent the members of U.S. Africa Command, an exceptional team dedicated to protecting our nation and advancing our interests. U.S. Africa Command has been engaged in a “blank slate review” since I took command in July last year, an effort which has accelerated since I provided my initial assessment to the Secretary of Defense in October. In concert with the Department of Defense, we have developed a prioritized list of objectives and actions to protect the Homeland, secure our strategic interests in Africa, and focus the American taxpayer’s investment in the right areas. We are further refocusing U.S. Africa Command’s approach on the objectives of the National Security, Defense, and Military Strategies. These foundational documents acknowledge the strategic importance of Africa and guide our mission: *U.S. Africa Command, with partners, counters transnational threats and malign actors, strengthens security forces and responds to crises in order to advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security and stability.*

Africa is home to the fastest growing economies and populations in the world, sits at crossroads of international commerce and trade, and watches over the world’s most important sea lines of communication. The U.S. plays a unique role in ensuring these strategic routes remain open to all. The international order we have helped create gives people everywhere the best hope for safe, secure, and prosperous lives. Africans recognize this and continue to look to the U.S. for leadership. Our future security, prosperity, and strategic access in times of crisis rest on free, open, and secure sea and air lines of communication around Africa. Simply put, a secure and stable Africa is essential for America’s security.

### **STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT**

**A Vast Continent.** The land mass of Africa is larger than the United States, China, India, Japan, and all of Europe combined. This vast continent of opportunity and promise also includes strategic challenges from malign competitors and violent extremist organizations (VEOs). Of the 1.3 billion people who live in Africa, over two-thirds live in conditions of astonishing poverty.<sup>1</sup> Poverty and food insecurity are exacerbated by natural resource degradation, shifting weather patterns, climate impact, infectious disease outbreaks, and conflict. Lack of economic opportunities and a search for a better life leads to internal displacement and refugees, which creates new challenges and conflicts over increasingly scarce resources. These factors and others have led to an uptick in migration to Europe in recent years, under dangerous conditions in many cases, and feed a lucrative market for VEOs and criminal networks.

These challenges will be amplified as Africa's population continues to grow. By 2050, Africa's population is projected to double, and more than a quarter of the world's inhabitants will reside on the continent. By 2100, Africa's population is projected to almost double again.<sup>2</sup> At that point, almost 1 in 3 people on the planet will live in Africa. This massive population growth will further strain resources, require job creation, potentially lead to surges in migration to Europe and beyond, and will increase political instability, communal conflict, trans-regional terrorism, and further marginalization of already vulnerable populations.

Nonetheless, Africa is also a land of opportunity. Over half of the world's farming land is in Africa, and when effectively managed, Africa's population growth and rich natural resources drive progress. Of note, 26 African nations hold reserves of minerals determined to be critical to the U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> 85% of Africans live off less than 5.50 USD per day, World Bank October 2019

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision

economy and national security<sup>3</sup>. For 2020, the World Bank projects six of the world's fastest growing economies to be in Africa, with Rwanda identified as the second fastest growing economy in the world (after Guyana) with 8.1% GDP growth. In conditions that promote a healthy business climate, these burgeoning markets present opportunities for U.S. trade and investment.

**Africa and National Security.** Located at the crossroads of the world, Africa watches over strategic choke points and sea lines of communication, including the Mediterranean Sea and the Strait of Gibraltar on NATO's southern flank, the Red Sea and the Bab al Mandeb strait, and the Mozambique Channel. These strategic pathways are essential to global commerce and critical to the operations of most of our Geographic and Functional Combatant Commands. These corridors facilitate one-third of the world's shipping, and are key to the movement of Africa's vast natural resources including energy and strategic mineral. African, U.S., and global prosperity depend on unhindered access to these waters.

**Global Power Competition<sup>4</sup>.** China and Russia have long recognized the strategic and economic importance of Africa, and continue to seize opportunities to expand their influence across the continent. The National Defense Strategy directs us to prioritize great power competition with China and Russia due to the "magnitude of the threats they post to U.S. security and prosperity today and the potential for those threats to increase in the future." The U.S. encourages constructive partners helping to develop Africa's economic, infrastructure, humanitarian, and security sectors to the benefit of all Africans. However, malign actors, unencumbered by international norms and professional military standards, leverage speed of action and access to economic and security arenas

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<sup>3</sup> Executive Order 13817, A Federal Strategy to Ensure Secure and Reliable Supplies of Critical Minerals, December 20, 2017

<sup>4</sup> I use "global" rather than "great" because China and Russia are "global powers" but they are not "great powers" in the way the U.S. is. Further, calling Russia "great" plays right into the Russian's hands as their dream is for Russia to be considered great like the U.S. and they are far from it.

in many parts of the continent. Their coercive and exploitative activities undermine and threaten many African countries' stability. China is outpacing all of its competitors in Africa, where, with the construction of a military port and helicopter landing pads, it is converting its first overseas military base in Djibouti into a power projection platform. We know they seek to open more bases and their unprofitable seaport investments in East Africa and Southern Africa track closely with involvement by Chinese military forces. These Chinese seaports are not genuine commercial ports; these investments are geo-economic tools to increase the PRC's geopolitical influence throughout the continent. China continues to invest heavily in African infrastructure and currently maintains 52 embassies in Africa – three more than the U.S. and a 24% increase since 2012. China also leads its G20 partners in head of state and senior leadership visits to the continent over the last decade. In the last seven years, China has sold over two billion USD in arms to African partners. During the same period, Russia increased access agreements by 200% and remains the top arms dealer for the entire continent, selling nearly nine billion USD in arms to African partners. Russian private military companies (PMCs) have a highly destabilizing influence in Africa, as they are frequently employed to secure Russian investments at the expense of Africans, to prop up corrupt regimes and establish a broader Russian military footprint globally. In Libya, Russian PMCs almost certainly downed a U.S. unarmed, unmanned aircraft in November using a sophisticated Russian air defense system. From the 7th Forum On China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing in September 2018 where China pledged over 60 billion USD in investments, to the October 2019 Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi where all 54 African countries attended with over 43 Heads of State, it is clear that China prioritizes Africa and Russia sees an opportunity to gain a strong position on NATO's southern flank. China and Russia's corrupt and exploitative investment and security assistance often prioritizes their own gains rather than building long-term African security capacity, and their activities often undermine transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights. Importantly,

they erode U.S. influence and access over time.

**VEOs Remain a Reality.** Violent extremist networks are expanding in Africa at a rapid pace, due in large part to weak governance and disenfranchised populations while employing violence to exacerbate despair and hopelessness. They undermine public trust in local governments and militaries, eventually filling - via illegitimate means - security and public service voids while expanding their radical ideology. In general, African governments view VEOs as near-term threats to their capacity to govern effectively, protect their populations, and improve their economies. They also pose threats to U.S. interests. Most VEOs in Africa seek to strike at the U.S. in the region, and many aspire to strike the U.S. Homeland. U.S. Africa Command prioritizes efforts on the most capable VEOs today. In East Africa, we focus on al-Qa'ida's al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab is the largest and most kinetically active al-Qa'ida network in the world. After a series of complex attacks targeting Somali and U.S. bases last year, in November al-Shabaab's leadership publicly identified Americans and U.S. interests worldwide as priority targets – mirroring Usama bin Laden's declaration of war on the U.S. in 1996. The latest manifestation of this threat was the 5 January 2020 attack by al-Shabaab on U.S. forces at the Kenyan Naval Base at Manda Bay, which killed three Americans and clearly demonstrated al-Shabaab's willingness and capability to attack the U.S. outside of Somalia.

While al-Shabaab is most dangerous to U.S. interests today, ISIS is rapidly franchising VEOs in all corners of Africa and may become a pre-eminent threat to U.S. interests, as it did until western intervention in Iraq and Syria. In West Africa, the primary VEO threats are al-Qa'ida's Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and ISIS networks in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin. Unlike we have seen elsewhere, in this region, both al-Qa'ida and ISIS networks are working together to exploit under-governed regions, disenfranchised populations, and porous borders and threaten the security and stability of our African partners, our allies, U.S. commercial



and security interests, and U.S. citizens. Kidnapping for ransom remains a pervasive threat throughout Africa where Americans and other Western partners are often targeted by VEOs to raise revenue or exact other concessions from Western countries. Left unchecked, this threat will continue to expand across Africa.

Africa is a complex continent with a unique environment. There are numerous big challenges, but its potential is enormous. Today our African partners are under siege from new agents coming to strip them of their natural resources, trap them in unpayable debt, and undermine the international order. Chinese investment has brought some benefit to the continent through infrastructure projects that have improved roads and connected markets to transportation hubs. However, the United States offers a unique partnership, as we believe in investing in and fortifying our African partners to enable “African solutions to African problems” – the bedrock of long-term self-sufficiency, security, and development.

#### **U.S. AFRICA COMMAND STRATEGIC APPROACH**

*U.S. Africa Command’s operations are a bargain for America...*

*an “ounce of prevention” that is just pennies on the defense dollar.*

The United States must continue to advance our national interests in Africa within the international order that underwrites global security and prosperity. Following our national strategic guidance to achieve U.S. foreign policy goals, U.S. Africa Command applies a partner-centric, interagency-based approach dating back to the inception of the command in 2007. In an era of global power competition, the combined efforts of the Department of Defense, Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the broader interagency, American businesses, and the charitable generosity of the American people are critical to achieving our objectives in the National Defense Strategy. This whole-of-government model defines U.S. Africa Command’s strategic approach across three themes: we partner for success, compete to win, and

maintain pressure on malign networks.

First, we understand Africa's challenges cannot be resolved solely through the use of U.S. military power. U.S. Africa Command must **Partner for Success** with a diverse network that includes African nations, strategic allies, U.S. government agencies and departments, and multinational coalitions to prevent, address and mitigate conflict in Africa. We emphasize military support to diplomacy and development as our security activities directly complement Department of State and USAID efforts to reduce the spread of harmful ideologies, strengthen governments to protect their citizens, and promote stability and security, good governance, and economic successes. Security is a key enabler of U.S. whole-of-government and whole-of-society efforts - a minimum security threshold must be met for diplomacy to work, economies to flourish, and development efforts to take root. On the other side, development and diplomatic engagement are necessary to consolidate military and other security gains. U.S. Africa Command helps African partners create this operational space in Africa to build the governance and economic growth necessary for them to repel malign actors and VEO influences.

Second, we **Compete to Win**. We conduct our security activities to safeguard U.S. interests. We seek areas where our interests align with those of our allies and partners as we work together to achieve shared objectives. This is particularly true where we see unhelpful activities and pressure exerted by malign actors. Chinese, Russian and VEO activities on the continent are destabilizing and promote a disregard for human rights and inclusive economic growth that will upend the progress the continent has seen in the last ten years. U.S. Africa Command must continue to find ways to expand the competitive space and outpace Chinese and Russian influence to maintain our strategic access in Africa. America's values, our high standards of professionalism, our direct focus and commitment to addressing partner security needs, and our high-quality equipment and niche capabilities give us a qualitative advantage over these competitors in

Africa...which our African partners actively seek.

Most importantly, in order to counter potential threats to the U.S. and our core interests, we work closely with allies and partners to apply persistent **Pressure on the Malign Networks** of global and regional competitors, VEOs, and transnational criminal organizations. Our principal means for applying pressure is working with our African and international partners, increasing African security capabilities, information operations, and, only when necessary, using military force. Ultimately, in countries like Somalia that have seen progress over the course of a decade of investment, our use of force in Africa directly supports host government, African, and international partner efforts to provide the security required for development activities to bring about long-term stability and prosperity.

This strategic approach allows us to protect our citizens and interests at home and abroad, advance American prosperity and values, and support allies and partners overseas so they become more self-reliant and less dependent on U.S. security assistance.

#### **PRIORITIES, PARTNERS, AND COMPETITORS**

U.S. Africa Command advances U.S. strategic objectives by focusing on global power competition to maintain strategic access, by prioritizing efforts that protect the Homeland and U.S. personnel on the continent, and by responding to regional crises across our area of responsibility. U.S. security cooperation with African partners builds professional, capable militaries that can provide security which sets the conditions for economic growth and development. We achieve and maintain influence with our African partners through security cooperation, exercises, engagements, operations, and “setting the theater” or maturing infrastructure on the continent.

Protecting U.S. personnel and facilities remains U.S. Africa Command’s number one responsibility. Our mission to protect U.S. embassies and forces in Africa is central to our force posture. The Department of State has designated 32 diplomatic facilities worldwide as High Threat,

High Risk posts - 15 are in our area of responsibility, spread across an area 3.5 times the size of the United States. This critical mission requires heightened readiness and vigilance. Additionally, on any given day there are approximately 6,000 Department of Defense personnel across the continent supporting U.S. interests, addressing global security challenges, and maintaining strategic access and influence. Even if the numbers of at-risk diplomatic posts and military personnel are reduced, the remainder will still require the backing and protection of the Department of Defense. Al-Shabaab's capability to reach outside the borders of Somalia to strike Americans in locations we once considered beyond their reach highlights the growing threat to our interests. After the 5 January attack in Kenya, we have taken swift measures to increase our force protection posture and harden our location at Manda Bay, while pursuing the attackers and their network. We are also taking a hard look at all our locations across the continent in light of this expanded threat.

We benefit greatly from close coordination with a variety of U.S. and international partners. There are currently 28 representatives from 13 different U.S. government departments holding key positions on my staff. All U.S. Africa Command activities are closely coordinated with Defense Attachés and Chiefs of Security Cooperation in our embassies across Africa. In addition, U.S. Africa Command collaborates with the U.S. National Guard's State Partnership Program (SPP), where 15 African countries are paired with U.S. National Guard units. The SPP creates enduring bonds between Americans and Africans, and we are encouraged as more African countries apply to the program every year. Furthermore, foreign liaison officers representing 18 countries and multinational organizations are assigned to U.S. Africa Command headquarters providing key reach back capability within their Ministries of Defense and General Staffs. Outside the command, we regularly work with the African Union, European Union, NATO, United Nations, and the Regional Economic Communities in Africa on operations, exercises, engagements, security cooperation, and maturing the theater activities.

**In Africa, Counter-VEO *is* Global Power Competition.** U.S. Africa Command prioritizes global power competition, even while we remain engaged in counter-VEO (C-VEO) operations. At AFRICOM, we recognize the strategic environment is changing and the Joint Force must orient the bulk of our efforts against China and Russia even as we counter VEOs that threaten America. In Africa, the C-VEO fight is a key component of global power competition as these efforts are not mutually exclusive. Our experience, training, equipment, advice, and other unique capabilities to support C-VEO efforts led by our allies and partners addresses immediate partner needs, builds relationships for the future, and is a distinct U.S. advantage that our competitors cannot match. Al-Qa'ida and ISIS influence is growing in Africa and al-Shabaab's capability to threaten American interests in East Africa and the Homeland is on a dangerous trajectory. The international community is not making durable progress to contain priority VEOs in Africa, mainly because military activities remain insufficiently coordinated and lack a "whole of coalition" balance between military and non-military investments. Outside of arms sales that they leverage to their own benefit, China and Russia do little to counter violent extremist groups seeking to destabilize Africa. However, as one African leader recently shared, "a drowning man will accept any hand." In the absence of even limited U.S. C-VEO assistance, African partners are turning to our competitors to fill the void, including by accepting training and other military engagement opportunities overseas. In our highest priority countries, where U.S. interests are greatest, C-VEO assistance is a key tool in our global power competition toolkit.

**In Africa, Building Partner Capability *is* Global Power Competition.** Building partner capability is also an important tool in global power competition, reinforcing the U.S. role as the world's elite professional fighting force and furthering American values, respect for human rights, and adherence to obligations and commitments. We have learned that we cannot surge trust. The enduring relationships built while we develop partner capabilities provide us with the long-term

strategic alliances we need to address future challenges.

U.S. Africa Command and its component commands conduct engagements and exercises throughout the region designed to strengthen key partnerships and improve partner capabilities in basic military skills, maritime security, C-VEO efforts, counter-trafficking, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and control of key infectious diseases. U.S. Africa Command leverages an interagency toolkit and coordinates a broad group of programs to complement our capability-building efforts such as, among others, the Department of State's Global Peace Operations Initiative, Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, Africa Military Education Program, and the Women, Peace & Security Initiative. These programs help professionalize partner military and security forces and strengthen defense institutions through training on human rights, the rule of law, and prevention of violence against women.

U.S.-facilitated exercises offer some of the best return on investment by advancing our force readiness and providing our African partners with exposure to American values, expertise, and professionalism. Our exercise program improves partners' capabilities, encourages self-sufficiency, and develops opportunities for burden sharing over the long-term. U.S. Naval Forces Africa completed Exercise Cutlass Express in November, combining for the first time with U.S. Central Command's International Maritime Exercise, creating the second largest maritime exercise in the world for little in the way of additional resources. This exercise also allowed U.S. Africa Command and U.S. Central Command to practice cross-boundary operations along our seam. The ability to attract large coalitions of partners and allies to exercises addressing shared security concerns is a unique U.S. advantage that sends a strong message to our partners and competitors.

Another U.S. Africa Command niche capability with long-term and high return on investment is U.S. professional military education and training. In 2019, African partners sent 763 of their best and brightest military leaders for training at professional military schools in the U.S.

through Department of State's International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. In addition, in August, U.S. Africa Command's Senior Enlisted Leader hosted the third annual and largest African Senior Enlisted Leader Conference with over 67 African partners from 29 countries. These are important stakeholders that our competitors dismiss - strong officer *and* enlisted leadership is a bedrock of responsible defense institutions and our African partners look to U.S. forces as a model.

U.S. Africa Command engages partners to establish the security environment required for economic opportunity and trade to flourish. With a whole-of-government approach, enhanced security fosters development and investment with U.S. initiatives such as the Millennium Challenge Corporation, Prosper Africa, and the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development (BUILD) Act. Efforts like these open doors for U.S. companies to compete overseas and respond to China's increased economic engagement in Africa.

#### **REGIONAL ASSESSMENTS**

In **East Africa**, we see opportunity in several countries and strong partners in others. Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia, and Kenya are the top African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) troop contributors and some of our strongest African partners in the fight against al-Shabaab in Somalia. Djibouti also contributes troops to AMISOM and hosts our largest presence on the continent at Camp Lemonnier, home to more than 3,000 Americans supporting multiple U.S. combatant commands and other organizations. Thanks to our collective security and whole-of-government efforts, we have seen real and tangible progress in Somalia over more than a decade, albeit slower than we would like. AMISOM and the Somali National Army (SNA) have made gains in al-Shabaab strongholds in the south, holding territory and establishing outposts. Gains are fragile, though, and at risk of stalling, so there is much work to be done. Al-Qa'ida's al-Shabaab is a very real threat to Somalia, the region, the international community, and even the U.S. Homeland,

but political friction between the Federal Government of Somalia and Somali Federal Member States threatens to distract Mogadishu from the fight. Somalia's Prime Minister Khayre called 2019 Somalia's "Year of Action," and has led encouraging security sector reforms replacing corrupt leaders with reform-minded officers. U.S.-trained "Danab" SNA units, along with U.S. counterterrorism efforts, are important to maintain momentum and secure hard-fought gains. Importantly, the European Union continues to fund AMISOM stipends at over 200M EUR per year. Underscoring the importance and urgency of the international effort, al-Shabaab's 5 January Manda Bay attack – the group's first ever attack on a military base inside Kenya – demonstrates their intent and capability to strike outside Somalia. It is critical that AMISOM remain in the fight, as the SNA requires more time and international support before they are able to counter al-Shabaab themselves. In the next six months, I intend to review U.S. military operations in Somalia in detail to assess our progress and the way ahead.

**North Africa** is home to some of our oldest friends and newest democratic partners. Morocco was the first country to recognize our new nation in 1777 and remains by our side through exercises, training programs, foreign military sales, and counterterrorism cooperation. We'd like to strengthen our security cooperation with Algeria as it enters a new era under its first new president in twenty years. Tunisia just completed its second free and fair presidential election since its 2011 revolution. The Tunisians are strong partners in the fight against ISIS-Libya and complement our security cooperation investment dollars with national funds. However, much of the international community remains paralyzed in Libya as we watch a civil war play out with no real progress toward a political solution. As we continue to support the United Nations action plan, Turkey and Russia are weighing in heavily on opposing sides. Notably, Russia continues to harvest benefits from the instability in Libya - its military meddling has prolonged the conflict and exacerbated casualties and humanitarian suffering. Moscow continues to deny any Russian involvement in the



conflict, but its private military companies (PMCs), such as the Wagner Group with strong links to the Kremlin, are leading the fight for the self-styled “Libyan National Army” against the UN-backed and U.S.-recognized Government of National Accord. Turkey’s recent deployment of troops and hardware to counter Russian PMCs risks a significant escalation, as both Russia and Turkey are attempting to tip the scales in their favor. A potential bad outcome for both the U.S. and NATO is Russia gaining access to oil and military bases with long-range anti-access area denial (A2AD) capabilities on NATO’s southern flank. Despite these frictions, U.S. Africa Command continues to keep pressure on ISIS and other VEOs as they seek to take advantage of the security vacuum created by the civil war in Libya. Our persistent focus on ISIS-Libya, in coordination with our interagency and African partners and at low cost in Department of Defense resources, continues to disrupt ISIS freedom of action as a regional terrorist threat. We will remain vigilant to counter VEO reconstitution efforts.

In **West Africa**, we see functioning democracies, peaceful transfers of power, and an engaged regional organization in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Senegal remains a stalwart, fully functioning democracy, focused on bolstering their defense institutions. Ghana hosts our West Africa Logistics Network, a unique shared-expense logistics hub that supports U.S., African, and European partners across the continent. However, we also see a serious regional threat from VEOs emanating from the Sahel. Security is deteriorating rapidly, with a 250% increase in VEO violence since 2018 in Burkina Faso, Mali, and western Niger. Having quickly spread from northern Mali, al-Qa’ida’s JNIM, ISIS-aligned groups, and other VEOs are now operating throughout the Sahel region. They are taking advantage of porous borders, weak governments, under-resourced and overextended militaries, and disenfranchised populations, and are now even threatening Gulf of Guinea countries. Our African partners are trying to help address this growing regional threat themselves through the G5 Sahel Joint Force, the Accra Initiative and

various ECOWAS initiatives. However, despite U.S. bilateral security assistance and generous pledges of support from the international community coordinated by the European Union, they cannot effectively control their own borders or address security and related governance challenges in the region without substantive external assistance from their Western partners. We praise our French partners who are assisting this African-led effort in a significant way with over 4,400 French troops deployed as part of Operation Barkhane. In our view, African and European partners must do more to roll back the VEO threat and there must be a better synchronization of efforts in West Africa. The window of opportunity to dig a firebreak and prevent the further spread of VEOs is months, not years. We applaud emerging plans by the French and Germans to develop new structures to improve coordination, synchronization, and effectiveness of international assistance, and improve African partner fighting capabilities. We encourage all approaches that will allow regional partners to be more self-sufficient.

In **Central and Southern Africa**, we again see some strong partnerships and a few opportunities. Botswana is a bright spot with its enduring democracy, continued stability, professional military and good relations with the U.S. In 2019, Rwanda became the 15<sup>th</sup> African nation to join the SPP, establishing their partnership with the Nebraska National Guard in December. South Africa is the second-largest economy in Africa and the largest U.S. trade partner on the continent. There is enormous potential for Mozambique, where the U.S., France, and other partners have invested in an 11 billion USD liquid natural gas project that is located in the same areas as an increasingly violent group that has claimed links to ISIS. In addition, U.S. Africa Command support to USAID for Cyclone Idai relief and recovery efforts have opened a door with Mozambique for future security cooperation opportunities.

China and Russia are in a position of advantage in central and southern Africa. Russia is testing its playbook for malign activity in the Central African Republic, where they are deploying

PMCs, extracting minerals, and attempting to buy influence. In Mozambique, Moscow provided second-rate counterterrorism assistance in the hopes of buying oil and gas concessions. Russia also deployed strategic bombers to South Africa, and participated in the first-ever trilateral Chinese-Russian-South African naval exercise MOSI in November 2019. ISIS and other spoilers look to exploit long-simmering grievances and gaps in governance in the region. We are exploring renewed military-to-military outreach in South Africa.

#### **ECONOMY OF FORCE**

U.S. Africa Command continues to assess and implement reform efforts to maximize value from our precious resources. For example, we prioritize the warfighting readiness of assigned and allocated forces through refinement of our exercise program. We are committed to optimizing the effectiveness of our security cooperation assistance and activities and we must be innovative in how we use our assets in support of our strategic objectives. Honest assessments and prudent investments ensure the U.S. maximizes the impact of every taxpayer dollar while remaining the premier security partner for priority African governments.

U.S. foreign assistance should serve America's interests and should support countries that help us to advance our foreign policy goals. U.S. Africa Command's efforts are focused on priority nations and strategic objectives that are sustainable, consistent with our national-level guidance, maintain our strategic access and protect the Homeland and U.S. personnel on the continent.

It is a commander's responsibility to ensure our world-class troops have the resources they need. We must protect our forces when we move them into uncertain environments. The pace of improved base defense capabilities against emerging threats has been too slow. We need to accelerate C-UAS technologies to Africa to improve local domain awareness and provide an additional layer of warning and force protection while also improving capabilities across the joint force. As previously mentioned, our exercises hone partner capabilities and encourage self-

sufficiency and burden sharing. This small investment in relationships and the human capital of our partners can make a difference in a crisis. With the continued support of Congress, U.S. Africa Command can best provide our troops the protection they deserve while enabling engagements critical to war-winning activities in any theater.

## **CONCLUSION**

### ***A secure and stable Africa is an enduring American interest.***

U.S. Africa Command remains ready to protect U.S. citizens, interests, strategic access, and respond to crises in our area of responsibility. The men and women of U.S. Africa Command, our partners on the continent, and our broad collection of stakeholders understand how important Africa is to the global economy and security environment. Strategic access to Africa, its airspace, and its surrounding waters is vital to U.S. national security. As outlined in our governing strategies, long-term global power competition with China and Russia and the need to limit the harmful influence of malign actors in the region is of utmost importance.

In my first six months of command, and through our ongoing “blank slate review” process, I have learned that small investments in Africa go a long way. A few bucks and a few troops can make a significant difference and have proven to be the cornerstone of multinational efforts in the region. What U.S. Africa Command accomplishes with relatively few people and few dollars, on a continent 3.5 times the size of the continental United States, is a bargain for the American taxpayer. That said, U.S. Africa Command is diligently working to make our operations even more efficient and adjusting our posture and activities to ensure U.S. strategic access for today and tomorrow. Africa is key terrain for competition with China and Russia, and our support to C-VEO operations is necessary. While we can and will grow more efficient to contribute to higher NDS priorities, if the U.S. steps back from Africa too far, China and Russia will fill the void to our detriment. Violent extremist organizations will be able to grow unchecked, some will ultimately threaten the

Homeland, and we will lose opportunities for increased trade and investments with some of the fastest growing economies in the world.

Finally, it remains my honor to lead the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, civilians, and families of U.S. Africa Command. Our efforts have made the U.S. safer and advanced American interests while helping Africans do more for themselves. U.S. Africa Command is an investment in America's, Africa's, and the world's future.

Thank you.

**General Stephen J. Townsend**  
**U.S. Army Commander**

U.S. Army Gen. Stephen J. Townsend became the fifth commander of the United States Africa Command on July 26, 2019.

General Townsend leads a command responsible for building defense capabilities, responding to crises, deterring and defeating transnational threats in order to advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity, all in concert with interagency and international partners. U.S. Africa Command is one of six U.S. Department of Defense geographic combatant commands.

Townsend previously served as the commanding general of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. Raised in an Army family, he commissioned as an infantry officer upon graduating from North Georgia College in 1982. Townsend has led and commanded troops at every echelon from platoon to corps and combined joint task force, to include leading all U.S. and multi-national forces fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria as the commander, Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve.

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**WITNESS RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED DURING  
THE HEARING**

MARCH 10, 2020

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#### **RESPONSE TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MR. GALLAGHER**

General MCKENZIE. The FY21 President's Budget (PB) assumed a DOD presence in Afghanistan of 8,600 for the entire year, from 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021. Should the conditions support a further reduction of troops, and under the direction of the POTUS, the Department, with significant input from the Services, will review the budget request. Any reductions to the request (savings) will depend upon drawdown timelines, maintenance schedules for redeploying equipment, base closure costs, the amount of Afghanistan Security Forces Fund that must be retained to support the Afghanistan National Defense Security Forces, etc. There is no scenario where the OFS FY21 request would go to \$0. [See page 24.]

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#### **RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. TORRES SMALL**

General MCKENZIE. Currently, the U.S. Central Command is employing Counter-Unmanned Aircraft Systems (C-UAS) in response to urgent operational needs using existing and commercially available capabilities. Some examples do exist of AI supporting C-UAS systems to detect, classify, and identify small UAS and separate friend from foe. AI has also been shown to support frequency spectrum management and electronic warfare attack against adaptive threat systems. This becomes even more critical when dealing with swarms of systems. I can provide more details under a separate cover. [See page 25.]

General MCKENZIE. The Secretary of Defense designated the Secretary of the Army as the DOD Executive Agent (EA) for Counter-Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (C-sUAS). In this capacity, the EA will lead, accelerate, and streamline the DOD enterprise C-sUAS effort in coordination with the Services, Joint Staff, and OSD.

The Joint Staff and the Services are still working to review and refine the objective Joint C-UAS requirements. These requirements will help shape the future C-UAS capability and will determine how technologies such as AI and autonomous systems might best fit into that future solution. [See page 25.]

General TOWNSEND. The national security cost to the U.S., our allies and partners include threat to our operational security and deployed forces in active theaters and potential loss of access and influence in regions and chokepoints critical to U.S. security and economic interest, for example; the Bab al-Mandeb, Suez Canal, the Straits of Sicily, Strait of Gibraltar, and the Mozambique Channel. These considerations have driven the engagements of U.S. Africa Command with countries such as Morocco and Djibouti, where China has also sought to expend their influence. [See page 26.]

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#### **RESPONSE TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MS. HOULAHAN**

General MCKENZIE. Cyber is a dynamic, man-made battle space that requires a concerted effort across all COCOMs, Services, and Agencies, as well as our allies and partners, in order to enable a collective defense. My focus remains on ensuring Cyber is integrated throughout all operations while simultaneously ensuring we are postured to protect our critical assets from cyber-attacks. This requires a highly specialized workforce that not only understands the Information Technology complexities and terrain, but also the adversaries' capabilities and intent. We are closely aligned with U.S. Cyber Command (CYBERCOM) and their subordinate organizations, Joint Force Headquarters-Cyber, and the Cyber Operations Integrated Planning Element. They have established an effective construct to oversee cyber mission force readiness, employ offensive and defensive cyber forces, and enhance situational awareness. However, cyber is still a growing sector of the multi-domain approach to our future force employment and currently, the cyber workforce is still a high demand but low density operational force. CYBERCOM is undertaking a series of studies on the capacity of the cyber mission force and their ability to meet current and future demands. I am confident that the investments made thus far have en-

hanced our readiness, as we are collectively committed to developing adaptive programs that will allow us to outpace our adversaries. [See page 33.]

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#### **RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. GALLEG0**

Ms. WHEELBARGER. For FY 2021, The Secretary of Defense is rebranding the DSCA Security Cooperation Account as the “National Defense Strategy Implementation (NDS-I) Account” to reflect the role security cooperation plays in advancing the National Defense Strategy and consolidating multiple funding lines into the account to provide greater flexibility in executing programs according to NDS objectives. The Department anticipates this consolidation will result in greater efficiencies and cost savings through increased scrutiny combined with active prioritization and coordination to ensure security cooperation efforts focus on NDS objectives. The Secretary has requested a broad review of programs globally in order to align resources with our National Defense Strategy. These reviews ensure programs and readiness that allows the Department of Defense to accomplish prioritized objectives. The Department of Defense intends to brief relevant Congressional Committees, as well as other concerned Members, prior to implementing any future decisions. [See page 41.]

General TOWNSEND. I would just add, I think some of the most important programs that we have are programs like 333, FMF, FMS, IMET and the State Partnership Program are critical whole of USG programs we use for Global Power Competition in Africa. We have collaborated with the DOD and have reduced the proposed 333 cuts from \$72 million to \$55 million which shapes our focus in countries such as Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Morocco, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. We will continue to prepare and posture additional program opportunities, based on the NDS priorities, should increases in funding occur this year. [See page 41.]

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#### **RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. ROGERS**

General MCKENZIE. The Department funds ISR requirements from both base and OCO funding. This specific request would be temporary in nature, to support operational taskings and military operations to defeat ISIS, deter Iran, and ensure freedom of navigation across the AOR. [See page 37.]

General TOWNSEND. Exercise FLINTLOCK has occurred annually since 2005 in Africa. This year’s exercise that just concluded in February of 2020 marked the 16th year of exercise FLINTLOCK in Africa. [See page 38.]

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**QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING**

MARCH 10, 2020

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#### QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. LAMBORN

Mr. LAMBORN. Have you seen a degradation in the effectiveness of the IRGC Quds Force in Iraq and Syria after the strike which killed Qasem Soleimani?

We've communicated to Iran and the IRGC our redline that killing an American will result in a serious response; we killed Soleimani and Mohandes in response to their lethal attack on Americans in Iraq.

Senior Taliban leadership appear to believe they can kill U.S. and Afghan security forces with impunity; what costs will be imposed on senior Taliban leaders should they kill an American? Can we use the IRGC model with the Taliban?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. The depth and breadth of relationships Solemani cultivated over time with a diverse variety of key players in Iraq will be difficult for anyone else in Iran to replicate. It is still too soon to determine with confidence if there has been a major change in Iranian influence in Iraq, but the loss of such a key Iranian player is likely to decrease that influence in time. We have not seen a change in IRGC effectiveness in Syria as a result of the Solemani strike. Since the signing of the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which is not recognized by the United States as a state, and is known as the Taliban, and the United States of America (referred to as the U.S.-Taliban agreement), the Taliban have ceased attacks targeting U.S. and coalition forces. Nevertheless, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) places the highest priority on force protection and remains postured to defend against any potential threats to American personnel. Should the Taliban attack or kill an American, the United States would re-evaluate the terms of the agreement and will not hesitate to respond appropriately. U.S. response would depend on the specific conditions of an attack on a service member. Removing the leader of the Taliban would create a short term disruption in operational planning, but will not have a significant effect on Taliban operations as demonstrated by the previous removals of Taliban leaders. Pursuing a durable peace settlement in Afghanistan is the best path towards protecting service members.

Mr. LAMBORN. In your testimony, both of you point out that ISIS has the ability to constitute in Iraq and Syria if the U.S. and our coalition partners do not maintain pressure on them. With that in mind I'd like to ask you about the level of cooperation and coordination between the U.S. and the Government of Iraq.

Has the Government of Iraq been allowing full freedom of movement and military independence to the U.S.?

Have our counter-ISIS operations been hampered at all by the Iraqi government's restrictions on U.S. and our partners?

If yes to either question, can you characterize the nature of their interference?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. The Department of Defense continues to engage with the Iraq Ministry of Defense and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) on a regular basis through the Operation Inherent Resolve mission to defeat ISIS, the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq, and through senior leader bilateral discussions. At the moment, all train and advise activities with the ISF have been temporarily paused due to concerns over the spread of COVID-19; however, U.S. and Iraqi leaders continue to cooperate on a wide-range of security issues using means other than in-person meetings until such time normal operations are able to resume. The State Department announced on 7 April that it plans to engage with the Government of Iraq on a Strategic Dialogue scheduled to take place in June. The purpose of the dialogue will be to come to a mutual understanding regarding the future of the U.S. military presence and economic cooperation that serve as the foundation of the strategic bilateral relationship. The U.S. Department of State delegation will be led by Ambassador David Hale, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. The delegation will also include representatives from the Department of Defense, Department of the Treasury, and other relevant departments and agencies. In general, the Government of Iraq (GoI) has allowed freedom of movement for U.S. forces within Iraq. As with any country, there are sections of Iraqi airspace designated as Restricted Operating Zones (ROZ). In Iraq, ROZs are typically established over religious sites and restrict overflight for all aircraft. U.S. and Coalition aircraft are precluded from operating in these areas without special approval from the Iraqi government; however, the GoI has approved Coalition aircraft participating in the counter-ISIS mission to operate in these areas.

Mr. LAMBORN. It is my assessment that our adversaries have discovered the limits in our current missile defense architecture, including lack of 360 degree radar, lack

of sufficient capacity, and lack of capability against lower tier threats. We have seen 20 air attacks, including rockets, on U.S. assets in the Middle East in the past 5 months.

What are you currently able to do to protect our men and women in uniform and our strategic assets currently under threat from these ongoing attacks in your AOR?

Wouldn't fielding to your AOR the Iron Dome batteries the Army recently procured, as soon as they are ready (and as mandated by Congress), help to address this threat as an initial step even if you required more systems in the next few years to further address the threat?

I know the Army wants to incorporate every missile defense system into its still-developing IBCS, but wouldn't placing a battle-tested system into theatre now help protect our troops and strategic assets and deter future such attacks?

General MCKENZIE. [The information is classified and retained in the committee files.]

Mr. LAMBORN. Have you seen a degradation in the effectiveness of the IRGC Quds Force in Iraq and Syria after the strike which killed Qasem Soleimani?

We've communicated to Iran and the IRGC our redline that killing an American will result in a serious response: we killed Soleimani and Mohandes in response to their lethal attack on Americans in Iraq.

Senior Taliban leadership appear to believe they can kill U.S. and Afghan security forces with impunity: what costs will be imposed on senior Taliban leaders should they kill an American? Can we use the IRGC model with the Taliban?

General MCKENZIE. [The information is classified and retained in the committee files.]

Mr. LAMBORN. In your testimony, both of you point out that ISIS has the ability to constitute in Iraq and Syria if the U.S. and our coalition partners do not maintain pressure on them. With that in mind I'd like to ask you about the level of cooperation and coordination between the U.S. and the Government of Iraq.

Has the Government of Iraq been allowing full freedom of movement and military independence to the U.S.?

Have our counter-ISIS operations been hampered at all by the Iraqi government's restrictions on U.S. and our partners?

If yes to either question, can you characterize the nature of their interference?

General MCKENZIE. The Government of Iraq (Gol) did not restrict coalition forces during ground operations with Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), however Gol did restrict overflight of several cities in Iraq without prior approval from Iraqi Air Traffic Control (ATC). Coalition Forces operate within Iraq at the request of the Iraqi government to conduct Defeat-ISIS operations and to share the responsibility of protecting Coalition Forces throughout the country. Yes. The Government of Iraq (Gol) restricted U.S. and coalition airborne assets through the establishment of Restricted Operating Zones (ROZ). The Gol placed ROZs over several cities and areas in Iraq. ROZs restrict overflight without prior approval from Iraqi Air Traffic Control (ATC). In some cases, ROZs degrade the coalition's ability to observe indicators and warnings of potential threats to U.S. and Coalition Forces.

#### QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. SCOTT

Mr. SCOTT. The JSTARS was brought back from mission operations in CENTCOM and returned to the region only a few months later. What is the current role of the JSTARS in the CENTCOM AOR? As you assess your ISR requirements and the various systems available to you to fulfill these requirements, how critical is Joint STARS? Specifically, could you perform the wide area surveillance mission without it?

General MCKENZIE. Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) is primarily employed to maintain vigilance on Iranian maritime and land based weapons systems in the Arabian Gulf. In the event of credible imminent threats from Iranian-backed militia in Iraq, JSTARS would support force protection of deployed forces in Iraq. At the strategic level, its Moving Target Indicator (MTI) capability enables us to watch adversary nation force movements while standing off outside of their airspace. Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) is the premier Moving Target Indicator (MTI) system in the world. Its MTI capability allows it to collect on target types that few other MTI systems can, with a larger field of view. Thus JSTARS is employed in our highest priority areas, and is in very high demand. Yes, however, there would be a degradation of sensing capability. Moving Target Indicator (MTI) is one of many sensors that allow for wide area collection, including other wide area electro optical full motion video (FMV) and Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) sensors. Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System MTI

tracks vehicles—combined with FMV and SIGINT—allows us to develop enemy targets, determine their typical movement patterns, and protect our forces.

Mr. SCOTT. If more JSTARS were available, could our warfighters and tactical intelligence units benefit from its wide area surveillance capability in CENTCOM and AFRICOM? In short, could you use more Joint STARS in theater?

General MCKENZIE. Yes to both questions.

Mr. SCOTT. What is the role of the U.S. Coast Guard in CENTCOM?

General MCKENZIE. The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) has the mandate to conduct operations under Title 10 and Title 14 U.S. Code, but while under U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) they operate almost exclusively under Title 10 and Department of Defense Rules of Engagement. The USCG supports U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) in various ways: First, USCG Patrol Forces Southwest Asia (PATFORSWA) contribute to the organic surface fleet under the operational control of NAVCENT. These 6 cutters support the NAVCENT missions of maintaining the free flow of commerce and global freedom of navigation while enabling U.S. and coalition maneuver across the contested maritime environment of the Arabian Gulf. Secondly, PATFORSWA's Maritime Engagement Team (MET) serves a dual purpose of maintaining warfighting competencies for the unit through training efforts and conducting Theater Security Cooperation for NAVCENT's Planning and Engagement Directorate. The MET conducts interoperability engagements and subject matter expert exchanges with regional and international allies and partners. These engagements normally focus on atsea visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS) of vessels of interest. During the last twelve months, the MET conducted 28 engagements. There is also the USCG Maritime Security Response Team that provides an Advanced Interdiction Team to NAVCENT. This detachment is a tactical assault force capable of conducting operations including opposed boardings under NAVCENT's maritime security operations mission. Lastly, the USCG provides the Maritime Infrastructure Port Facility Training Advisory Group to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under a Title 22 security assistance case. This team is responsible for the mentorship of a 5,000-person Saudi Arabian force responsible for the organic protection of critical maritime infrastructure. The team operates under the authorities of the Chief of Mission and is operationally controlled by USCG Headquarters Office of International Affairs.

Mr. SCOTT. If more JSTARS were available, could our warfighters and tactical intelligence units benefit from its wide area surveillance capability in CENTCOM and AFRICOM? In short, could you use more Joint STARS in theater?

General TOWNSEND. AFRICOM has a valid Ground Moving Target Indicator (GMTI) requirement, which JSTARS provides, but JSTARS is not the preferred option for AFRICOM. Our demand is more specific to point-area GMTI versus wide-area collection. As a result, JSTARS could be utilized in Africa but is not the optimal GMTI capability to support today's current AOR-wide dynamic Counter Violent Extremist Organization (C-VEO) fight.

Mr. SCOTT. What is the role of the U.S. Coast Guard in AFRICOM?

General TOWNSEND. The U.S. Coast Guard's unique missions, authorities, and responsibilities play a small but important role in the development of partner nations' maritime security throughout the African continent. U.S. Africa Command benefits from the assignment of Coast Guard officers and senior enlisted members at our headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany. These Coastguardsmen and women lend their operational expertise as legal advisors, cuttermen, naval aviators and law enforcement experts in the execution of the African Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership Program, or AMLEP. The Coast Guard also employs its expertise with members assigned to U.S. Naval Forces Africa-Europe, Naval Combined Task Force 65, and as part of Coastal Riverine Squadrons that escort vulnerable and high-value maritime traffic in Djiboutian waters.

Mr. SCOTT. Are there any plans to establish a Joint Interagency Task Force like JIATF South within AFRICOM's AOR? How much would it cost? What would be the advantages of establishing a JIATF for AFRICOM?

General TOWNSEND. There are no current plans to establish a Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) within AFRICOM's Area of Responsibility. The associated cost to operate a JIATF is uncertain without a thorough analysis. Were we to pursue a JIATF it could potentially allow us to be more responsive to interagency requests within the region. It could bring additional or unique resources to bear on specific threats in Africa where criminal organizations converge with violent extremists and terror groups to move drugs, weapons, and other illicit goods. Furthermore, a JIATF could serve as AFRICOM's executive agent to coordinate DOD support to Law Enforcement counterdrug, counter threat finance, and other counter transnational organized crime initiatives within the AFRICOM area of responsibility. Again, AFRICOM does not currently plan to pursue a JIATF.

Mr. SCOTT. Do you support the assignment of additional Coast Guard personnel to CJTF-HOA? Could Africa benefit from more Coast Guard cutter port visits? Do you support increased Coast Guard maritime engagement in and around East Africa?

General TOWNSEND. While there are currently no U.S. Coast Guard personnel assigned to AFRICOM's Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) headquarters, the U.S. Coast Guard serves as an essential force provider to the multiservice (U.S. Navy/U.S. Coast Guard) Coastal Riverine Squadrons, who deploy to CJTF-HOA to conduct force protection of strategic shipping and naval vessels operating in the maritime approaches to Djibouti. CJTF-HOA's personnel structure is currently under review, and should inform the potential for any additional personnel there. Both U.S. Africa Command and its African partners, around the continent not just in the east, would gladly welcome any additional maritime presence in Africa, including the U.S. Coast Guard. Since most African partners do not employ their navies and coast guards in an expeditionary capacity, the U.S. Coast Guard serves as an ideal model for maritime security and governance. This past year, U.S. Coast Guard Cutter THETIS participated in AFRICOM's multi-national maritime exercise OBANGAME EXPRESS and leveraged its maritime law enforcement authorities in combined maritime law enforcement Operation JUNCTION RAIN with our African partners. Recognizing the value of U.S. Coast Guard support in the region, I recently requested additional U.S. Coast Guard cutter and law enforcement detachment support for the fiscal year 22-26 resource planning cycle.

#### QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. GALLEG0

Mr. GALLEG0. I understand that shifts to the budgets associated with USAFRICOM may result in reductions to our force posture. In the hearing, General Townsend indicated that his command will "do less with less." If "less" is now what we expect from DOD in Africa, have we discussed our force posture changes with our African allies and partners, many of whom cannot sustain counterterrorism efforts on their own? If so, what is their response, and what is our plan to mitigate risk stemming from a likely increase in terrorist activity and other activity counter to U.S. interests?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Through the Combatant Command Review process, we are evaluating the best resource-informed balance for USAFRICOM along with global tradeoffs. The USAFRICOM review is ongoing. It is best to wait until this review is complete before we have substantive discussions about possible force posture changes with our African allies and partners. The outcome of the review would also inform a plan to mitigate risk from terrorist activity and other activity counter to U.S. interests.

Mr. GALLEG0. Following the killing of General Soleimani and the Iranian retaliation attack on al Asad Airbase, there was a real risk of open war with Iran. What is the internal DOD plan for escalation management in the event of another crisis with Iran? Please include detail on how OSD, CENTCOM, and other relevant parts of DOD would seek deescalation in the event of another crisis.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. The President has been clear—we do not want a war with Iran. In response to repeated attacks, the United States has increased our defensive posture and taken action intended to degrade the capabilities of those groups that pose a risk to U.S. forces. DOD continuously considers the potential escalatory and deescalatory effects of all of its actions. The Department manages escalation in the Middle East by maintaining a deterrent posture, ensuring escalation dominance, messaging our intentions, and collaborating with the State Department to leverage our nation's diplomatic tools to achieve deescalatory effects. In addition, we continue to raise the threat posed by Iranian proxies with our Iraqi partners and stress the need for the Government of Iraq to mitigate these threats.

Mr. GALLEG0. Following the killing of General Soleimani and the Iranian retaliation attack on al Asad Airbase, there was a real risk of open war with Iran. What is the internal DOD plan for escalation management in the event of another crisis with Iran? Please include detail on how OSD, CENTCOM, and other relevant parts of DOD would seek deescalation in the event of another crisis.

General MCKENZIE. We do not seek escalation with Iran. We seek to deter Iran from further aggressive and offensive actions against the U.S., the Coalition, and our partners in the region. In order to prevent escalation, and if required to manage escalation, at the direction of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Central Command has proactive measures in place to deter further action by Iran and its proxies. Over the last few months the U.S. has deployed capability into theater while repositioning forces to protect them from a range of threats. Concurrently, we are work-



ing with our partners and allies to integrate existing assets across the peninsula to provide a more comprehensive defense of the region. An essential part of avoiding escalation is maintaining a posture that enables an effective defense. The President has made it clear that a loss of U.S. life will result in a response. I will provide my advice through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense and the President on the appropriate military-responses. Our main goal is to deter Iran from using aggression against U.S. forces and interests, to include our partners and allies, in the region.

Mr. GALLEGO. I understand that shifts to the budgets associated with USAFRICOM may result in reductions to our force posture. In the hearing, General Townsend indicated that his command will “do less with less.” If “less” is now what we expect from DOD in Africa, have we discussed our force posture changes with our African allies and partners, many of whom cannot sustain counterterrorism efforts on their own? If so, what is their response, and what is our plan to mitigate risk stemming from a likely increase in terrorist activity and other activity counter to U.S. interests?

General TOWNSEND. U.S. Africa Command is working closely with the Secretary of Defense, Office of Secretary of Defense, and the Joint Staff through the Combatant Command Review to consider strategic objectives and potential force posture changes. Our allies and partners are aware of these reviews and understand the importance of judiciously allocating defense resources. We are working with the Office of the Secretary of Defense on mitigating threats and messaging our allies/partners to address their concerns once the Secretary makes decisions.

#### QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. VELA

Mr. VELA. What strategically is CENTCOM's top three priorities for the region? What value do the forces in Saudi Arabia play in achieving CENTCOM's strategic priorities?

General MCKENZIE. U.S. Central Command's (USCENTCOM) strategic priorities for the region remain deterring Iran, resolving the conflict in Afghanistan, and maintaining our defeat ISIS campaign in Syria and Iraq. With Iran, our military elements of power in theater support the maximum pressure campaign. In Afghanistan, we seek a negotiated settlement that supports long-term U.S. security requirements, namely the prevention of terrorist attacks against the Homeland from Afghanistan. USCENTCOM's current posture in Syria and Iraq, mostly through enablers and advise/assist units, is sufficient to achieve the objectives of the defeat-ISIS campaign. The forces deployed to Saudi Arabia provide operational depth to maintain a credible deterrent to escalating Iranian actions and are part of our broader campaign to counter Iranian malign influence in the region.

Mr. VELA. President Trump stated last week that it's possible the Taliban will overrun the Afghanistan Government as a result of this peace deal. In your military opinion, what is the likelihood this would happen with the withdrawal of U.S. troops, and what would be the consequences of the Taliban again ruling Afghanistan?

General MCKENZIE. Assuming the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Taliban are able to reach a political settlement, the main threat to the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces—the Taliban—will be neutralized, and the remaining security threats will primarily consist of Violent Extremist Organizations such as ISIS-K and criminal organizations. The current peace agreement with the Taliban involves the joint participation of the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan to establish a lasting political solution. The United States has advocated for an inclusive government, which is more likely to protect the advances in human rights that the Afghan people have come to enjoy. However, if the Taliban were to regain control of Afghanistan without the involvement of an inclusive government, there are serious concerns from various elements of Afghan civil society, particularly women and ethnic minorities, that the human rights advances they have achieved would be lost.

Mr. VELA. The attack at Manda Bay caught us all by surprise. What vulnerabilities did AFRICOM identify from this incident? What other forward operating based have been assessed at risk? What action have been taken to date and what still needs to be done?

General TOWNSEND. Although the Manda Bay investigation is still underway, three general impressions have emerged regarding vulnerabilities there. First, a lack of appreciations for the evolved threat at all levels of command. Second, a lack of an adequate defensive barrier plan for the airfield. Third, a lack of clarity over security responsibilities between U.S. and host nation forces. U.S. Africa Command

and its components have recently assessed our sites for vulnerabilities and develop strategies to mitigate risk. Based on the violent extremist threat across Africa, I would assess nearly every location has a threat and we must remain vigilant to respond. We are improving and updating defensive barriers defense, updating our technological capabilities, and deploying additional security personnel. We also work with partner forces to improve their physical security capabilities at shared locations. We have also identified funding to support force protection improvements, but as protection is a continuous effort we will continue to pursue additional security funding.

Mr. VELA. What is the current situation in Libya? What is the U.S. doing in Libya? What are European nations and NATO doing in Libya?

General TOWNSEND. Libya has been embroiled in civil conflict since the 2011 revolution. In April 2019 the self-proclaimed Libyan National Army (LNA) launched its ongoing offensive against Tripoli and the UN recognized Government of National Accord (GNA). Both the LNA and GNA are supported by multiple external nation state actors. United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM) supports the Department of State efforts to bring stability and political reconciliation to Libya. The U.S. Military currently has no DOD personnel in Libya; however, USAFRICOM maintains a U.S. unilateral counterterrorism capability to surveil and strike ISIS-Libya and AQIM in Libya. This counterterrorism capability is predominantly by unmanned aerial systems in coordination with the GNA and LNA. European countries have participated in diplomatic engagements with both Libyan sides, and external actors, in support of United Nations reconciliation efforts. The European Union has started a new operation in the Mediterranean Sea with the mission to enforce the United Nations' Libya arms embargo and train the GNA Coast Guard/Navy.

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#### QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MR. KIM

Mr. KIM. Having invested billions of dollars to building the capabilities of the Iraqi Security Forces and the Kurdish Regional Guard Brigades to fight and defeat ISIS, how are we ensuring that there is a plan, funding, and capability for the Iraqis to maintain and sustain the equipment and training we have provided over the last 5 years?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. The Department of Defense, together with Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), has made significant gains in the continued disruption of ISIS networks and safe havens. After the physical destruction of the so-called "caliphate", ISIS has transitioned to an insurgency and is expected to seek to re-establish governance in sparsely populated areas. With the intent of denying an ISIS resurgence, the Department plans to direct Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 funding towards specific ISF and Peshmerga units actively engaged in areas identified as enemy sanctuaries. Additionally, the Department is transitioning from equipping and logistical support to training and sustainment support. An increase in sustainment support, along with continued security sector reform efforts, will enable the ISF to achieve adequate readiness rates to independently and effectively conduct D-ISIS operations. The Department ensures the Government of Iraq is taking the appropriate steps to maintain and sustain U.S. divested equipment through a 5-year security cooperation plan, Congressionally mandated reports, and End-Use-Monitoring for certain types of high-valued equipment. State Department announced on 7 April that it plans to engage with the Government of Iraq on a Strategic Dialogue scheduled to take place in June. The purpose of the dialogue will be to come to a mutual understanding regarding the future of the U.S. military presence and economic cooperation that serve as the foundation of the strategic bilateral relationship. The U.S. Department of State delegation will be led by Ambassador David Hale, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. The delegation will also include representatives from the Department of Defense, Department of the Treasury, and other relevant departments and agencies.

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#### QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. HOULAHAN

Ms. HOULAHAN. General McKenzie, your predecessor, General Votel, had stated that cyber will be integrated through all operations, however, "CENTCOM continues to be challenged by constrained resources including trained cybersecurity personnel." Does CENTCOM continue to feel the affects of constrained cyber resources and trained personnel, and how would you propose to solve that issue?

General MCKENZIE. Cyber is a dynamic, man-made battle space that requires a concerted effort across all Combatant Commands, Services and Agencies, as well as our allies and partners, in order to enable a collective defense. My focus remains

on ensuring Cyber is integrated throughout all operations while simultaneously ensuring we are postured to protect our critical assets from cyber-attack. This requires a highly specialized workforce that not only understands the Information Technology complexities and terrain, but also the adversaries' capabilities and intent. We are closely aligned with U.S. Cyber Command and their subordinate organizations. They have established an effective construct to oversee workforce development, employ defensive cyber forces and enhance situational awareness. I am confident that the investments made thus far have enhanced our readiness as we are collectively committed to developing adaptive programs that will allow us to outpace our adversaries. This will require a sustained effort across the Department of Defense with continued investment in people and resources.

Ms. HOULAHAN. General Townsend, what's your perspective on cyber challenges within the AFRICOM area or responsibility?

General TOWNSEND. U.S. Africa Command is focused on malign activities of Global Power Competitors on the continent and their ability to influence our African partners. We have established the U.S. Africa Command Joint Cyber Center as our primary synchronization element to ensure we are focus both our Intel and Cyber planning elements with U.S. Cyber Command. I think Cyber is like ISR in that every Combatant Commander wants more capability. U.S. Africa Command has a nascent, not a robust cyber force, but we are leveraging resources to inform our African partners on what the malign actors are doing.

#### QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. GOLDEN

Mr. GOLDEN. It is clear that Baghdad must stand down the Popular Mobilization Forces. Some of these militias, such as Kata'ib Hezbollah, are foreign terrorist organizations responsible for killing Americans. What actions, if any, are the U.S. taking to facilitate this endstate?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. The Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) are part of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), reporting to the Prime Minister's Office, and its members are Iraqis. Over 40 groups are part of the PMF, many of them Shia, but also Sunni, Christian, and Yezidi. Disciplined elements of the PMF, those under the control of the Iraqi government and beholden to its civilian leaders, were instrumental in the territorial defeat of ISIS and we recognize the critical role they played in the fight. Some elements, however, are Iranian-backed, operate semi-autonomously, and are particularly destabilizing in the liberated areas, prioritizing smuggling and extortion for personal gain over fighting ISIS. The groups are also responsible for recent attacks against facilities hosting U.S. and Coalition forces causing several casualties. The Department of Defense supports the Government of Iraq's efforts to bring all armed groups fully under state control. This is an important step towards ensuring Iraq's future as a strong, sovereign, unified, democratic, and prosperous state. We continue to engage with the Government of Iraq on the need to gain control over non-compliant militia groups that threaten U.S. forces and support their efforts to do so. That said, we have an obligation to defend U.S. and Coalition forces against attacks and will take the necessary actions to ensure the safety of our forces.

Mr. GOLDEN. The Syrian Democratic Force is currently administering prison camps in northeastern Syria containing thousands of ISIS members and their families. Is this situation sustainable, and what are we doing to help?

General MCKENZIE. [The information is classified and retained in the committee files.]

Mr. GOLDEN. It is clear that Baghdad must stand down the Popular Mobilization Forces. Some of these militias, such as Kata'ib Hezbollah, are foreign terrorist organizations responsible for killing Americans. What actions, if any, are the U.S. taking to facilitate this endstate?

General MCKENZIE. In close coordination with the Ambassador, U.S. Central Command continually conducts Key Leader Engagements (KLE) with senior Iraqi military officials to urge ISF to bring non-compliant PMF units into compliance with the Iraqi law and the rule of law. The enduring success of the GOI will be predicated on an ISF that is solely responsible and responsive to the GOI. CJTF-OIR continues to reinforce and support the ISF efforts to address the security threats posed by non-compliant militia groups to both the Government of Iraq and Coalition Forces.