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

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ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC, Tuesday, April 20, 2021.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 11:00 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. We will call the meeting to order.

I will put my glasses on, so I can read what we need to read here.

This is the full committee hearing on National Security Challenges and U.S. Military Activities in the Greater Middle East and Africa. We have with us Ms. Amanda Dory, who is the Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; General Kenneth McKenzie, who is the Commander of U.S. Central Command; and General Stephen Townsend, who is the Commander of U.S. Africa Command.

As always, this is a hybrid hearing, so I will read the instructions for how to conduct a hybrid hearing, so we are all on the same page.

Members who are joining remotely must be visible on screen for the purpose of identity verification, establishing and maintaining a quorum, participating in the proceeding, and voting. Those members must continue to use the software platform's function while in attendance unless they experience connectivity issues or other technical problems that render them unable to participate on camera. If a member experiences technical difficulties, they should contact the committee staff for assistance.

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Finally, I have designated a committee staff member to, if necessary, mute unrecognized members' microphones to cancel any inadvertent background noise that may disrupt the proceeding.

Thank you.

As mentioned, we are here today to hear from our Central Command and Africa Command commanders, and there is, to put it mildly, a lot going on in both of your areas of responsibility, and we look forward to getting an update on those challenges. And certainly, the U.S. challenge has been central for a very long time in the region as we have dealt with ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] in the Middle East, you know, between Iraq and Syria and elsewhere, and then various affiliates of many different groups, including ISIS and al-Qaida, throughout Africa.

I think educating members on exactly what is going on with the fights there will be very important because, you know, some of that is not on the front pages. But I know, for instance, what is going on in the Sahel and West Africa is very concerning. We are working with our partners in the European Command—sorry, with our partners in Europe who have interests there as well. I am very interested to hear how that is going and what we can do to be supportive of that.

But also, as is previewed by the slides that General Townsend has passed out for us, both of these areas of responsibility are also part of the larger great power competition. I think that is very important to understand, that both Russia and China are particularly active in Africa, also obviously active in the Middle East.

You know, how does our military play a role in those parts of the world with dealing with the great power competition that we are facing from both China and Russia? We will be very interested to hear that.

And then, of course, there is the big issue of the moment and that is the President's decision to withdraw our troops from Afghanistan and NATO's [North Atlantic Treaty Organization's] corresponding decision to also withdraw their troops by September.

I think this is the right decision. There was no easy, good decision here. There was no win-win-win where everything was going to be fine no matter what we did. Afghanistan is a very difficult part of the world. But when you look at the maps in front of us, when you look at just these two areas of responsibility, much less the concerns that we have elsewhere in the world, certainly in Asia but increasingly in Latin America as we see the difficulties down there spilling across our border, we come to understand that the level of investment in Afghanistan does not meet where it currently falls in our national security objectives.

We have accomplished much of what we set out to accomplish in terms of degrading al-Qaida. Certainly, we killed Osama bin Laden, and we have significantly reduced the ability of terrorist groups to operate out of that region. And at between \$14- and \$20 billion a year, I don't think that investment is justified at this

point. I think the President made the right decision in terms of what our current defense priorities are.

That is not to say that we are going to cease to have interests in the Afghanistan region. We will. But there are other, better ways to meet those interests that are more cost effective.

And the final point I would make on this is, you know, we have been in a bit of a lull in terms of U.S. casualties over the course of the last year, since the preliminary—well, “peace agreement” is an overstatement—but the preliminary understanding was reached with the Taliban whereby they have not been attacking us. As we know, that expires on May 1, and at some point after that we would be back into a hot war, and we would, once again, be losing U.S. service members’ lives in Afghanistan.

Given the commitment and given where we are at in our national security needs, I think the President made the right call. The risk of staying outweighs the benefit at this point, but we will want to hear the details from General McKenzie and Ms. Dory on how we plan to execute that, what the risks are, and how we are going to mitigate those risks.

With that, I just want to thank our witnesses again for being here, for their service, and I will turn it over to Mr. Rogers for his opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MIKE ROGERS, A REPRESENTATIVE
FROM ALABAMA, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES**

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to welcome our witnesses and express my appreciation for their service and their time to prepare for this hearing.

In both AFRICOM [United States Africa Command] and CENTCOM [United States Central Command], we have made progress in combating terrorists, but they are not completely gone. Adding to the problem, many groups have spread out making them more difficult to locate. General Townsend, as we discussed last week, maintaining pressure on these terrorists’ networks remains vitally important.

But spending in AFRICOM comprises only three-tenths of a percent of our defense budget. Spreading those resources even further is the increased presence of Russia and China on the continent. Russia is entering into a disturbing number of arms sales and strategic agreements with African nations. China is using its Belt and Road Initiative to extract African national resources.

The Chinese Communist Party is also building its first overseas military base on the strategically important Horn of Africa. Alarmingly, it is only a few miles away from our own base. Given the increased role China and Russia are playing in Africa—and its geostrategic importance—it is imperative that we continue to make investments there.

I look forward to hearing from General Townsend about how we can maximize diplomatic and military efforts to eliminate terrorist footholds and counter Russia and China’s global ambitions in Africa.

In CENTCOM, General McKenzie is facing tremendous challenges from hardened terrorists and nations bent on our destruc-

tion. President Biden's decision to unconditionally withdraw all forces by September 11, 2021, will only complicate matters.

I am very concerned that the Taliban will overrun the democratically elected government soon after we withdraw. When that happens, what assurance do we have that Afghanistan will not become another breeding ground for terrorists. I have yet to hear how the President intends to conduct counterterrorism operations without any U.S. troops in the region. There had better be a plan for that, and I expect the administration to explain it to us as soon as possible.

I am also very concerned with the ongoing destabilizing actions of Iran. The Ayatollah continues to fund and equip terrorists targeting American troops. His cronies are prolonging a civil war and humanitarian crisis in Syria, and his regime is aggressively pursuing nuclear weapons. We absolutely cannot allow that to happen, and I am not convinced that reentering the JCPOA [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action] will stop them.

I look forward to hearing more about the administration's plan for ending the Ayatollah's quest for nuclear weapons and how they intend to deal with the rest of the regime's destabilizing actions.

Finally, I want to express my deep frustration with the defense budget proposed by President Biden. Cutting defense spending below the rate of inflation will mean combatant commanders like General Townsend and General McKenzie will not have the resources and capabilities they need to do their jobs.

I look forward to working with both Republicans and Democrats on this committee to pass a defense budget that adequately supports our servicemen and women.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Dory, you are recognized for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF AMANDA J. DORY, ACTING UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Ms. DORY. Thank you, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers. Can you hear me okay?

The CHAIRMAN. I believe so, yes.

Ms. DORY. Okay. Very good. Thank you. And distinguished members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify on our defense policy in the U.S. Africa Command and U.S. Central Command areas of responsibility alongside their commanders, General McKenzie and General Townsend, today.

I would also like to express my appreciation for the strong support Congress provides the Department of Defense. As a career civilian in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, I have seen firsthand how the executive and legislative branches work together to ensure our Armed Forces have the resources and authorities required to deter, and if necessary defeat, any foe.

Secretary Austin has emphasized the need to match resources to strategy, strategy to policy, and policy to the will of the American people. The President's interim national security strategic guidance speaks to that approach by prioritizing the security of the Amer-

ican people, expansion of the economic prosperity and opportunity, and the defense of our democratic values.

This requires Department of Defense to defend our people and economy, deter and prevent adversaries from threatening the United States, our allies, and partners, and support whole-of-government efforts to lead a stable and open international system.

An early priority for the Secretary is to match our resources to strategy by rightsizing our posture investments. To that end, at the President's direction, the Department is undertaking a global posture review to balance operational requirements, risk, readiness, and international commitments.

In Africa and the Middle East, DOD [Department of Defense] plays a supporting role to broader U.S. Government efforts in an acknowledgment that military force is not the answer to the challenges in these regions. Our policy objective is to increase stability and secure our interest by working by, with, and through our reinvigorated networks of allies and partners.

Africa is a continent ripe with opportunities and challenges. In Africa, the interim national strategic guidance directs us to continue building our partnerships and to work toward bringing an end to the deadliest conflicts while preventing the onset of new ones. It also directs us to assist African nations to combat the threats posed by climate change and violent extremism.

Undergirded by the investments and tools you have afforded the Department for building partnership capacity, and in close cooperation with our diplomatic and development colleagues, the resulting partnerships enable us to support conflict resolution efforts, combat the threats posed by violent extremism, improve defense institutions, and strengthen democratic norms and the rule of law.

These modest investments play an outsized role in Africa and the Department's objectives across the continent. In the Middle East, DOD works to deter Iranian aggression, disrupt al-Qaida networks, prevent an ISIS resurgence, and protect vital interests such as freedom of navigation.

We have made progress toward achieving the enduring defeat of ISIS and transitioned the focus of Operation Inherent Resolve to advising, equipping, and assisting partner forces to enable them to manage the ISIS threat independently.

The State Department is leading diplomatic efforts to bring Iran's nuclear program back into compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action while DOD focuses on deterring and defending against Iranian threats.

In Yemen, we ended support to Saudi-led offensive operations but continue to demonstrate our commitment to the defense of Saudi Arabia by providing limited non-combat support to help our partners defend their territory from Houthi attacks.

In Afghanistan, our mission has been preventing terrorist groups from using the country to threaten the interest and security of the United States, our allies, and partners. After two decades of U.S. and NATO military involvement in Afghanistan, we have accomplished that mission, and President Biden has decided to draw down the remaining U.S. troops from Afghanistan.

In closing, I am confident in the Department's capacity to contend with the range of dynamic challenges facing the United States

in Africa and in the Middle East. We retain many advantages, including our economic power, dynamism, democratic values, military capabilities, and global alliances.

Thank you to the members of the committee for your continued support. I look forward to discussing the topics further in the rest of the hearing.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Dory can be found in the Appendix on page 55.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

General McKenzie.

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

General McKENZIE. Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, distinguished members of the House Armed Services Committee, I appear before you proudly representing the 70,000 men and women of United States Central Command. It is a great pleasure to be with you here today.

It is my duty to testify, of course, but I have to say it is also a privilege to address this body, and all the greater honor to do so sitting beside the Acting Secretary of Defense, Ms. Dory, and the Commander of U.S. Africa Command, General Steve Townsend.

Since my last testimony, the region has continued to evolve, and it remains as dynamic as ever. With the President's announcement last week, we are focused on working closely with the Afghan government and our NATO allies to responsibly conclude Operation Resolute Support in Afghanistan. This is my main effort at present, but it is not my only responsibility. My prepared statement addresses our other missions in detail.

The United States and our NATO allies sent forces to Afghanistan nearly 20 years ago, and the President has judged that now is the appropriate time to redeploy and reposition these forces, so that they are better arrayed to deter adversaries and respond to threats globally, including those in the Central Command region.

Our singular purpose in Afghanistan has been to assure that al-Qaida and other violent extremist organizations could never again plot, prepare, and perpetrate attacks against the United States and our allies from the refuge of that country. The campaign has evolved considerably over the years from active combat operations with U.S. and NATO forces in the lead to advisory efforts designed to enhance the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces' ability to conduct their own campaigns against violent extremist organizations.

That there has not been another 9/11 is not an accident; it is the cumulative product of these efforts. We will now conclude our Afghanistan-based advise and support mission. We are further planning now for continued counterterrorism operations from within the region, ensuring that the violent extremist organizations fighting for their existence in the hinterlands of Afghanistan remain under persistent surveillance and pressure.

Ever since 12 September 2001 when our allies invoked Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, we have done everything in Afghanistan within a partnership framework, and that will not change in

the months ahead. We are planning collaboratively with our inter-agency and international partners and will take all measures to ensure the safe and orderly withdrawal of all of our forces and those of our partners from Afghanistan. This includes positioning significant combat power to guard against the possibility that the Taliban decide to interfere in any way with our orderly redeployment.

I would now like to briefly summarize some other challenges in the region. While Iran has itself avoided state-on-state attacks on U.S. forces since last January's strikes on the Al Asad and Erbil airbases, it continues to menace regional partners and the free flow of commerce through the use of proxies and the proliferation of armed unmanned aerial systems and other munitions. Its pursuit of regional hegemony remains the greatest source of instability across the Middle East.

Iraq and Syria, the campaign to eliminate the threat posed by ISIS has entered a new phase. In Iraq, we are engaged in a strategic dialogue with the Iraqi government to determine the nature of our security relationship. ISIS' so-called physical caliphate is no more, but its toxic ideology lives on. The problem is especially acute in communities ravaged by conflict and its sprawling camps for displaced persons where ISIS preys upon vulnerable populations.

What has accelerated in the last year is the influence of China and Russia, which each in their own way are attempting to subvert the rules-based international order and to gain strategic influence in the Middle East. China's activity in the region takes the form of economic investment, arms sales, and other overtures.

Russia has made an 18th century power play in Syria, propping up the murderous Asad regime. The Middle East remains key terrain, and I believe China and Russia will continue to expand their efforts to improve their position in the region and diminish U.S. standing wherever possible.

The CENTCOM area of responsibility is the most cyber-contested theater in the world. It is also the proving ground for the proliferation and employment of unmanned weaponized systems, many emanating from Iran.

This difficult and complex operational environment provides units inside CENTCOM opportunities to operate and to conduct realistic training within an environment that exists nowhere else in the world. I can state as a matter of fact that the units and ships assigned to CENTCOM are as ready as any in the joint force.

The weeks and months ahead will see us execute a very complicated and demanding military operation to withdraw U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan. This is presently the main effort of my command, and we have the tools necessary to accomplish the task.

With that, I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you, sir.

[The prepared statement of General McKenzie can be found in the Appendix on page 74.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.
General Townsend.

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

General TOWNSEND. Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, and members of the committee, good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to appear here today.

It is a privilege to represent America's exceptional men and women at U.S. Africa Command, who are dedicated to securing U.S. interest and preserving our strategic options on the African continent.

This morning I am accompanied by one of my key staff advisors, Air Force Colonel Jacqueline Breeden. I am also here this morning with my colleagues and friends, Ms. Amanda Dory, our Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, and General Frank McKenzie, the CENTCOM Commander, to discuss our shared challenges and opportunities and our areas of responsibility and the high return the American people get for their defense investments around the globe.

Historically, America has not been penalized for underestimating the importance of Africa. Today we can no longer afford to underestimate the economic opportunity and strategic consequence Africa embodies and which competitors like China and Russia recognize.

Africa is the crossroads of the globe. The recent blockage of the Suez Canal not only demonstrated the importance of critical sea lines of communication flowing through the Mediterranean and Red Seas but also around the Cape of Good Hope. Violent extremist organizations, competitor activities, and fragile states are among some of the threats to U.S. interests.

Beyond geography, global population growth is largely African. By 2050, one in four people on the planet will live in Africa. Rapidly growing markets, 60 percent of the Earth's arable land, and vast untapped resources, including strategic rare earth minerals, provide tremendous economic potential. Thirteen of the world's 25 fastest-growing economies are in Africa.

Africa's tremendous opportunities are offset by significant challenges, including climate change, food shortages, poverty, ungoverned spaces, historic grievances, and other factors that make the continent also home to 14 of the world's 20 most fragile countries.

Our strategic competitors are very active in Africa. China has invested heavily in their second continent, or as some think tanks call it, China's fourth or fifth island chain.

Russia seeks to exploit instability and fragility for their own gain and at U.S. expense. Iran is also increasingly active on the continent. African-based VEOs [violent extremist organizations], like al-Qaida, their affiliate, Al-Shabab, and ISIS, thrive in the continent's ungoverned spaces. They provide the greatest threat to many of our African partners and aspire to kill Americans in Africa as well as here at home.

Across this diverse continent, USAFRICOM operates with .3 percent of DOD's budget and .3 percent of DOD's manpower. This tiny investment pays enormous dividends as just under 6,000 service members, civilians, and contractors work with our partners, both interagency and foreign, to counter malign actors and transnational threats, respond to crises, and strengthen security

forces to advance U.S. interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity.

AFRICOM works every day to protect America's security and advance our access and influence. We do this arm in arm with the U.S. interagency and through coordinated action with allies and partners.

What AFRICOM accomplishes with a few people and a few dollars on a continent three and a half times the size of the continental United States is a bargain for the American taxpayer and a low-cost insurance policy for America.

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

[The prepared statement of General Townsend can be found in the Appendix on page 98.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you all very much.

I think something you said very interesting there about Africa and our investment there and DOD's investment there is a lot of bang for the buck. And as I look around the world, I think with the multiple challenges that we have that is sort of key to how we approach them is, you know, how can we make a difference and cover all of the areas we cover, and that—I know SOCOM [United States Special Operations Command] has been very involved in that, being present in countries, building partner capacity, working with other allies. Can you expand upon that a little bit and how that plays out in Africa as you deal with all of the various challenges that are spread out across the continent?

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Chairman. So, first of all, everything we do is through partners. America, America's military, is not really in the lead for anything in Africa. We work first with our African partners. We work secondarily through other partners like Europeans, notably in West Africa the French, for example, but many countries actually.

So everything we do—and our interagency partners, of course. So everything we do is through partners and, Chairman, U.S. Special Operations Command.

A lot of the troops who have boots on the ground in Africa are U.S. special operating forces, not all of them. There are plenty of general purposes forces there as well.

So we don't try to be all things to all people. We try to focus our efforts in priority areas. There are 53 countries in my area of operation. We don't have—we don't try to win in all 53 countries, but we do try to focus our efforts where it matters the most for America's security.

The CHAIRMAN. I will now ask you a question that is probably impossible to answer at this point, but I am curious what you think. As we pull out of Afghanistan—I mean, the budget in Afghanistan last year was \$14 billion, 3,500 troops, a lot of what we have been doing has been about the rotations that are involved in sending our forces into Afghanistan.

With that extra money and those extra forces, have you guys, you know, within the Pentagon started to think about how do we then distribute them? Do we bring them all home? Are there places in Africa or elsewhere where you could shore up your efforts? How

do you see a benefit coming from, you know, reducing that expenditure by that amount?

And, General McKenzie, it is your AOR's [area of responsibility's] starting point. So I would be curious what your thoughts are, and I know this is probably early on, but curious where you see that going.

General MCKENZIE. Sir, I think there are—as our forces come out and we are able to reposture, I think first of all we have to look at what we define as the pacing threats for the Department. And I think we look to China, we look to Russia, and we have to look at those areas.

I think some of the forces are going to remain in Central Command because we are going to look at offshore over-the-horizon options, and that is going to require us to do some things. Nothing on the scale of the expenditures that you are seeing now in Afghanistan, of course, but we will still need to do some things there as well.

But I think broadly it is going to be a significant lever for the Department to apply against what I agree are the most significant challenges that we face today.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I appreciate that.

With that, I will recognize Mr. Wilson, who I believe is with us virtually.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I thank our witnesses for being here today, and I am real grateful.

General McKenzie, a question. I believe the U.S.-Israel relationship is of paramount importance to U.S. foreign policy. Given that Israel has now been moved into the purview of CENTCOM, I want to ensure that our cooperation with Israel continues to be a priority. In moving Israel to CENTCOM, it is important that we don't undermine the cooperation Israel has in Europe, particularly with NATO.

The question would be, how are we ensuring this move does not undermine agreements and understandings that currently exist?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, that is a great question about Israel. So today Israel does most of its operational business with U.S. Central Command. Their threats typically emanate from the east. Nonetheless, they have broad enduring cultural and other ties to the Europeans and to NATO.

So as part of direction I have received from the Secretary of Defense, over the next several months we will work a careful plan to integrate Israel into the Central Command AOR while preserving their unique nature and their unique ties back into Western Europe.

So we think we have a good plan to do that, but in many ways the movement into the Central Command AOR simply reflects an operational fact that has been in existence for some time. We work closely with them every day. Now we will have not a divided responsibility for it, but rather a single responsibility for it.

But I will tell you that I will still be in very close touch with General Tod Wolters and U.S. European Command as we go forward. And I think that is an important relationship, as you note, but also it is going to be important for Israel to have the opportunity to develop normalized relationships with Arab nations. And

that is one of the key things that will accrue from having them in the Central Command AOR.

Mr. WILSON. Well, thank you very much, and I appreciate that assurance to our friends of Israel.

Secretary Dory, the U.S. defensive expeditionary operations are enabled by a network of American bases and facilities hosted in allied and partner countries, particularly in Afghanistan. Presuming that the withdrawal of all forces results in the loss of control of Bagram and Kandahar airbases, how does that complicate our ability to reenter Afghanistan to combat research and terrorist groups as we had to do in Iraq? What number of U.S. forces would be required to reenter Afghanistan without control of existing infrastructure?

The attacks of 9/11 by Osama bin Laden were from the cave in Afghanistan in 2001. What assurance does the President have that future attacks will not come from caves of Afghanistan against the American public?

Ms. DORY. Congressman, thank you for the question about what our future posture will look like with respect to Afghanistan following the force drawdown. What I can say at this point is that work is underway to adapt to the adjusting security environment and consider how to continue to apply pressure with respect to potential CT [counterterrorism] threats emanating from Afghanistan, so looking throughout the region in terms of over-the-horizon opportunities. Of course, the surveillance intelligence component of that is fundamental to ensuring the type of scenario that you just laid out would not persist in the future with respect to individuals in caves who had threatened the U.S. homeland.

But I can say from the decision process that the President led with his national security team is that there was consideration of a range of scenarios for the future of Afghanistan and our ability to continue to apply pressure, but the commitment is that there will not be threats emanating from Afghanistan against the U.S. homeland looking ahead in the future.

Mr. WILSON. And additionally, Secretary, over the last several years of the conflict in Syria, Iran has entrenched itself deeply within Syrian territory. It has bases, factories, weapon storage facilities. These pose a threat to U.S. interest in the region, including our alliance with Israel as well as safety of the Syrian people who often are being used as human shields.

Does the U.S. continue to support the freedom of action for Israel to address the Iranian threats emanating from Syria?

Ms. DORY. Congressman, our commitment to Israel remains ironclad. I think we have seen through the Secretary's initial visit to Israel last week, and in the dialogues that have been conducted with Israel already in this administration, including a rejuvenated effort led by the National Security Advisor, that the relationship remains robust and close, that there is a strong level of dialogue and commitment to one another.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, and I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Langevin is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Very good. Can you hear me okay, Mr. Chairman?

The CHAIRMAN. Yes. We have got you. We will turn your volume up a little bit here, but you are good. Go ahead.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you. Well, good morning, and I want to thank our witnesses for your testimony today.

So we have heard entities like Special Operations Command say that counter-VEO is a form of great power competition. General Townsend, do you agree that that statement is true? And, if so, why?

General TOWNSEND. Thank you, Congressman. I absolutely believe that statement is true. In fact, we say that often in Africa, and here is why. So what is—we don't use the term "great power competition" there. Our partners don't really like to hear that term, so we use "global power competition" in Africa.

What is the purpose of global power competition but to expand America's access and influence? So how do you get that? You get that by helping a partner with a problem that they have. And one of the significant problems that many of our African partners have is the scourge of terrorism. So by doing counter-VEO or counterterrorist operations supporting our African partners, we are gaining access and influence by doing that. Absolutely, in Africa, counterterrorism operations are a way of global power competition.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you. I personally also agree with that statement, and I think it is important that we look at these holistically because terrorism is not going away anytime soon, in my view.

But what other forms of great power competition happen in Africa or global competition, as you talk about it? What role does the military play as China, particularly, makes diplomatic and economic inroads there?

General TOWNSEND. So China and Russia are very active in Africa. Russia is very active with arms sales, but most of their activity on the continent I judge to be self-interested and exploitative in nature. And I think though they may be a threat today, I think they are less of a threat tomorrow.

China, however, is of great concern. They are literally everywhere on the continent. They are placing a lot of bets down. They are spending a lot of money. We know they use debt trap diplomacy, coercion, with corrupt politicians. They build a lot of critical infrastructure, and they—so most of their competition is through economic means, building infrastructure and trapping African countries in bad loans that give the Chinese access to that infrastructure after they build it.

They are also—you know, their first overseas military base, their only one, is in Africa, and they have just expanded that by adding a significant pier that can support even their aircraft carriers in the future.

Around the continent, they are looking for other basing opportunities. They are also doing cooperation in the intelligence realm that concerns me significantly. I would say that they have offered training and arms sales. Frequently that winds up working out okay for us because their quality of their equipment that they sell frequently is inferior and the Africans wind up being disappointed with both the equipment they get from China and the training they

get from China. But China is a learning organization, and they are the concern for the future.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, General.

Let me turn to General McKenzie, if I could. General McKenzie, in your testimony, you list great power competition as your third priority behind containing Iran's reigning influence in CVEO [counter violent extremist organization] operations. What does great power competition look like in your AOR and what is your timeframe for shifting your priorities with great power competition?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, so we see with Russia disruptive activities. You know, they seized a foothold in Syria that allows them to pursue an age-old dream of a warmwater port in the Eastern Mediterranean and basing in the Eastern Mediterranean, which also allows them a lily pad to go into Africa. So Russia is generally opportunistic weapons sales, as General Townsend noted.

China is, as in Africa, playing a much deeper and a longer game, and it is principally an economic effort, although we believe they do aspire at some point to have basing in the theater, but that is still ahead of them. But right now we see China as principally economic.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. Turner is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TURNER. Thank you. Ms. Dory, as Mr. Langevin just mentioned, General McKenzie has in his comments the importance of deterring Iran, looking to how do we strengthen our allies, and the importance of intelligence to be able to respond to their malign activities.

In your statement, throughout you reference the malign activities that Iran has done and has performed that is obviously of grave concern. Other than entering back into the JCPOA, which is a flawed agreement and which they have currently breached, what else do we need to be doing to deter Iran?

Ms. DORY. Thank you, Congressman. I would start off by saying the President has chosen to lead with respect to diplomacy when it comes to JCPOA and the nuclear file. That leaves an important role for DOD with respect to deterring malign activity in the other range of activities Iran engages in.

And so there is a very important role for the Department to continue with respect to the range of allies and partners in the region, to backstop them to have forces on the ground working to advise, train, and assist with the different partners. Each partnership has its own character and quality, but the combination of the force presence, the ability to provide the President with options, in the event those are required, those are the fundamental roles of the Department at this point.

Mr. TURNER. General McKenzie, you mentioned ISR [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance] and the tools that are necessary to be able to deter Iran, specifically citing MQ-9. I know that you know that there is pressure on the committee for the purposes of diminishing the role of MQ-9 and other deployable ISR.

I thought you might want to take an opportunity to give a commercial for the importance of that tool as you look to deterring Iran.

General MCKENZIE. Well, sir, let me begin by saying I recognize that there is a global demand for ISR, and also we need to move beyond the MQ-9 system, which is the backbone system for U.S. Central Command. The future is going to demand bigger, better, different kinds of ISR, more sophisticated than what we have got now. However, right now for me the MQ-9 is a very good platform.

And we have found that particularly against Iran, they do not like their activities to be exposed. In the summer of 2019, we believe we stopped several imminent attack streams from ships at sea simply by positioning MQ-9s overhead, so they could hear them operating. I am confident of that. The intelligence is very clear on that.

So the intelligence, first of all—the platform, first of all, allows us to gather intelligence. But, second, we have an observed and reported-upon deterring effect on Iran by simply manipulating those platforms. So I use them, but I am not insensitive to the future of this platform and the fact that we have got to make some adjustments globally.

Mr. TURNER. Great. In your comments, you emphasize our need to work with our allies. Certainly, in working with those allies, we need to be strengthening their capabilities. The Trump administration had entered into a transaction to provide the F-35 to UAE [United Arab Emirates]. The Biden administration has confirmed its interest in continuing to do so.

Could you speak for a moment about how important it is for us to have advanced tools and equipment like the F-35, and certainly weapons systems, in the hands of our allies that join with us in trying to deter Iran?

General MCKENZIE. So one of the key aspects to deterring Iran is an international community that is devoted to that deterrence. Iran has no friends, so what we have is lots of friends, friends across the region and friends across the globe as well.

But one of the things for supporting our friends in the region is to give them the best capability that we can afford to give them, consistent with the other requirements, such as reassurance of Israel, which is always in my mind when I give advice on these deals, but it is not a CENTCOM decision.

But I think that is a good capability and it will stand us in good stead with our friends in UAE.

Mr. TURNER. Thank you, General.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Larsen is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LARSEN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

General Townsend, I don't know if I need an answer. This won't be—it will be a comment, really. On this issue that Mr. Langevin brought up about CT [counterterrorism] and global power competition, my concern with your answer—as the concern I have expressed with SOCOM—is just that sometimes it should only be a CT mission and not creep into something else, and sometimes it should start out as a global power competition mission and not be necessarily be based in a CT mission.

That may not be the case for everywhere on the continent of Africa for you, but do you have—I guess I do have a question. Do you

have an example where a SOCOM mission that is operating under AFRICOM is just a global power competition mission?

General TOWNSEND. Yes, Congressman. I would prefer to discuss that in the——

Mr. LARSEN. Yes or no is fine with me, and you said yes. I appreciate that. I just want to make the point that sometimes they are related and sometimes they are not. And I don't need to—I don't want to keep hearing CT is GPC [global power competition] because it sounds like an excuse to keep CT all the time, and sometimes it is not appropriate and sometimes it is.

And we are just trying to—I am trying to get SOCOM to think through this a little bit more than I think I am getting the impression that they are. So, but I have been clear to SOCOM folks about that as well.

So let's stay on the continent, actually specific countries. And, Secretary Dory, 20 years ago I was in Afghanistan all the time when I got here. Just in the last 3 weeks—I wouldn't have heard this 20 years ago—I have heard from Ugandan constituents, they are from—their country of origin is Uganda. I have heard from constituents from Tigray. I think I have got that pronounced correctly. I don't want to be disrespectful. About their respective problems in those countries.

Wouldn't have heard that 20 years ago. My district is changing. The country is changing. We are a nation of immigrants and new immigrants. So can you—on those two areas, can you give us—give this committee or give me an update? Something I can tell my constituents who are both concerned about the elections in Uganda and my other constituents who are concerned about how their families are being treated in Northern Ethiopia.

Ms. DORY. Thank you, Congressman. In that period of time, I previously served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Africa. So for some of us, those were areas we were working on even before the recent renaissance, if you will.

In terms of Uganda, what I would say there is the U.S. Government is very concerned at this point in terms of the quality, or lack thereof, of the election, the repression against the other candidates who contested the election, and the actions of the security services in Uganda in terms of repressing participation by citizens and their concerns in governments.

So messages in particular via the State Department are robust with respect to our concerns. We do recognize the positive role that Uganda has played with respect to the AMISOM [African Union Mission in Somalia] mission in Somalia over many, many years, on the one hand, but that does not counterbalance the concerns in terms of the repression that is underway in Uganda proper.

Similarly, with respect to Ethiopia and Tigray, intensive concerns on the part of the U.S. Government with respect to the conflict underway there, and concerns that it is fundamental to have a negotiated settlement to the conflict at this point. You have participation by regional players in addition to the different groups within Ethiopia and the way forward is through dialogue, and that is something that our Embassy on the ground and the State Department are leaning into robustly.

Mr. LARSEN. Thank you.

General Townsend, back to you. Can you comment on Mozambique—in the last 45 seconds—if we are—how you assess what is happening in Northern Mozambique and what does that mean for decisions and advice you are providing to the Department?

General TOWNSEND. Over the last 2 years, ISIS Mozambique has been an increasing threat in Northern Mozambique in the Cabo Delgado Province. As you saw a couple of weeks ago, they launched a 7- to 10-day siege on the town of Palma. It is not clear to me if they are actually more than just local groups flying an ISIS flag of convenience, but ISIS core has claimed them as their own.

My view is that the African partners need to do more, and European partners need to do more before the United States does more there.

Mr. LARSEN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. The ranking member is recognized.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General McKenzie, in your 2020 posture statement, you noted that without sustained pressure levied against it, ISIS had the potential to reconstitute in Iraq and Syria. I am interested in your thoughts in your 2021 posture statement about that, as well as ISIS blossoming under a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan after we leave.

General MCKENZIE. Sir, in Iraq and Syria, we have completed the physical destruction of what was the so-called ISIS caliphate. ISIS remnants still remain in Syria and some in Iraq as well. They find it difficult, if not impossible, to hold ground. They can still conduct small-scale terror attacks, and they do that. But largely in Iraq and Syria, in Iraq, the Iraqi security forces are generally able to handle that problem.

We are not patrolling with the Iraqis on the ground. The Iraqis are doing it. Now, we provide them enabling support. We provide them high-level advice and assist, but generally the Iraqis are doing that themselves.

In Syria, it is sort of the same thing. Our SEF [Syrian elite forces] partners there are conducting those operations with our back-in-the-rear advice and support for them. So those operations are continuing.

Now, the future in Iraq and Syria is not going to be bloodless. ISIS is not going to go away. It is going to remain. But our objective there is to enable local security forces that we have trained and enabled to be able to handle the problem at a local level without significant external assistance from either us or our European allies.

The other component of that is you want to prevent those elements from being able to develop global connective tissue to reach out to other entities. And that is not only a physical fight on the ground there but also a fight in cyber, and we conducted in all of those domains.

So that is the way I read the picture right now. Continued pressure is still necessary. The trends are moving the right way, and the strategic dialogue with our Iraqi partners is just one example of that moving forward. As we go forward, we will be able to look to reexamine the posture we have in Iraq, and that will be some-

thing we will take a look at here in the future with our Iraqi partners.

In Afghanistan, as you noted, the principal reason that, you know, we see that ISIS and al-Qaida have been so significantly degraded has been the significant CT pressure that we have been able to put on them over the past several years. ISIS is very small in Afghanistan, probably several hundred fighters, ISIS-K [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria-Khorasan] a little bigger but still disaggregated. They have not been able to hold ground successfully in the East. They look to—you know, they look to reassert themselves if they can, but pressure is the important component of that.

And I see that I am out of time there.

Mr. ROGERS. So if we are gone and the coalition forces are gone and Taliban does take a more prominent role in Afghanistan, is it a concern of yours that they may increase their presence, so without us there to push back?

General MCKENZIE. So the Taliban has undertaken to agree to not allow that to happen. With the Taliban, I have learned to not listen to what they say, but rather to watch what they do. So we will watch closely what they do.

Mr. ROGERS. Great.

General Townsend, given the massive size of your AOR, I would like to hear more about your additional—any additional resources or capabilities you need, particularly in the southern part of the continent, in the western part, to carry out your mission. Are you adequately resourced in that part of the continent?

General TOWNSEND. Ranking Member, as you noted, you know, Africa is three and a half times the size of the continent of the United States, and we have about 6,000 total troops spread over that area. We don't have a significant footprint from about the equator south, and I am not sure that we need that.

I would say that, you know, our force posture is under review as part of this global posture review, so I don't really want to get ahead of my civilian leaders on describing what we might need or might not need. However, there are some perennial things that are always on the razor's edge of, are we going to get that or are we not going to get that?

One of them is the ISR that General McKenzie has already mentioned. The simple fact of the matter is we do not have enough to do what we assess we need to do in Africa. Realize there is pressure on it across the entire Department.

And then our warfighter recovery network, which is providing timely casualty evacuation and medical care to our troops, that is a fairly—we do most of that through contracted. We don't actually need to put pressure on low-density, high-demand units like military Medevac and personnel recovery assets.

We can do most of our work through contracted sources. That takes money, and we are always waiting to get that money to make sure our troops have what they need. Those are probably two things right off the top of my head.

Mr. ROGERS. All right. Thank you.

I yield back, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Courtney is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. COURTNEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, again, General McKenzie, thank you for reminding us just a moment ago that there actually was an agreement in place that the sitting government of this country entered into in the last administration. And in many respects, the announcement that President Biden made was really to try and make that agreement more logistically executable, so that we are not in a situation like Saigon 1975.

So Ms. Dory sort of alluded a moment ago to the fact that we are still going to retain over-the-horizon capability to make sure that a counterterrorism effort can continue and protect the homeland. Can you describe just a little bit more in detail what that looks like? Because that is I think the real heartburn that I certainly pick up from my constituents about the decision.

Is it going to be at sea? Is it going to be in neighboring countries where we, again, have the ability to deploy assets to, again, respond to a terrorist threat?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, I am actually conducting detailed planning by direction of the Secretary to look at those options right now, and I will report back to him by the end of the month with some alternatives. But I can broadly state, if you leave Afghanistan and you want to go back in to conduct these kinds of operations, there are three things you need to do. You need to find the target, you need to fix the target, and you need to be able to finish the target.

So those three things all—the first two require heavy intelligence support. And if you are out of the country and you don't have the ecosystem that we have there now, it will be harder to do that. It is not impossible to do that. It will just be harder to do it.

You will have to base your overhead ISR, if we are no longer within Afghanistan, where an MQ-9 can take off and be over its target in a matter of minutes, to perhaps much further away.

We will look at all of the countries in the region. Our diplomats will reach out, and we will talk about places where we could base those resources. Some of them may be very far away, and then there would be a significant bill for those types of resources because you would have to cycle a lot of them in and out.

That is all doable, however. So there are ways to get to the find and the fix part. The fix part is very important, though, because if we are going to strike something, we are going to strike it in concert with the law of armed conflict and the American way of war. We are going to minimize collateral damage. We are going to make sure we have a precise target and that we are going to be able to control what happens there.

It is difficult to do that at range. It is not impossible to do that at range. And so you have a variety of ways that you could actually strike the target if you chose to do that. You could do it with long-range precision fires. You could do it with manned raids. All of those are inherently dangerous, but you could still do it.

You could do it with manned aircraft. There are problems with all three of those options, but there is also opportunities with all three of those options.

So I don't want to make light of it. I don't want to put on rose-colored glasses and say it is going to be easy to do. I can tell you that the U.S. military can do just about anything, and we are ex-

amining this problem with all of our resources right now to find a way to do it, you know, in the most intelligent, risk-free manner that we can.

Mr. COURTNEY. Well, thank you for that answer. Again, I think it is important to, you know, remember that we are not in the same mind-set we were at the time of 9/11. I mean, I think, you know, certainly it sounds like, again, you are very focused in terms of making sure that a threat like what occurred back then is going to be planned for and, again, addressed as the case may be.

General Townsend, in the last NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act], there probably were at least two or three provisions regarding critical minerals and rare earth minerals, which I have been on this committee a while, that was pretty unique. But, again, I think from a security standpoint I think there is now a pretty widespread recognition that China has been very methodical and successful in terms of cornering the market, in terms of critical minerals. And Africa I think is clearly a part of the world that they have succeeded at that.

Again, your map on economic activity I realize was kind of a global view, but is that something that AFRICOM is watching and at least being able to help, if nothing else, educate us back here about the fact that, you know, we have got to pay attention to this, because they have a stranglehold—let's face it—in terms of things like antimony and cobalt, lithium, all of these minerals that go into everything from our cell phones to platforms that we need for our national defense.

General TOWNSEND. Congressman, you said it great. So the Russians are looking—to me, they are looking at exploiting and short-term gain. The Chinese have a much longer term view that is more concerning to me. And so they are not only mining rare earth minerals in Africa for their own use, they are cornering the market on these concerns in Africa to have them under control for a rainy day in the future. That should be of concern to us.

As you look at the list of rare earth minerals—and you named a few of them—a couple of others, tantalum, and I was just looking at these today—

The CHAIRMAN. I am sorry. General, I do apologize. The gentleman's time has expired. I want to try to get the other folks here.

General TOWNSEND. Sure.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Lamborn is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am concerned because, as Robert Gates said famously regarding—when Joe Biden was a Senator, and then Vice President, he seemed to be on the wrong side of foreign policy decisions at almost every turn.

You could go back to the 1980s when the nuclear freeze was being discussed and that would have frozen a permanent advantage into Russia's favor, or Soviet Union's favor, to as Vice President promoting the withdrawal of troops out of Iraq that let ISIS come to the fore or counseling against the strike against Osama bin Laden, and on and on and on.

And I am just concerned that we are seeing this bad decision-making today with Afghanistan and Iran.

So on Afghanistan, General McKenzie, are you able to tell us whether or not you advised the President to unilaterally withdraw by September 11 all U.S. forces, or are you able to not—are you not able to discuss that?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, I can tell you that I had multiple opportunities to have a detailed conversation with the President and give my advice. He heard my advice. I am not going to be able to share it with you here this morning, sir.

Mr. LAMBORN. Okay. Regarding the Taliban, we have talked a little bit about that. The ranking member had some questions. Are they a reliable partner in negotiations?

General MCKENZIE. I have grave doubts about the Taliban's reliability. I have expressed those publicly going back for a long period of time, but we need to see what they are going to do here.

The fact of the matter is, if let's say we leave, if they want any form of future international recognition for Afghanistan, if they want any form of international support, they are going to have to keep the agreements that they have made. We will be able to observe that and see it very clearly and directly, whether or not they are able to do it.

Mr. LAMBORN. Well, I am happy to hear that we are going to be watching them closely, but my concern is that we have been watching them closely, and they have been pretty much uniformly unreliable.

Ms. Dory, I would like to ask you about Iran. Recently, they made the announcement that they were going to upgrade their highly-enriched uranium to 60 percent, and that pretty much goes against everything that we want them to be doing or peace-loving people in the world want them to be doing. So what is the Biden administration going to do about that?

Ms. DORY. Congressman, I think what we see with that announcement is playing out in terms of the public nature of the announcement is the jockeying for leverage with respect to the negotiations that are underway in Vienna right now.

So it is important what is happening in public. It is also important what is happening behind closed doors and whether we are getting closer through the talks that are underway to a resumption of compliance on the part of Iran with the agreement.

Mr. LAMBORN. Would you agree that upgrading their HEU [highly enriched uranium] to 60 percent is unacceptable?

Ms. DORY. Absolutely.

Mr. LAMBORN. And how close does that get them to weapons-grade-capable HEU, highly enriched uranium?

Ms. DORY. Congressman, it puts them farther along that path. You know, the 90 percent level and above is where you would need to be in terms of weapons-grade uranium.

Mr. LAMBORN. Okay. Well, I have just got a lot of concerns. Like you, General McKenzie, I am going to be watching closely. Oh, I do have one last question for you, General McKenzie, my last minute. And this is a concern I have that—where we are not taking advantage of a capability that we have.

We have purchased some Iron Dome batteries from Israel, and we know that these are highly-capable units shooting down incoming rockets and missiles. Are there places in CENTCOM where we

could be using these Iron Dome batteries? And my understanding is we are not using them at all. I hope I am wrong on that. But if we are not using them at all, aren't there places where they could be put to good use?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, I would prefer to talk to that a little more directly in a closed session a little bit later this afternoon. But I will just tell you this: we looked globally at the management of our air defense assets. CENTCOM has requirements.

There are other places in the world that have requirements as well, and we just need to bear that in mind, that I can go in and fight for the resources for CENTCOM, but there are in fact other places in the world that need air defense assets as well. And so I need—I do recognize that.

Mr. LAMBORN. Okay. But let's continue that discussion later today.

General MCKENZIE. Yes, sir.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you all for being here, and I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Garamendi is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General McKenzie, is it true that President Trump reduced the number of troops from 10,000 to 2,500 via a tweet last year, and then via another tweet decided that we would leave by May, early May, all troops out of Afghanistan?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, I believe he tweeted it, but my orders came through the chain of command resultantly from the President to the Secretary, written orders. And in the Department of Defense, we move troops based on executed orders.

So he may have tweeted that at the beginning. I am not exactly aware of the time when he did or didn't do it. But the chain of command, which the President sits at the top of, is what directs us to move forces.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Okay. So it was President Trump that said all troops would be out by May of this year.

General MCKENZIE. Conditions-based.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Conditions-based. Okay. Just a slight clarification there of the way in which we now find ourselves with troops leaving in September.

My question is to the countries surrounding Afghanistan. What is your assessment, Ms. Dory, first, and then General McKenzie, about the role of the surrounding countries—Pakistan, India, China, Russia, others—how are they going to respond to the departure of NATO and U.S. troops?

Ms. DORY. Congressman, I think you will see an array of hedging behaviors as the U.S. and coalition forces begin to depart. And as we focus in on a diplomatic first presence in the country, you will see behaviors in terms of—already we see it with Pakistan where Pakistan is applying pressure to an extent with respect to the Taliban out of concern for the impact on Pakistan should civil war break out again, and refugee flows affect their country.

I think that same dynamic is true with the other neighbors as well where each is looking at the situation now to assess for them-

selves what are the risks, what are the threats, and how will we posture ourselves going forward.

Mr. GARAMENDI. General.

General MCKENZIE. Sir, I think Ms. Dory captured it pretty clearly. I think the country that is going to be the most affected, frankly, is going to be Pakistan because of the possibility of unconstrained refugee flow because of the possibility of renewed terrorist attacks in Pakistan that could ramp up as a result of this. All of those things are certainly very possible.

I think we should also—the countries to the north of Afghanistan will also be concerned—Tajikistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan—those countries up there because they are going to be worried about refugee flow and the flow of fighters perhaps to the north as well.

So I think all of them are going—we will see what happens when we leave. They will look at how we posture after we go, and then they will have to decide, you know, the way they are going to go forward with that. It is going to be—they are going to face some very tough choices, though.

Mr. GARAMENDI. So they may or may not be encouraging or engaging in what could be a civil war. You just don't know.

General MCKENZIE. I think they will all be keenly aware of the probable—should a civil war occur, they will be very aware of the population flow, the violence that will certainly spill over from Afghanistan if that is the case.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Thank you.

Let's turn to Africa. General Townsend, climate change, the Sahel, how is climate change likely to affect at least the Sahel area and, if we have time, beyond?

General TOWNSEND. Well, first of all, I think AFRICOM's role is to support the State Department and USAID [United States Agency for International Development] in this area of climate change. But we see clear evidence of that on the African continent and probably—you mentioned the Sahel. The biggest issue we see there is water shortages and desertification of the farmland there. And that spreading southward of the Sahara Desert is probably one of our biggest concerns, and that sparks all kinds of conflict between herders and farmers, for example.

I think the ways—the Department of Defense is looking at a lot of ways we have been charged by the President and Secretary of Defense to look at ways we can contribute to helping mitigate the climate change problem. Some of those ways are with unique energy solutions, and those kind of projects are starting to unfold in Africa.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Thank you very much.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Wittman is recognized by 5 minutes.

Mr. WITTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank our witnesses for joining us today.

General McKenzie, I would like to begin with you. You know, there is a concern that I have about the tension between our service branch chiefs and our combatant commanders, as your demand signal is before you with the global force management allocation

plan and generating readiness today, and the service branch chiefs focus on making sure that there is not only readiness today but there is modernization and we will call it revitalization for meeting the future demand significant.

Let me ask to begin here, when we look at the GFMAP [global force management allocation plan] today, and we see in many circumstances the increased number of RFFs, request for forces, does that reflect that the continuity of what is happening is changing, or is the GFMAP maybe a little bit outdated and we need to look at that? Give me your perspective on where that dynamic is today from your thoughts.

General MCKENZIE. Certainly, sir. Thank you. So my last job before I was the Commander of U.S. Central Command, I was the director of the joint staff. And before that, I was the J5 of the U.S. Joint Staff, so I was at the very core of the GFMAP process. I would consider myself an expert on the GFMAP process.

And so there is always going to be a natural tension between those who raise and maintain forces and those who employ forces. That is natural. It goes back as long as we have had joint chiefs and combatant commanders.

So that is just a natural byproduct of that. It is not new, and those tensions are adjudicated by really only one person and that is the Secretary of Defense. And the process to do that adjudication is actually quite good.

Now, the GFMAP is actually a design for the future. And like any design for the future, it is based on a set of assumptions, that the GFMAP is as good as the assumptions that were made. I would argue that over the last couple of years the GFMAP has not completely incorporated the rise of Iran in the White House's thinking and importance. So there were a lot of tensions as a result of that.

Should tensions with Iran go down, or should we adopt a new policy, then you could have a GFMAP that would be more aligned to that. But, again, the key thing is, the GFMAP is simply a plan. Any plan is based on assumptions. If the assumptions change, you have to change the plan.

So I am not particularly—when I was the director, I wasn't particularly concerned by it. Now that I am a COCOM [combatant commander], I am not particularly concerned by it. I ask what forces I need based on the tasks I am given. It is the Secretary, advised by the joint staff and by his civilian leadership in the Department, to determine if they can fix that by either changing the task they have given me, giving me more forces, or accepting the risk, and then that is a risk that we all know and understand.

So I would argue, frankly, the process works pretty good. We might not like the answers from the process, but it is a pretty good process.

Mr. WITTMAN. Sure. Yeah. That is a constant dynamic is mitigating risk today versus risk in the future, and how much risk can we take today to make sure we mitigate in the future. Unfortunately, it seems like history looks at us in a not-so-kind way and that many times we have not estimated well what the future risk is, and we focus too much on what is front of us today.

So hopefully as we look at what is out there—and I am glad you mentioned the dynamic element of the environment—and how we

are looking at that future versus today in generation of force and readiness.

Mr. WITTMAN. Sure. Thanks.

General Townsend, let me point to you. I know that in your AOR you see that Russia is looking to increase influence there. You see their effort in the agreement with Sudan for essentially putting a naval base there for the next 25 years. My concern is, again, you see the Chinese presence in Djibouti, now you see Russian presence in Sudan, you see them trying to expand their influence in those areas.

Are there concerns that this development or this placement of hardware there could go to other areas? Could it go to areas like South Sudan and areas in the Tigray region of Ethiopia? Are we going to see an expansion of Russian influence in that area? What are your perspectives in what we see with Russian activity?

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Congressman. I am concerned about what Russia is doing on the continent. First, their influence in Libya, that seems to be maybe trending in a positive direction. Next concern I have, as you just pointed out, is Sudan and their efforts to place a naval base there. That project has been a little fraught with some friction for them, but they seem to be trying to push that forward.

First of all, I would say that there are two types of naval bases, so here I am an Army infantryman talking about naval bases. But my naval component commander has educated me a little bit. There is two types. The one type where you can stop and get gas and groceries, that is useful for port calls and steaming around the world, but for war you need a militarily useful naval base and the ability to rearm and repair ships. So it is not clear to me that they—they are just on the ground stages of trying to get an agreement solidified to get. So we have got some time to work this.

I am concerned about what they are doing, and you have mentioned that they connect all the way, that Russian activity connects all the way to the—

The CHAIRMAN. I apologize, General. The gentleman's time has expired. My bad.

Mr. Brown is recognized.

Mr. BROWN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Is that my echo? Mr. Chairman, can you come back to me and maybe tech can help me with this, or am I okay?

The CHAIRMAN. We are hearing you just fine. Are you hearing an echo?

Mr. BROWN. Yeah. I am hearing an echo. Are you?

The CHAIRMAN. No. We have got you loud and clear. We are okay.

Mr. BROWN. Okay. Could I just ask, then, that my clock be reset to 5 minutes? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Absolutely. We will reset and start now. Go ahead.

Mr. BROWN. Thank you. I appreciate it. And thank you to our panelists.

General Townsend, a question for you. Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Africa Affairs, Mr. Meyers, recently said that U.S. engagement with the nations of the continent is crucial

for peace, democracy, and development. Could you describe what additional security resources, military assistance, and capabilities that you need to mitigate the risks and support the various diplomatic, disaster assistance, and humanitarian efforts across the continent?

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Congressman. I would like to defer my conversation about—my answer about forces, as we are engaging in this global posture review. And I haven't presented our plans yet or recommendations yet to the Secretary of Defense about forces. But other capabilities I would like to address, those are foreign military sales, foreign military financing, section 333 support, IMET [International Military Education and Training]. Those types of security assistance are absolutely vital to our ability to get our mission accomplished in Africa.

And AFRICOM has seen significant reductions in those types of security assistance over the last couple of years, and one of them, IMET, is of great concern, but also 333 funding. So it is those types of things that I am willing to talk about, now short of actually talking about forces. Over.

Mr. BROWN. Thank you. Can you describe how terrorists and extremist activity interferes with the humanitarian missions and how it stalls economic development across the continent? I witnessed that on a CODEL [congressional delegation]. I spoke with, you know, representatives from USAID and the Embassy, they said they just can't do their work in a secure enough environment because of terrorist and extremist activities.

Can you share a little bit—put a little bit of meat on that bone?

General TOWNSEND. Sure, Congressman. Thank you. So there is a symbiotic relationship between those 3Ds—diplomacy, development, and defense. And one of the ways we assist those two other Ds in getting their work done is providing a secure environment. So our work with the security forces of an African country is critical to allowing the USAID do development work and the Department of State do their diplomatic work.

And that symbiotic relationship is very evident in Africa, and because of it, generally, you know, and security—and status of the security environment there, the Department of Defense's assistance is regularly needed. Over.

Mr. BROWN. Thank you. And just in what little time we have left, for General McKenzie and General Townsend, if you could take 30 seconds or so each. Can you please describe the programs and initiatives within your command that you use to foster a culture of inclusion, diversity, and equity within our ranks in your command? General McKenzie.

General TOWNSEND. Yeah. Go ahead, Frank.

General MCKENZIE. Yes, sir. So there are a variety of programs, but I would say what is absolutely most important is what leaders do by—if you go into the front office of a leader, who is in the outer office, who do leaders pick as principal staff officers, who—people see those things. And while the programs are very important, we have a variety of those programs that are underway, I think for a high-level leader the most important thing you have to do is act, because I think that is what actually people see.

And I will pause there, sir.

Mr. BROWN. General Townsend.

General TOWNSEND. Congressman, I think General McKenzie said it very well. The only thing I might add is at AFRICOM we have a gender advisor on our staff to help us with that. But that gets back to what General McKenzie said. It is about what leaders do.

Mr. BROWN. And I agree with you that people that you have in place and the commitment of leaders to diversity, equity, inclusion, are extremely important. I will point out that in the fiscal year 2021 NDAA, this committee, along with our colleagues in the Senate, collectively Congress, directed the Secretary of Defense to establish a mentor program, among many other things we have asked him to do regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion, but a mentor program to encourage greater diversity among more career fields and throughout the rank structure.

So I know you are doing a lot of good things. We are probably going to want you to do—step it up even a little bit more.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Scott is recognized.

Mr. SCOTT. Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Townsend, thank you for your support of CODEL Panetta in August of 2019. Mr. Brown, Mr. Panetta, Mr. Hutchinson, and I had a great trip, learned a lot, and could not have learned what we did had it not been for your support.

At that time, we visited the U.N. [United Nations] Mission at Mali, and many of the people in the meeting that we had discussed China's activity and expressed concerns that China's activity was going to lead to civil war in many of the countries on the continent of Africa.

Yesterday—I am sorry—last week, Admiral Faller, head of SOUTHCOM [United States Southern Command], testified, and I will quote him, “Our interagency partners in the United States pointed out to us, the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], and others that Chinese money laundering is the number one underwriting source for transnational criminal organizations.”

In your testimony, you mention on page 12 that illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing by the Communist Chinese is the primary contributor to a growing food crisis that will further drive instability in West Africa, and obviously food crisis and instability have historically led to civil wars.

My question for you is, how do we stop this activity from China, short of absolute war?

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Congressman. I think the solution there is competition, right? We want to compete before war comes, and competition is a forever task, because you are always trying to stay short of war.

So with China, we have to compete, and we don't have to compete with them in all 53 countries of the AFRICOM AOR equally, but we have to pick and choose where we are going to compete. And one of the ways we do that is just simply by calling out their activity on the continent.

You mentioned illegal fishing, and they are probably—my assessment is they are probably the number one offender in illegal fish-

ing. And it is commercial, but we all know that China has a command economy. So calling that out has helped us a lot.

Another example is helping countries avoid getting the bad deals with China, and this is an example where our Department of State does something. I am aware of it, but we offer a free service to evaluate the contracts of any of our African partners before they enter, sign a contract with China, or a Chinese entity.

The U.S. Embassy will review that contract and point out the inconsistencies and the potential pitfalls in that contract and advise the African partners, so they can make smart decisions.

Mr. SCOTT. General, I appreciate your question. I will tell you, I also think we need the support of corporate America and the American consumer in that while I recognize that our manufacturing base has become contingent upon Asia, there are a lot of other countries that share our interests and share our values outside of China.

And it bothers me when I walk into a store to buy a power tool that virtually every power tool that is available on the shelves in America is manufactured in China. And so we have got to have some help from corporate America to source our products from countries outside of China.

One of the other things I want to mention is that on that CODEL we got to witness the ODA [Operational Detachment Alpha] missions and the training missions, and this is something that, Ms. Dory, may be more for you. But we bring these young men in from Africa, they are 18 or so, they have at best a mid-school, sixth, seventh, eighth grade education. We have them onsite for 24 months, 7 days a week, and they leave with that seventh or eighth grade education after we have trained them to fight.

And my concern is that without an education that they become the people that, you know, leave and their ability to fight is their greatest asset. So I would encourage you to work with your counterparts. This is more of a State Department mission, and then maybe more of a mission for the French in the area.

But while we have those young men on our bases, our bases where we are training them, I do think it would be worthwhile to look at what it would take to educate those men and try to move them from that mid-school education closer to a high school graduate education.

With that said, I look forward to the classified hearing. My time is up. Thank you. Thank you all for everything you do for our country.

I yield.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Crow is recognized.

Mr. CROW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all for coming in here today.

My first question is to Ms. Dory. Ms. Dory, last NDAA process this Congress passed a provision, section 1215, that would ensure that any administration—at that time, the Trump administration—would actually engage with Congress on the issue of Afghanistan. Specifically, 1215 requires that the administration make assessments regarding the impeding of counterterrorism missions, be-

cause we saw what happened with the insurgence of ISIS after our withdrawal in Iraq.

It talks about the risk posed to U.S. personnel because these are obviously the men and women that we represent in our communities. It talks about the issue of Afghanistan becoming a terrorist safe haven and the assessments that are required there.

And, of course, the impact on our partners, allies, and the humanitarian conditions on the ground because we have made substantial investments and capacity-building investments in humanitarian aid, and the men and women and children in vulnerable populations in Afghanistan.

So, with that said, and the fact that this is America's war, not any one administration's war, and it is Federal law that the administration provide that assessment to Congress in advance of a withdrawal from Afghanistan, is it the administration's intent to comply with that law and provide those assessments to the United States Congress?

Ms. DORY. Congressman, it is my understanding that the administration will comply with the law. My understanding, further, the briefings that will be provided later today are a down payment in some respects with respect to section 1215.

Mr. CROW. Well, just so you know, I don't expect a briefing would satisfy those requirements. And when I say "comply with the law," the last administration, the Trump administration, basically provided a certification invoking an emergency to bypass the intent of the law, not actually provide those assessments. And we would expect this administration to comply in good faith with the intent of that law, and that is to have written and comprehensive assessments.

Can you provide any insight into which approach the administration is going to take here?

Ms. DORY. Congressman, all I can say right now based on just the evolving nature of the decision-making process, is the decision just happened and we are now moving into implementation. But I fully expect compliance with the law in a manner that is intended by the Congress.

Mr. CROW. Okay. Thanks, Ms. Dory.

General McKenzie, over to you. One of my biggest concerns is force protection. Obviously, retrograde operations are some of the riskiest things we do. You had testified earlier as to a surge of combat power into Afghanistan to set the conditions for the withdrawal. But I am gravely concerned as our footprint gets smaller what the QRF [quick reaction force] capacity looks like in the event the security situation dissolves much faster than our assessments might indicate.

Can you speak to what forces, regional forces, would be available and how we are going to ensure that the last remaining units in Afghanistan have assistance available to them?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, I would prefer to talk to specific tactical details in the closed session this afternoon, but I will be happy to do that in that session.

I would tell you that I spent a lot of time looking at force protection in Afghanistan, but withdrawals such as we are doing is based off three components. One is the equipment extraction, what you

are going to do with it. The other is turning over the bases and the infrastructure. And third, and the most important, is the force protection itself for our forces.

General Miller and I talk every day about force protection in Afghanistan, and I am confident that we will have the forces necessary to protect our forces should the Taliban decide to begin attacking us on 1 May or at any other date. And I will be happy to provide the details to you in a classified forum.

Mr. CROW. Thank you. Look forward to having that discussion this afternoon.

And, General Townsend, very briefly, I represent one of the Nation's largest communities of Ethiopians and Ethiopian diaspora. And I am extremely concerned for the security situation, particularly the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project. Could you provide some insight as to our efforts to ensure that that project does not result in regional armed conflict?

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Congressman. With the remaining 30 seconds, I might want to give some to Ms. Dory on this. We are watching the situation with the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, and we are trying to keep people informed. I think this is mostly a diplomatic-led effort, and I will turn it over to Ms. Dory.

Ms. DORY. I agree fully with General Townsend. There is a big diplomatic push at this point with respect to the GERD [Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam] concerns.

Mr. CROW. Okay. Thank you, all of you. Appreciate the testimony very much.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I want to make sure members know—I did not announce this up front—we have a hard stop at 1:30 for this portion, and then we will be reconvening at 3:00, in this room actually, for the classified hearing. So I want to emphasize that point, because normally we do it in the CVC [Capitol Visitor Center], but the CVC is occupied today by extended discussions about Afghanistan.

So 1:30 hard stop, and then 3:00 back here for that. I will be departing shortly, and turning the committee over to the capable hands of Mr. Larsen, to go up and do one of the CVC briefings. But I just wanted to make sure everyone had that scheduling update.

And with that, Mr. DesJarlais is recognized.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Thank you, Chairman Smith.

General McKenzie, which state actor in your area of responsibility do you believe to be the United States' greatest geostrategic foe?

General MCKENZIE. I consider Iran to be the greatest threat to regional stability in the Middle East.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. And with Israel moving from EUCOM [United States European Command] to CENTCOM later this year, do you believe that they will be your closest partner in the AOR?

General MCKENZIE. We have a lot of close partners in the AOR. Israel will certainly join the line of dependable friendships and partnerships that we have in the region. We have a unique and old relationship with Israel, but I wouldn't further characterize it.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Okay. When you have the political leadership of our greatest foe in the region—Iran—threatening our closest ally,

Israel, and stating that its mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran is to erase Israel from the map of the region, do you believe that one of our top priorities should be keeping a nuclear weapon out of Iran's hands?

General MCKENZIE. I believe the President has stated that is a high priority. I also believe that one of the things Central Command does on a daily basis is deter Iran from acting against us and against our partners and friends in the region.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Okay. If Iran were to develop nuclear weapons, what do you believe would be the response from some of our allies in the region? And do you believe such a move could have the potential to set off an arms race?

General MCKENZIE. I would prefer not to speculate about future contingencies. I can tell you that it would be very concerning to us if Iran possessed a nuclear weapon, it was able to possess a nuclear weapon. And it is the aim of United States' policy to prevent that condition from occurring.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Okay. You mentioned in your opening statement that as a result of the challenges faced with UAS [unmanned aerial systems] detection and interdiction that United States is for the first time since the Korean War operating without complete air superiority. What would we—what should we be doing to address this gap in our capabilities and retain the advantage against Iranian forces?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, I think the—I think, first of all, the Department of Defense has moved out very aggressively to address this problem. The Army is the executive agent for close-in protection against these small UAS systems that are most concerning to me. But I think we still have a ways to go to get on the right side of the curve with this, because right now you can go out and buy one at Walmart or some other location. You can weaponize it very readily. Sometimes it is very difficult for us to detect them until it is too late.

We have a variety of systems that we are testing now in a free market competition to find the best and most integrated capabilities. We are not there yet, and it remains a very concerning priority of mine.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Okay. Can you spell out the implications of China's 25-year agreement with Iran, which includes expanding military cooperation?

General MCKENZIE. Sure, sir. You know, China has had an existing military agreement with Iran for a period of time. I am not certain that this is going to produce anything new or different. Again, we will watch to see what it does with oil exports, and I am probably not the best person to talk about that right now.

But a number of sanctions could still come in place against Chinese companies should they elect to do business with Iran. So, again, I am probably not the best guy to give you an answer on that, sir.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Okay. The annual threat assessment issued earlier this month by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, they highlighted Iraq as the key battleground for Iran's influence this year and during the next several years. Do you agree with this assessment?

General MCKENZIE. I completely agree with that, and I would go further to say that in the year 2020 Iran's plan was to gain, through political action, the ejection of the United States from the region and principally from Iraq. They failed in doing that.

And as a result, we are beginning to see attacks ramp up from their Shia groups in the region, and I think that is going to continue.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Okay. So you kind of partly answered that, but what would be the net effect if the U.S. were to drawn down or completely withdraw troops from Iraq?

General MCKENZIE. Well, that move is not contemplated. If there is—one of the good news stories in the region is I believe we have a good relationship with the government of Iraq, just recently completed strategic dialogue, is going to provide a framework for us to decide what our forces are going to look like going forward.

So I don't think there is—I don't see us withdrawing completely from Iraq in the future.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Okay. Well, thank you, General, both Generals, for your service, and, Ms. Dory.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Carbajal.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all of the witnesses here today.

Ms. Dory, I welcome this administration's decision to strategically withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021. I must say, though, that the difference between this administration and the previous administration is that it seems that we are doing it with our allies, and we are doing it in close coordination and collaboration instead of hearing about a tweet and our commanders not really being in the loop. So I appreciate that.

But, still, the question that stays as a significant issue is, well, what is our plan? That was my criticism before with the previous administration, and that is—I am looking to better understand, what is the plan as we leave Afghanistan?

So if you could answer that, and then help me understand what President Biden meant when he said, "We will reorganize our counterterrorism capabilities and the substantial assets in the region to prevent reemergence of terrorism." Can you elaborate on that statement?

Ms. DORY. Thank you, Congressman. This administration has reinvigorated a focus on alliances and partnerships, and I think you see it in the work that has been underway to support taking a decision with respect to the future of the U.S. force posture in Afghanistan, so the intensive engagement that we saw most recently with NATO and coalition partners with respect to the decision to draw down in Afghanistan.

In the very near term, there is detailed planning underway, as you heard General McKenzie refer to a few moments ago, with respect to how the force drawdown will proceed in conjunction with the allies and partners' separate planning underway with respect to what the counterterrorism footprint will look like going forward, given the focus in Afghanistan, the primary vital interest that has

sustained us over time being to ensure that there are no attacks emanating from Afghanistan with respect to the U.S. homeland.

And we will have—in the classified briefings later today, we will be able to get into that, into a lot more detail.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Okay. Does that include what our footprint will look like moving forward?

Ms. DORY. Well, I think what we understand is from here and to September, that we will have—we will not have combat forces, U.S. or coalition combat forces there, and we will transition to a diplomatically oriented footprint with the U.S. Embassy.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you. Can you provide us with an update on where the intra-Afghan peace talks are at at this point?

Ms. DORY. I think Ambassador Khalilzad will be one of the panelists in the briefings later this afternoon, and will be well-postured to give a just—just a fresh update on those talks.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Great. Thank you.

General McKenzie, in your testimony, you comment that CENTCOM is committed to working with interagency partners to develop mechanisms that ensure continued oversight of and accountability of the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund. What oversight tools do we currently use that will be important to continue after the withdrawal? How will our oversight adapt to having a limited presence on the ground?

General MCKENZIE. The principal tool that we use to manage the oversight of the disbursement of those funds and the proper use of it are the people on the ground that see what happens to it and monitor that. As we draw down, that is going to become our principal challenge. How do we do that from a remote location?

A lot will depend on the size of the U.S. Embassy that remains, and we have not yet finally determined that, and that is something that we are talking about planning right now. The smaller the Embassy is, the more difficult it will become to manage the ASFF [Afghanistan Security Forces Fund] as we go forward. We are keenly aware of that. That is right at the centerpiece of our planning, and we are working very closely with the Department of State to make those determinations.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Mr. LARSEN [presiding]. Thank you, Representative Carbajal.

The chair now recognizes Representative Gaetz of Florida for 5 minutes.

Mr. GAETZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to talk about Chad. General Townsend, it appears in the last several hours the President of Chad was killed, engaged in front line fighting against rebels who had based in Libya and have crossed the border. What do you know currently about the situation in Chad, and particularly any change to the counterterrorism cooperation that we have been able to rely on from that government?

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Congressman. As you know, that is sort of a breaking news story, as I walked in here this morning, we learned about the reported and confirmed death of President Déby. He is a retired general, and he has in the past gone to the front where there was action. And we don't know exactly how he got killed, but the report is he was killed in action up there facing off with a column of rebels that are not terrorists. They are not

ISIS. They are not al-Qaida. They are—they were actually anti-regime in Chad.

They were based in southern Libya. They mounted up in several hundred vehicles, and they transited a long way across the Chadian desert towards the south. The Chadian government forces started engaging them. They were supported by the French. We observed this, and then President—it looked like that the column had made the decision to withdraw.

This has happened before. They were about to withdraw, we think, and then the news of President Déby's death became known. It is unclear what this means for our relationship there. His son, President Déby's son, former intel [intelligence] chief, has been appointed as the interim president.

We expect that he is inclined towards good relationships with France and the United States. We think that will continue. There could be some potential for violence, and we are working closely with our country team there.

Our Embassy did a precautionary drawdown of personnel to a minimum staff, and we also have some military folks there working with the French and the Embassy. So we are watching this very closely to keep Americans safe while this becomes a little more clear.

Mr. GAETZ. It seems tactically significant that these rebels were able to base in southern Libya, but they were able to traverse such a distance, and then execute this mission. It might suggest that the situation in Libya is getting worse as well with a failed state following the Gaddafi regime.

With this transition council that has President Déby's son now in some position of leadership, I guess the position of leadership in the country, what do we expect from the French? I know that they were very supportive of the regime. Is there anything that we would expect as a change from—regarding their involvement with the country?

General TOWNSEND. On our point about the situation in Libya, we know that the Chadian government had been supportive, and there were also factions in Chad that supported various factions in Libya regarding the future with this interim president, the son of President Déby, the interim President Déby.

Right now I anticipate that it will—he will be favorable to good relations with France, and France I anticipate will continue to do what they have been doing up to this point, supporting the government of Chad. But I have to be honest with you: this is breaking news, and it is not clear.

Mr. GAETZ. Yeah. It sort of seems when a president who took power through a military coup then dies in a battle against political rebels, not religious extremists, and then gives rise to his son being selected by the national council, that it is not the strongest case for emerging democracy in Africa. It seems to suggest more of a move toward authoritarianism, and I think that is something we should all watch carefully.

I thank the chairman, and I yield back.

Mr. LARSEN. Thank you.

The chair recognizes Representative Slotkin of Michigan for 5 minutes.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am happy to see all three of you here, some of our really foremost experts on the Middle East and Africa that we have in our government.

My questions are going to be primarily for General McKenzie on Afghanistan. You know, I think for the most part most of us feel, at least I feel from my constituents, that they want to be out of Afghanistan. We have fathers who are sending off their sons to fight in the same war they fought in.

But what holds people back is this fear that the exact reason we went in—you know, a threat of terrorist attacks against our homeland and our allies—could creep back up again.

So help us understand. I understand we will talk more of the classified stuff in a separate session. But, General McKenzie, help reassure my constituents that by pulling out we won't be going right back in because we have a threat that impacts us here on the homeland.

General MCKENZIE. Thanks, ma'am, for that, and I appreciate the concern of your constituents. Like them, I sent my son twice to Afghanistan, so I am very much aware of those concerns.

As we have talked a little bit before, we are going to go to zero in Afghanistan. That means there will be no U.S. forces on the ground there. We will use a variety of means to monitor al-Qaida and ISIS in Afghanistan. The intelligence will decline. The Director of National—or the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] Director has said that, but we will still be able to see into Afghanistan. There still will be ways to do that.

Much of that will depend on the Embassy platform that remains, and that is yet undetermined. But that will be helpful if we maintain an Embassy there. But we are going to be able to continue to look into Afghanistan. And I think the President has been very clear: we are not going to reenter to reoccupy Afghanistan under any conceivable circumstances.

What we will retain the ability to do is to find and fix those people who plan attacks against us that we can detect. And then, when appropriate, we will be able to strike them. I don't want to make that sound easy because it is not easy. It is going to be extremely difficult to do it, but it is not impossible to do it.

Ms. SLOTKIN. So I am deeply impacted by our experience on Iraq as someone who grew up as an Iraq specialist and who didn't agree with the decision to go to zero in Iraq, and then watched in the years after we had pulled out how difficult it was to get Washington to pay attention to what was then a growing threat of ISIS.

We couldn't get the intelligence support. We couldn't get the overhead imagery support. We couldn't get the attention of folks when we saw things creeping back in the wrong direction. Please help me understand how this will be different.

General MCKENZIE. Well, speaking to the future, I don't know, but I will certainly be a relentless advocate to keep the focus on Afghanistan. We are going to shift assets out of Central Command. That is a given. That is going to happen.

At the same time, we need to balance against what we know the known aspiration of these groups to launch attacks against the United States. That hasn't gone away, and it is there right now.

They are depressed. They have very little ability to do that. Certainly, it is possible they could reestablish themselves in the future.

It is also possible the Taliban will do some of the things that they have said they are going to do. I will just watch that very closely to see that it happens. I think that is a reasonable concern, and I share that concern, frankly.

Ms. SLOTKIN. And I know that, you know, we have learned in the past 20 years that our best attempts in these wars is through coalitions, through alliances, doing things with partners and allies. So I am heartened that we are having the conversation with them, but is there anything planned on the regional security architecture? A formal plan with our allies and partners to have a conversation not just about how to end the war but how to contain the situation after the war has ended.

General MCKENZIE. So I defer to Ms. Dory for some of that. But I would say what has been very impressive to me has been the complete and comprehensive degree of consultation that went into this decision, and the execution of this decision, both with our NATO partners, our other coalition partners on the ground, and in fact regional partners.

So I think that set the stage for some form of regional architecture, but I defer to Ms. Dory for further comments on that.

Ms. SLOTKIN. I will go to Ms. Dory in just a second. But just to finish out, you are one of our most seasoned, experienced four-star generals with experience on the ground in the Middle East, tour after tour. Do you feel confident that the American people will stay safe and not be attacked again emanating out of Afghanistan?

General MCKENZIE. The key thing that is different in 2021 from 2001 is not only what is going on in the theater, but our ability to harden the country here. The steps we have taken here to protect ourselves, it is a very different country in terms of ability to enter and operate in the United States than it was in the fall of 2001.

So, you know, we work very hard to ensure that attacks aren't going to come from Afghanistan or from Africa or from any other place. It begins on the ground there, but there is also a broad, in-depth defense that is in place that was not in place before.

Ms. SLOTKIN. And in my last remaining 20 seconds, do you know of any discussions with the Afghans about—the Afghans, excuse me, on a status of forces agreement or a diplomatic security agreement for our Embassy?

General MCKENZIE. I know that is actively being worked now, but I don't have any details beyond that.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Thank you, General. Appreciate it.

I yield back.

Mr. LARSEN. Thank you, Representative.

The chair recognizes Representative Waltz of Florida for 5 minutes. Representative Waltz.

Mr. WALTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to make—can you hear me okay?

Mr. LARSEN. You are good.

Mr. WALTZ. All right. Thank you. General, I just want to pick up on Ms. Slotkin's questions. I certainly share her concerns, and it was good to spend some time with you a few weeks ago. Can you

talk to me, what about—or, Ms. Dory—what basing agreements do we have from any of the Stans—Tajikistan, where obviously we no longer—where we have no basing; Kyrgyzstan, where we no longer have Manas; Uzbekistan, where we no longer have K2, what agreements do we have with any of the neighboring countries to be able to base our forces and conduct lethal strikes or even surveillance back into Afghanistan? Do we have any currently?

General MCKENZIE. At this time, we have no—we have none of those agreements in place.

Mr. WALTZ. General, do you think it would have been optimal to have those agreements before we announced to the world that we are going to zero in a few months?

General MCKENZIE. I can't speak to that. I will tell you that right now we are engaged in a significant effort to evaluate where we want to put potential CT forces, where they would be best optimized from geography, and also the diplomatic angle of it, as we go forward.

Mr. WALTZ. I think it is—we need to be clear with the American people that when the military goes, our intelligence assets go, the agency is—the Central Intelligence Agency and other agencies are dependent on that military backbone and basing, and also our contracts and our contractors go, with estimates of 15- to 20,000 currently there providing logistics, maintenance, and other critical support of the Afghan security forces.

What is the plan for the continuing presence of those critical contract support services?

General MCKENZIE. So right now, most of the contractors are going to leave. Certainly, the U.S. contractors are going to leave. We will try to develop ways to do distant contracting where we can. Clearly, there are going to be some things that we are not going to be able to do anymore as the contractors leave. And I don't want to minimize that.

Mr. WALTZ. And it is important for everyone to understand that those contractors were providing maintenance, for example, for the Black Hawks that we provided to the Afghan security forces, to the limited close-air support capabilities that they have, and, again, critical logistic and advisory functions.

All of that is going to be gone in the next few months, and both the—a number of reports, both think tank, intelligence community, and even the Afghans themselves, have cast real doubt on the ability of the Afghan security forces to continue to hold without that support.

So I fear, to add on to Ms. Slotkin's questions, if the Taliban does take over, or we do even have a power-sharing agreement with the Taliban, we will now be reliant on them for any basing over flight or any type of authorities that we need to go after al-Qaida, assuming that they will give them. Is that—do I have that wrong?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, that is a lot of future hypotheticals that I am probably not the best person to talk about. I will tell you right now, though, that there is still a possibility of intra-Afghan dialogue. That could still continue. We can have our own assessment about the probability of that reaching success, but that still continues.

Mr. WALTZ. Well, but, General, I want to be clear with everyone that it is not a hypothetical that the State Department has introduced a draft power sharing agreement into the dialogue where the Afghan government would dissolve as it currently stands and share power with the Taliban. So I don't think it is a leap to say we would then have to negotiate them for any ability to return and go after al-Qaida.

But my question is: what military—so assume they have the will to turn on and conduct operations against al-Qaida? What military capability does the Taliban have that a 300,000-man Afghan army and 42 coalition nations have struggled in terms of containing al-Qaida? What military capability does the Afghans have?

General MCKENZIE. So the Afghans would have significant residual capability. It would depend on if the nation is whole, if the nation is fractured, if there is a civil war. There are a variety of future contingents that would directly affect the ability of the Afghan—whatever, whoever is leading the Afghan government, in whatever state it is, their ability to actually concentrate combat power.

Some of those scenarios you have outlined, it would be a fractured state. They would not be able to do it. Other scenarios, they might be able to do it.

Mr. WALTZ. Thank you, General. And just in the time I have remaining, would Bagram Air Base be valuable to you being where it is located geographically west of China, south of Russia, east of Iran, in great power contingencies?

General MCKENZIE. Bagram is key terrain tactically in Afghanistan, operationally and strategically. It is the definition of key terrain.

Mr. WALTZ. And it is notable that we are about to just give that away with nothing in return.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield.

Mr. LARSEN. The gentleman's time has expired.

The chair recognizes Representative Houlahan of Pennsylvania for 5 minutes.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions, first to General McKenzie and General Townsend, have to do with China, which has obviously significantly invested in Pakistan and parts of Africa as part of their Belt and Road Initiative. And I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit, if you have any concerns about them in terms of national security in the region, and also if you might be able to tell us if you have heard any whisperings of the fact that they are maybe interested in sending a peacekeeping troop to Afghanistan if we indeed do leave the region.

General MCKENZIE. I will begin and briefly just talk about the Central Command before handing over to General Townsend. So we see China operating in Central Command principally from an economic perspective. They offer a number of apparently seductive and attractive infrastructure and other development loans and projects to countries in the region, which then have a significant—on the back end of that are not such—don't appear to be such a good deal after all.

They want access to the region. They would, I think, eventually want to seek naval basing in the region because they do import a significant amount of their hydrocarbons through the Strait of Hormuz and out of the region. But for now, for the short term to the medium term, it is principally economic engagement going forward.

And you are right; we see it in Pakistan but also in some of the Gulf states. It is significantly concerning to me they are playing a very long game, and they are playing it with vast amounts of resources.

Ms. HOULAHAN. And, sir, do you see any concerns or significant concerns as a result of that?

General MCKENZIE. I am very concerned about where we are going to be in a few years with China in the region. I believe that some of the nation-states in the region are also waking up to this and are becoming aware of it because they see what is happening in Africa, they see what is happening in South America and other parts of the globe.

And as you know, there are nations in the region that actually do have significant resourcing themselves, so they don't need to fall into the debt trap with China. Others are susceptible to that predatory diplomacy.

Ms. HOULAHAN. And, General Townsend, do you have anything as well?

General TOWNSEND. I would say our concerns are very similar to those expressed by General McKenzie. I don't know if you received the placemats. We handed out placemats here in the room, and I am told we distributed them electronically as well. One of them is on——

Mr. LARSEN. General, we do have those placemats.

General TOWNSEND. Thank you. What China is doing in Africa, and that kind of gives you an idea. I think the only thing I would add to what General McKenzie said is they very much have intent to establish additional overseas bases in Africa. Whether that be on the Atlantic coast of Africa or the Indian Ocean coast of Africa, they are working hard to establish naval bases and/or airbases, and that is of great concern to AFRICOM.

Ms. HOULAHAN. And so with regard to, you know, a potential buildup of China, do you anticipate, General Townsend, with the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan that we might increase our troops in AFRICOM? Given that there is, as we know, is a constant threat of extremism, how will we possibly do that, if indeed that is our plan, do you think?

General TOWNSEND. Congresswoman, I don't—as an economy of force effort for the Department of Defense, I don't anticipate a significant uplift of resources to AFRICOM, despite the drawdown in Afghanistan. So I am not anticipating that, but we are going to undergo this global posture review and we are going to work through all of those questions.

Ms. HOULAHAN. I look forward to that. I do have concerns. I know I don't—I am not alone in sharing those concerns with that particular part of the world. Africa seems to be a rising opportunity for terrorists to land there in the absence of other places around

the world that they could land, and I just want to make sure that we are keeping our eye on the region.

I appreciate your time, gentlemen, and I will yield back.

Mr. LARSEN. Thank you, Representative.

The chair now recognizes Representative Bice of Oklahoma for 5 minutes.

Mrs. BICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for being here this afternoon.

My first question revolves around China and Russia and their continued reach into the AFRICOM region. One of the things that I have learned in my very short time here is that rare earth minerals are becoming a very big concern, and the Chinese and Russians are tapping into the African region to try to mine those.

Is the DOD taking any steps to facilitate access to those rare earth minerals for domestic use?

General TOWNSEND. Thanks for your question, Congresswoman. On the topic of rare earth minerals, both countries, as you have pointed out, are seeking to exploit those on the African continent. The Russians are sort of near-term exploiters, and the Chinese are more strategic exploiters in my view. They are very carefully seeking out mineral deposits that they want to lock down for the future.

The Department of Defense is supporting the USAID and the Department of State in this effort. We don't have a particular effort directed at securing rare earth minerals on the DOD side. But we are supporting our interagency partners in that regard.

Mrs. BICE. Do you feel like that is being effective?

General TOWNSEND. I know that it has the energy of this administration. It is of great concern to this administration. I think it is a legitimate concern.

Mrs. BICE. Turning just a bit here, you know, we have also heard a lot about technology and the use of technology across the region. How are CENTCOM and AFRICOM addressing the emerging threat of drones and drone swarm tactics? And that can really sort of apply to, yeah, CENTCOM or AFRICOM.

General TOWNSEND. Sure. I will answer it and hand it off to General McKenzie. And my first encounter with drone-delivered munitions was in the battle of Mosul in Iraq 2 or 3 years ago. So this is an area of great concern to us. We haven't seen a significant employment of weaponized drones in Africa yet, but we are working very hard to be ready for that and to head that off.

The Department of Defense—as General McKenzie explained earlier, the Department of Defense has a great program focused on that threat. I am concerned about the small armed drones, as well as the larger one-way attack drones that we have seen employed in the region.

So I think we are focused on it, and we are employing as much technology as we can to prepare for that.

General McKenzie.

General MCKENZIE. Thanks. So small commercially available drones are one of the most persistent and dangerous threats that we see in the Central Command AOR. I am very concerned about it. We have ways to deal with the larger land attack cruise missiles. They are equally—they are concerning, but we can deal with them as an air defense problem. It is a lot harder to deal with

something that is small, perhaps commercially off-the-shelf bought, modified, and we are on the wrong side of the cost imposition curve when it comes to these systems.

So a lot of great work is being done in the Department. We are not there yet.

Mrs. BICE. And that sort of leads to my next question which was the factors that are limiting your ability to deploy counter UAS systems within CENTCOM and AFRICOM.

General MCKENZIE. So within CENTCOM, there are a variety of systems out there. I take any system and employ it immediately. What we—where we need to go is an integrated system, because the system—an integrated system would give you early warning of launch perhaps through a variety of means. It would give you an idea of where they are coming and their altitude. Then it would give you an ability to engage them kinetically and non-kinetically.

We do not yet have a single system that can do all of that. What we have are a variety of systems that all do part of this, and that is part of the problem. We are not integrated. So we pushed very hard to get an integrated system, but one that is not delivered late, behind need. That is the problem when you push for an integrated system.

Mrs. BICE. Ms. Dory, do you have any comments on that?

Ms. DORY. I would just add to that, Congresswoman, that the issue of counter UAS is something not just within the Department at this point but has a profile in terms of the interagency discussions on how to deter and defeat that threat.

So within the Department of Defense, there is the joint effort underway that the Generals have referred to, but there is also a broader whole of government approach that is recently initiated.

Mrs. BICE. Thank you, Ms. Dory, General McKenzie, and General Townsend, for your time.

And I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. LARSEN. Thank you. Before I go to the next questioner, I do want to just stop and as well thank General McKenzie for his hospitality 2 weeks ago at CENTCOM. Appreciate that, and I did not take that opportunity earlier. I wanted to thank you for that.

The chair now recognizes Representative Luria of Virginia for 5 minutes.

Mrs. LURIA. Well, thank you, gentlemen, and Ms. Dory, for your testimony today. I would like to first address the issue with General McKenzie of mine warfare in the CENTCOM AOR. Iranian mining capability is obviously a vulnerability for U.S. and allied military forces within the region as well as for commercial shipping and free trade. And the Navy plans to soon decommission its remaining four MCM [mine countermeasures] platforms stationed in the Gulf in Bahrain.

And as we know, the material condition and capabilities of these aging MCMs has been severely degraded over time. However, the Navy's planned replacement of the mine warfare capability through the mission modules on the LCS [littoral combat ship] class of ships is neither fully developed nor has it been successfully deployed from the LCS.

However, testing at the MCM platforms—on platforms of opportunity, such as provided by allied navies in 2019. The Royal Fleet

Auxiliary's *Mounts Bay* successfully tested this, and then the ESB-4 [expeditionary sea base], *Hershel "Woody" Williams*, also in 2019, proved successful. And these ad hoc capabilities are not resident in the CENTCOM AOR, which is going to leave us a convenient gap in MCM capability once these ships are decommissioned.

As the combatant commander, are you confident in the current and future mine warfare capabilities provided by the Navy in your AOR?

General MCKENZIE. Thank you for the question. I am very concerned about Iranian mine warfare capabilities. I think it is one of their great asymmetric weapons, and they employ it in two areas, up in the Strait of Hormuz—

Mr. LARSEN. General McKenzie, I am sorry, could you just get that microphone pointed right at your chin.

General MCKENZIE. How is that? Better?

Mr. LARSEN. Yeah. A little better.

General MCKENZIE. I am very concerned about Iranian mine warfare capabilities. It is a significant asymmetric threat that they possess, and they possess it not only up in the Strait of Hormuz, which is where we always think about it, but also down in the Bab al-Mandab in the Red Sea. The ability to deploy a wide variety of thousands of mines is very concerning to me.

Right now, we have very limited mine warfare capability in the theater. Our ships, as you have noted, and the ships of our British partners are also about all we have if we had to sweep and open the Strait of Hormuz, which is a vital international passage. And it would take us an extended amount of time to do it with the resources that we have now.

I, too, have noted the LCS and the problems that are attendant as a possible non-sweeping variant. Regardless, it is not going to be available in a reasonable amount of time for me in my requirements in U.S. Central Command.

So I would share your concerns. We talk about this all the time. This is an area of Iranian capability that remains vexing and concerning to me.

Mrs. LURIA. So, General, since there was a successful test of these advanced mine warfare capabilities using the T-ESB platform, which is something that is already played in your theater, would that be a valuable addition in the CENTCOM AOR? Are you able to leverage that capability on the T-ESB?

General MCKENZIE. CENTCOM would be happy to leverage any capability that is out there right now given the significant gap between our available resources and the scope and scale of the problem.

Mrs. LURIA. Okay. Thank you. And in the time remaining, General Townsend, I wanted to focus, as some of my colleagues already have, on the rapidly expanding Chinese influence on the African continent. We have already referenced the strategic location of the Chinese overseas base in Djibouti, adjacent to Bab al-Mandab and the entrance to the Red Sea.

But more than a strategic positioning from the maritime perspective, I wanted to focus on some of the infrastructure and transportation investments that they are making, reaching into Ethiopia.

It appears that the Chinese, who inarguably want to grow their position on the world stage, and in Africa, are engaging in their own version of modern day colonialism on the African continent as they venture, you know, to find cheaper labor markets and use infrastructure debt to leverage—as a leverage tool.

Can you comment on the domestic and regional impact of the Chinese economic expansion into Ethiopia and then maybe a little bit, in the time remaining, on how the recent unrest in the Tigray region has changed any Chinese activity in the area.

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Congresswoman. So you mentioned Chinese and an example of their investments on the African continent. Transportation and infrastructure is certainly one of those, seaports, airports, and rail lines in particular. And you see that with Ethiopia with rail lines running to the Red Sea from the country. You see that in Kenya as well.

In some places, these investments have worked out okay. I haven't seen any of them that have worked out really well as the Chinese had hoped they would. Regarding your question about Tigray, we haven't—I haven't seen a connection to Tigray in China.

Mr. LARSEN. The Representative's time has expired. Thank you.

The chair now recognizes Representative Franklin from Florida for 5 minutes.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the interest of time, I do have a couple of questions for General McKenzie. First, following up on Representative Waltz's dialogue earlier regarding basing in the region and the changes we are now going to face with Afghanistan not being there with physical presence the ground, I think back to just after 9/11 I was in Bahrain. We were planning some of those initial strikes into Afghanistan.

The challenge we had was long distances to make those happen, and we had carrier pilots that were flying 8- to 10-hour missions with multiple refuelings to get there. That is obviously going to be a challenge if we find ourselves having to go back in on that kind of scale in the future.

But in your testimony you had mentioned pursuing opportunities to enhance expeditionary basing in less vulnerable areas of the AOR. Could you expand a little bit on those and where they may stand?

General MCKENZIE. Certainly. When we talk about that, I am primarily talking about the Iran problem and the fact that our bases now, such as Al Udeid, Al Dhafra, Manama, Bahrain, as you noted, have the virtue of being close to the area you might want to fight. They also have a problem being very close to the Iranians.

So what we would seek to do is examine alternative further to the west in the Arabian Peninsula that would make it more difficult for the Iranians to target our bases there. It would increase the range of many of their weapons. It would not actually have the range to reach out there and get to those bases. The problem would be the tanker bill that is associated with that.

On the other hand, if the tanker can survive out to the west, it is probably better than it being close where it can be struck. So there is a tradeoff that we make, and we look to our partners to help us on this with these bases. And we have never looked to base permanently there. Rather, you would like to have the ability to go

in there, as you noted, in an expeditionary manner in a time of crisis or in a time of war, just to make it harder for an opponent to threaten the force.

Mr. FRANKLIN. All right. Thank you. Switching gears to the displaced persons camps in northeast Syria, particularly Al-Hol, I guess from your testimony, General, we talked about 61,000 people there, 94 percent women and children, two-thirds under 18. I mean, in addition to the obvious humanitarian crisis, I know there is a big problem with the radicalization of a lot of these children.

So this I guess would be a question for you, General McKenzie, and also Ms. Dory. What is the way ahead in that? How do we fix this problem? I know a lot of the countries that these people are coming from don't want them back. What is the end game for this?

General MCKENZIE. Sure. So I will defer to Ms. Dory here in just a minute, but I will say it is not a military problem. But it will manifest itself in 5 to 10 years as a military problem unless we solve it now, because the children are going to grow up radicalized, and we are going to see them on battlefields fighting us.

So it is an international problem. It requires repatriation. It requires nations to step up to the plate, claim their citizens, bring them home, reintegrate them back into their communities. And it demands de-radicalization, which is extremely difficult to do. It is best done and practiced by nations in the region who have a cultural affinity for the people that are largely in those camps.

It is a tough problem. Our diplomats—the Department of State, USAID, and a lot of NGOs [non-governmental organizations]—are working at this very hard. It is one of the most pressing problems we have in the CENTCOM region right now.

And with that, I will defer to Ms. Dory for anything she would like to add.

Ms. DORY. I think General McKenzie put it beautifully. It is not a military problem. It is an interagency issue, and it is a question of political will in terms of host nations for the individuals who are in the camps.

Mr. FRANKLIN. So what pressure do we have that we can apply to get these folks to step up and accept these people? We can't leave them there in the desert forever.

Ms. DORY. I think it depends on which countries you are talking about and the state of the dialogue with them, what forms of dialogue and leverage we have at our disposal to encourage stepping up to that responsibility.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. LARSEN. Thank you, Representative Franklin.

The chair recognizes Representative Strickland before just—the next questioner will be Representative Veasey. So, Representative Strickland, you are recognized—of Washington State, recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. STRICKLAND. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

General Townsend, we heard in your testimony that AFRICOM supported U.S. efforts to provide COVID-19 assistance in 43 countries, including the delivery of nearly 500 million in medical supplies. The United States is often at its best when it leads in crises as it did during the Ebola crisis.

Can you tell me, please, how AFRICOM is working alongside whole of government efforts to respond to COVID-19? And specifically have we, along with USG [United States Government], started to develop a plan to distribute vaccines for COVID to partners on the continent?

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Congresswoman. So as you saw in the testimony there, there have been significant Department of Defense efforts, but those are small in comparison to the U.S. Government's COVID assistance on the African continent that has been led primarily by the USAID and the Department of State.

So there are some military or DOD capabilities that we have employed to the maximum extent possible, things like medical supplies and mobile field hospitals that are being fielded to military partners that are being used by those partner countries to treat COVID.

So that has all been part of the larger U.S. Government response, and it is a small part compared to what the State Department and USAID have done.

On your question about vaccines, I will defer to Ms. Dory, but the U.S. Government is going to provide eventually vaccines internationally, and in Africa, but we are making sure we have taken care of the American population first. We have been asked for input, to provide that input to the Department of Defense and the Government for decisions about where vaccines might go first.

Ms. Dory.

Ms. DORY. Thank you, General Townsend. Just to add on that that with the state of vaccination at home in a much better place than it has been, plans are underway with respect to how the U.S. Government will be able to help overseas. Our USAID and State Department colleagues are at the forefront of those efforts, and I think we will see the results of those in the coming months.

Ms. STRICKLAND. Great. Thank you. And then one more question. Ms. Dory, we will stay with you. The prior administration chose to close U.S. defense attaché offices in several West African countries. Defense attaché perform a vital role in representing the U.S. military, and removing them can send the wrong message to host governments about the importance that we put on the relationship and how much we value it.

As you reviewed the decisions of the prior administration, can you tell me about the status of these defense attaché offices?

Ms. DORY. Congresswoman, I would be glad to, and I can imagine General Townsend might like to add on to this as well. Defense attachés are fundamental to the way the Department of Defense does business in the interagency context on the ground in our missions across the world.

We have the continued challenges, as we see in every other type of personnel category, of supply and demand, and insufficient supply relative to demand has led to some difficult decisions with respect to how we are represented in different countries and whether individual attachés are responsible for more than one country at a time. I would very much like to see sufficient attachés to go around.

General Townsend.

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Congresswoman. So as you heard, Congresswoman, the last administration did make a decision to close six defense attaché offices on the African continent. Some of those were a hub that did several smaller countries as well. That decision was overturned actually before the end of the—by the Acting Secretary of Defense Miller before the administration ended.

I suspect it may get reviewed during the global posture review. The problem is between the initial decision to close those offices we had a personnel assignment cycle go by, so no backfills were identified. So now that the decision was overturned, we are going to probably have a gap potentially of a year or two in some of those defense attaché offices.

Anyway, that is the current state of that, and Ms. Dory covered very well the importance of defense attaché offices in Africa.

Ms. STRICKLAND. Great. Thank you. Thank you, both of you.

I yield back my time, Mr. Chair.

Mr. LARSEN. Thank you, Representative Strickland.

The chair now recognizes Representative Veasey of Texas for 5 minutes.

Mr. VEASEY. Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

General Townsend, you testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in January 2020 and warned that VEOs were expanding at a very rapid rate across West Africa, noting that substantive external assistance from Western partners was critical to help our African partners make progress to contain these VEOs.

At the end of September 2020, AFRICOM reported that VEOs in the Sahel were either degraded and—nor contained, were neither degraded nor contained, and that VEOs in West Africa continue to expand geographically, conduct attacks, and threaten people and other partners in the region.

What do you believe were the driving factors behind the lack of progress over the past year? And how can we better leverage USG resources, specifically in Nigeria where violence threatens the prosperity of Africa's largest democracy and making sure that we keep Nigeria as stable as possible, because they are so important for the entire continent, quite frankly.

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Congressman. You are right. In my last testimony I said that the VEO threat in West Africa was expanding. I don't know if I used the analogy then, but it is appropriate like a wildfire coming south from Mali and Niger towards Burkina Faso and the littoral states. And I believe the reason for that is that the international efforts there by the African partners and foreign partners were both insufficient and uncoordinated.

They might actually be sufficient if they were better coordinated, but it was impossible to tell because they were uncoordinated.

Now, that advance has not progressed at the speed that I feared it would a year ago. That advance is still north, along the northern borders of the littoral states, which we have a great deal of concern about. I think that is partly because of a number of factors. One of them, though, is the European partners, led by the French, have initiated a couple of things to try to improve the coordination between all of the international efforts that are going in there.

They are also doing much more effective advise and assist operations. Partnership for West Africa is one of these things to in-

crease coordination. Task Force Takuba is an advise and assist organization the French have stood up. They have asked for European partners to join in that effort. They have joined in that effort, and it is starting to be more effective.

So I think they have done some work to improve the coordination of the international effort. That has slowed that spread some. That said, that forest fire is dancing along the northern borders of all of those littoral states. And I am of the view that we need to do—I would like to—for once, I would like to do something to prevent the fire, prevent those littoral states from gaining—getting fully engulfed like Mali is, for example. And I think there are some fairly low impact things that could be done there in the littoral states that might do fire prevention there.

So I think a fire break across the Sahel, which largely is with the resources we have there now, mostly African and European, and then some fire prevention efforts in the littoral states.

Mr. VEASEY. Let me also ask you, several years ago, myself and Representative Panetta and Mr. Scott from Georgia, we visited Camp Lemonnier and several other countries there in Africa. And one of the areas of concern was exactly where the Chinese base was being built. I don't know that there was—strategically where it was at seemed to be a very good location for the Chinese in what they are trying to do to expand, you know, their naval operations and their presence on the continent.

With the Chinese and the fact that, you know, they don't care about, you know, human rights violations, corruption, you know, they will fly, you know, prime ministers and presidents from the continent over to China, put them up in nice houses. What can we do to counter that as—you know, as more and more countries in Africa seek to be able to, you know, come into the—continue to grow economically and prosper as they want to, like any other nation does?

General TOWNSEND. Congressman, the African nations are not blind to what the Chinese are up to. They have fallen prey to some of these debt trap diplomacy traps. But they are not blind to it. They can see it. They believe they can—many of them believe they can manage it, and I think that is probably the biggest thing we can do is help them try to manage their interactions with the Chinese on the continent.

Mr. LARSEN. I thank the gentleman.

Next up will be Representative Panetta, followed by Representative Speier. And so Representative Panetta from California is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PANETTA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And, gentlemen and ma'am, thank you for obviously your service, your time, your preparation, and for being here today, and your answers to our questions.

As my colleague just mentioned, we did a CODEL—I forget when that was it, maybe 2018, summer of 2018—where we had—we definitely had one of the top CODELs I have been on in that we were based in Djibouti and obviously flew C-130s all around.

One of the bases we went to was Manda Bay, and obviously, subsequent to that, you are very familiar with the attack that occurred in Manda Bay. Unfortunately, not just because of the attack, but

unfortunately, we are trying to get the review of what happened in regards to the initial investigation, because of—obviously, I have been there, and obviously the tragedy that happened as well.

But what is going on with the report? I know it has been 15 months since the attack took place, and I know that Secretary Austin has ordered now another review of it. Can you give us some insight as to what is going on with that report and when you think we are going to get this report as to what the heck happened there?

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Congressman. Your visit was in the summer of 2019, not 2018. It was my first CODEL after I took command at AFRICOM.

Mr. PANETTA. No. That was a different one. This was to Manda Bay. Manda Bay was before. We went to West Africa after that, another excellent CODEL facilitated by you, General, and I appreciate that. But before that, we were in—we went to the east side of Africa. That was the west side of Africa.

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Congressman. Correct. So Manda Bay report. So, first of all, let me reassure you and the other members that all of the steps that have been needed to take corrective action, immediate corrective action, have been taken long ago. Not only did we take those steps at Manda Bay; we took that report and applied those lessons learned at every base across Africa.

Now, to answer your specific question about the status of the report, AFRICOM concluded its investigation in December of last year. Of course, the timing of that, trying to get that through the Department of Defense and released, became problematic because it was overlaid on top of the change of administration.

The new Secretary of Defense came in. He received this report. He didn't have all of the depth of background on it, and so I think he very rightfully said, "Okay. Thanks, AFRICOM. I think I would like to have a separate look at this." And AFRICOM supports that separate look.

So the Secretary of Defense has appointed a disinterested four-star from the Army to look at the report of the investigation and give him advice on it.

This is also necessary because many of the fixes pertain to other services and other COCOMs. So they weren't all within—all of the recommendations and findings weren't within AFRICOM's purview to see through, so the Secretary of Defense has to do that. So that is the current status of it.

I think he gave the Army a target of 90 days to report out, and I think that is the current situation.

Mr. PANETTA. Good. Outstanding. Great. Thank you for that very thorough answer, General. Appreciate that.

Now going to the summer of 2019 when I did—when we did the CODEL to West Africa, which once again we completely appreciate you facilitating that.

Let me read you something that really kind of summarizes what I came away with. An article in *The Economist* last month, 2 months ago, basically talked about France's challenge there in that area. And it says basically France is challenged by others who have recently fought insurgencies in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq. It is that of trying to improve security, which is almost impos-

sible to do without development, and also drive development, which cannot happen without better security.

I think, you know, that was the impression I had coming away from that trip to West Africa. My question to you is: how do we get out of that catch-22? What can we do? Obviously, you gave an excellent answer to my colleague, Marc Veasey, about coordination and cooperation. Is there anything else that we can do in order to provide security and development as we go forward, especially in the Sahel?

General TOWNSEND. Congressman, I would say that the thing that is probably the easiest to solve is the security challenges, but they can't be solved without better development, as you pointed out, and better governance. That is the root of all of this.

And as we have seen that from Afghanistan to Africa, the root cause is poor governance, insufficient development, which needs a secure environment to proceed. And I think probably—

Mr. LARSEN. The gentleman's time has expired. Sorry, General. You will have to finish up for the record.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 117.]

General TOWNSEND. Thanks. The international efforts are really focused on security, unfortunately.

Mr. LARSEN. Great. Thank you.

Mr. PANETTA. Thank you, General.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. LARSEN. The chair recognizes Representative Speier from California for 5 minutes.

Ms. SPEIER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your great service.

General McKenzie, let me start with you. I am very concerned that the May deadline is upon us, and I don't know that we have any assurances that the Taliban will not start attacking U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Can you provide us any consolation regarding that?

General MCKENZIE. I can tell you that we are prepared for those attacks should they occur and will be able to defend ourselves.

Ms. SPEIER. But we don't have any subsequent agreement, then, it appears.

General MCKENZIE. I have no—we have no agreement on that past 1 May. And I am not certain what decision-making is going on inside the Taliban pursuant to what actions they might or might not take. We are ready for whatever they choose to do.

Ms. SPEIER. And do we have any intention to maintain defense contractors in Afghanistan after we depart?

General MCKENZIE. Everyone will leave. All U.S. defense contractors will leave as part of the withdrawal.

Ms. SPEIER. All right. I think that kind of answers my questions.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. LARSEN. The Representative yields back.

Just a moment for everyone. I am just checking with staff on other members.

Okay. It looks like we are all good. So I want to thank the panel for coming today. We will I think adjourn or recess until 3:00 p.m. and meet back here at 3:00 p.m. for the classified portion of the hearing. It will give you all some time to have some lunch.

So appreciate your patience with us and answers to our questions. Very much appreciate that.

With that, we will stand in recess until 3:00 p.m. We will adjourn until 3:00 p.m. I apologize.

[Whereupon, at 1:27 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

APRIL 20, 2021

PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

APRIL 20, 2021

Statement by

Amanda J. Dory

Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

Office of the Secretary of Defense

Before the 117th Congress

Committee on Armed Services

U.S. House of Representatives

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Introduction

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on our defense policy in the U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) and U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) theaters, alongside Commanders General Townsend and General McKenzie. I would also like to express my appreciation for the strong support Congress provides the Department. As a career civilian in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, I have seen firsthand how executive and legislative branches work together to ensure our armed forces have the resources and authorities required to deter, and if necessary, defeat any foe.

Secretary Austin has emphasized the need to match resources to strategy, strategy to policy, and policy to the will of the American people. The President's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance speaks to that approach by prioritizing the security of the American people, the expansion of economic prosperity and opportunity, and the defense of the democratic values at the heart of the American way of life. This requires the Department of Defense to defend our people and economy, deter and prevent adversaries from directly threatening the United States and our allies, and support whole of government efforts to lead and sustain a stable and open international system. The Department of Defense will achieve these goals by working in coordination with the Department of State to reinvigorate our global alliances and partnerships and prioritizing China as our pacing challenge. We will remain fully ready to respond to and effectively deter nation-state threats; and will disrupt transnational and non-state actor threats from violent extremist organizations (VEOs) that threaten the U.S. homeland.

An early priority for the Secretary of Defense is to match our resources to this strategy by right-sizing our posture investments. To that end, at the President's direction, the Department is undertaking a Global Posture Review to balance among operational requirements, risk, readiness,

and global commitments.

In Africa and the Middle East, the Department of Defense plays a supporting role to broader U.S. Government efforts, as we recognize that employment of military force is not the answer to these regions' challenges. Our policy objective is to increase stability and secure U.S. interests by working by, with, and through reinvigorated networks of regional partners and international allies. By enhancing the capabilities and capacity of our partners to provide for their own defense and to address regional problems, we reduce the risk to our interests while increasing the internal security and stability of potentially vulnerable states. We will represent and advance U.S. interests and values in our defense relationships as we do in our broader bilateral relationships.

Africa

The Department of Defense will continue to build partnerships in Africa to support conflict resolution, combat threats posed by violent extremism, improve the institutions of defense ministries, and strengthen democratic norms and the rule of law. Enhancing our alliances and partnerships in Africa through diplomatic, development, and security initiatives will enable us to be more effective in protecting and securing U.S. interests in and related to Africa.

Overall, the security challenges in Africa include growing instability posed by VEOs in the Sahel, al-Shabaab in Somalia, the entrenched presence of ISIS in Mozambique (ISISM) in portions of northern Mozambique, and conflict in Ethiopia. These challenges garner the attention of many U.S. allies, partners, and strategic competitors.

DoD supports a holistic approach to the security challenges in Africa, ensuring that U.S. security and governance approaches are mutually reinforcing and sufficiently comprehensive. Working with our colleagues at the State Department and across the U.S. Government, we are reviewing all of our deployments, including in Africa, to ensure they are right-sized to balance

near-term challenges with long-term DoD modernization and readiness. This holistic approach is also evidenced by the diverse set of programs DoD implements in Africa to help build resilient defense institutions. For example, in coordination with the Department of State, DoD's training activities promotes a respect for the law of armed conflict, civilian oversight over the military, human rights, and gender diversity in partner nation security and defense sectors. Other aspects of this approach include key leader engagements, counter-terrorism training and assistance, bi-lateral and multi-lateral dialogues, military training exercises, foreign military sales and other security-related assistance, intelligence sharing, institutional capacity building, crisis response, and humanitarian assistance.

The Department's force posture in Africa is primarily concentrated in the Horn of Africa. This is supplemented with modest security cooperation investments, which are also directed to the Maghreb, Sahel, and Lake Chad Basin regions. Our engagements elsewhere on the continent, such as in Central and Southern Africa, are designed to keep an open dialogue and encourage positive changes toward more robust bilateral efforts, where possible.

Horn of Africa

In the Horn of Africa, progress has been challenging. At present, DoD remains committed to supporting the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and Troop Contributing Countries to that mission, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Burundi, and Uganda. We seek to address the threat posed by al-Shabaab and to adopt a tailored, effective, and sustainable strategy to pursue our national security interests in Somalia and East Africa. As an element of that focus, we are reviewing our posture in the region and looking closely at the safety of U.S. personnel operating in Somalia and the current terrorist threat in the region.

In Ethiopia, we are troubled by the loss of life and mass displacement that are a result of the

conflict in the Tigray region and are calibrating our assistance based on the ongoing situation. At the same time, we value Ethiopia's contribution to AMISOM. Kenya continues to be a strong DoD partner in AMISOM and we mutually benefit from our bilateral engagements. In Uganda, we share the concern of other U.S. departments and agencies related to the conduct of the elections, the erosion of Uganda's democratic norms, and the Ugandan security forces' violence against opposition supporters and other civilians. Although we value Uganda's key role in AMISOM as the largest troop contributing country, we support the Department of State in promoting accountability for those individuals who have violated the Ugandan people's human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Djibouti, as host to Camp Lemonnier with about 3,500 DoD military and civilian personnel, remains a critical U.S. partner. Djibouti's geostrategic location near the Bab al-Mandab strait is an important node in supporting DoD force flow and counterterrorism operations between the AFRICOM and CENTCOM areas of operations. Djibouti also hosts a constellation of foreign militaries to include U.S. partners like France and Japan, as well as China, whose first overseas naval base is six miles from Camp Lemonnier.

Sahel and West Africa

In the Sahel and West Africa, DoD supports interagency and multilateral efforts to address the drivers of insecurity, contain the spread of violence, and stabilize the region. DoD supports both the militaries of our African partners, and our European partners who support them, in their fight against VEOs. We also work closely with international partners to coordinate security and civilian protection efforts, including the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), France's Operation BARKHANE, the G5 Sahel Joint Force, the Multinational Joint Task Force, and bilateral security forces of Chad, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria, and

Senegal. Military assistance to Mali is currently suspended due to the August 2020 coup. We are focused on improving coordination of these efforts, and preventing the spillover of instability into littoral West Africa. DoD also works closely with West African partners to professionalize their armed forces, including adherence to the law of armed conflict, and prevention and accountability for human rights violations.

In West Africa, DoD is also concerned by the rising rates of piracy, illicit trafficking, and illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing in the Gulf of Guinea that impedes global trade and puts freedom of navigation at risk. Alongside the Department of State, DoD continues to work with global and regional partners to secure the South Atlantic from maritime threats, including through the provision of security cooperation activities and joint exercises that enhance the capabilities of partner nation navies and coast guards.

North Africa

In North Africa, Morocco and Tunisia continue to be key security partners who broadly support our common security objectives on the continent and the southern Mediterranean. As the only two major non-NATO Allies in Africa, Moroccan and Tunisian partnership is important for U.S. readiness as they host the largest land and naval exercises in Africa as well as other training events. Both countries have committed to helping export security to other African partners through training, exercises, and support to United Nations peacekeeping missions in Mali and the Central African Republic.

In terms of positive change, for the first time in years Libya appears to be making real progress through the UN-facilitated process toward political reconciliation and de-escalation. While malign foreign presence, like that of Russia and disparate foreign-backed mercenaries, continues to threaten a peaceful and a sovereign Libya, the Libyan people have committed to

holding national elections in December of this year and have agreed to a ceasefire that calls for the departure of all foreign forces and mercenaries. DoD supports interagency efforts to support these elections and urge foreign elements to begin their withdrawal. We see a real opportunity to support the development of a functioning Libyan state aligned with our common security interests. Finally, we continue to engage Algerian leaders with the sincere desire to strengthen ties as we face the challenge of persistent violent extremism in North Africa and the Sahel.

Strategic Competition

DoD's work is also important in the light of our strategic competitors' interests in Africa. China remains a serious competitor on the continent where its expansive economic, security, and political engagements provide access and influence. While China could make positive contributions to African security, its activities too often undercut regional and global efforts to strengthen local defense institutions and long-term stability grounded in international rules and norms. As China's overseas development and security interests expand, so too may its military and logistical support system to project power and protect those interests. A global People's Liberation Army logistics network could interfere with U.S. and allies military operations and eventually support offensive operations. We are seeing warning signs of this in Djibouti, China's first overseas military base, where the PLA has violated international norms by lasing U.S. military equipment and sought to restrict Djiboutian sovereign airspace. DoD is committed to halting the spread of these destabilizing activities in Africa through strong partnerships, multilateral engagement, and support of interagency initiatives that provide our partners with options that adhere to international norms.

Concurrently, Russia's security cooperation efforts and outsourcing to private military companies directly undermine our efforts to advance U.S. interests and values in Africa. Together

with interagency partners, we are concerned about Russia's expanding military partnerships, resource extraction, and malign influence in Africa.

Burden Sharing

DoD values the support of European partners who have deep ties to Africa. The Sahel and West Africa highlight the assistance of European partners such as France taking the international lead to counter VEOs and achieve mutual objectives. In Mozambique, Portugal has shown strong interest in training the Mozambican military in its fight against ISIS-Mozambique. In East Africa, the UK is a key partner in countering al-Shabaab. The Department of Defense welcome the support of like-minded partners to help bring stability and peace in support of African solutions to African problems.

Middle East

In the Middle East, the Department of Defense will work with our allies and regional partners to deter Iranian aggression and threats to sovereignty and stability, disrupt al-Qa'ida and related terrorist networks, prevent an Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) resurgence, and protect other U.S. vital interests such as freedom of navigation. We will also support diplomatic efforts to deescalate regional tensions and improve security and stability in the Middle East.

As we continue to foster ironclad, decades-long defense relationships with our Middle East partners, we must recognize that China and Russia continue to pursue their own interests and influence, which often aim to counter U.S. policy objectives, threaten U.S. force protection, and limit operational flexibility. China continues to expand its military and intelligence footprint and increase its involvement in the region's ports and technological infrastructure, while Russia increases its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. This has the potential to create new complications for U.S. forces conducting global operations. Russia seeks to reshape Middle East

security structures and expand its regional influence by creating frozen conflicts and exploiting governance vacuums to increase Russian leverage and influence. Both countries use weapons sales as a leading tool to deepen their influence in the region. China seeks to exploit Iranian economic weakness to secure long term, discounted access to Iranian resources. In response, the United States continues to invest in our long-standing regional partnerships to ensure that we remain the partner of choice in the Middle East. Our partners increasingly recognize the risks associated with accepting Chinese technological infrastructure and debt traps, reliance on Russian weaponry, and the destabilizing role Russia is playing in perpetuating Middle Eastern conflicts.

Iran

The Department of Defense plays a supporting role in the United States' Iran strategy by focusing on deterring and defending against Iranian military threats, while the Department of State leads diplomatic efforts to bring Iran's nuclear program back into compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The Department will calibrate its force posture to deter Iranian aggression, while building the capabilities and capacity of our partners to increasingly address Iranian destabilizing activities, including the development and proliferation of short and medium range ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial systems, deniable attacks on commercial shipping and oil facilities, training and equipping of proxy forces outside the control of states, and global cyber attacks.

Although we seek de-escalation, when required and directed by the President, we will act to protect American and coalition personnel from Iran-backed threats. In February 2021, at the President's direction, the Department of Defense executed an airstrike in self-defense that targeted infrastructure in Syria used by Iran-backed militia groups in response to an attack on our forces in Iraq. The strike was carefully calibrated to avoid a broader escalatory cycle in the region, but also

made clear that this administration always stands ready to take necessary and proportionate actions to defend U.S. forces when necessary at a time and place of our choosing. We will continue holding Iran responsible for attacks by militias that Iran backs with arms, training, and funds.

Operation INHERENT RESOLVE

We maintain our leadership role in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, which brings together 78 nations and 5 international organizations to provide an array of military capabilities, funding, and political support to the campaign against ISIS. Since 2014, the United States and its partners in the Global Coalition have made tangible progress in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. After the successful re-claiming of ISIS's territorial holdings, Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (OIR) formally transitioned to stabilization activities under Phase IV in July 2020. In this phase of OIR, we have shifted our focus toward advising, equipping, and assisting partner forces to improve their capabilities and capacities, enabling them to manage the ISIS threat independently.

In Iraq, the Coalition continues to work by, with, and through the Iraqi Security Forces and Kurdish Peshmerga. As Iraqi military capabilities have strengthened, Iraqi forces have taken the lead in combating ISIS. Although ISIS no longer holds territory in Iraq, it remains a dangerous insurgency movement, still capable of carrying out attacks. The January twin suicide bombing attacks in Baghdad are evidence of the ongoing threat ISIS poses, and reaffirm the continued need for Coalition-supported counterterrorism pressure in Iraq. However, the enduring defeat of ISIS is not just a military effort. Instead, OIR is just one piece of a broader whole-of-government strategy designed to address the underlying social, economic, and political conditions that gave rise to ISIS and that ISIS continues to exploit. U.S. and Coalition forces support the Iraqi Security Forces as they establish security and stability in Iraq, which also enables the Government of Iraq to address

underlying issues.

Attacks by Iran-backed militia groups in Iraq threaten to divert attention and resources from the fight against ISIS and pose a threat to the security of U.S. forces, Iraqi civilians, and neighboring states. The United States is in Iraq at the invitation of the Government of Iraq to support our Iraqi partners in the fight against ISIS, but the protection of U.S. and Coalition forces remains our top priority. The United States does not seek conflict with Iran or their proxies, and we remain well postured to defend our forces in Iraq and respond to attacks and threats of attacks.

In Syria, the Coalition continues to work by, with, and through the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and other vetted Syrian partner forces and individuals. The SDF, with Coalition support, liberated vast stretches of Syria from ISIS control and has successfully kept a lid on ISIS activity in the northeast. ISIS has retreated to mostly un-governed spaces, such as the Badiyah Desert in central Syria, from which it intends to regroup and launch attacks. Coalition-supported counterterrorism pressure is crucial to disrupting ISIS activity and preventing it from reconstituting. Off the battlefield, the SDF shoulders the responsibility of the international community by detaining approximately 10,000 ISIS fighters, including 2,000 foreign fighters. Additionally, the SDF provides security around Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps, including the sprawling al-Hol camp with more than 60,000 residents. In recent months Al-Hol suffered a number of security incidents, and we remain concerned about the long-term implications of exposing children and families to ISIS ideology within the camp. To bolster the safety and security of al-Hol, the SDF recently concluded an operation designed to degrade and disrupt ISIS activity. With U.S. support, the SDF displayed remarkable professionalism in executing this operation and coordinating on security issues with the camp administration and the humanitarian community to ensure life-saving NGO services continue.

Yemen

In Yemen, the United States seeks a peaceful resolution to the conflict that will improve stability in Yemen and the region, and reduce human suffering. Together with the Department of State and the United Nations, we support the UN Special Envoy's efforts to achieve a nationwide ceasefire, alleviate the dire humanitarian situation, and re-start the political process. The Department has two lines of effort in Yemen. The first is our fight against terrorist organizations that threaten U.S. national security interests, and have capitalized on Yemen's instability. Along with our partners, we degraded al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula's ability to conduct external attacks and ISIS-Yemen's presence.

Our second line of effort is to provide limited, non-combat support to the Saudi-led Coalition (SLC) focused on defending Saudi Arabia from external threats. This non-combat support is consistent with President Biden's February 4, 2021 announcement to increase U.S. diplomatic efforts to end the war in Yemen and cease U.S. support to SLC offensive operations in Yemen. Continued U.S. assistance is designed to reassure U.S. partners of our commitment to their defense so that they can meaningfully engage in the United Nations political process to end the war. In support of the President's policy, roughly 60 DoD military advisors are deployed to help Saudi Arabia's Armed Forces defend their territory from threats emanating from Yemen.

With Iranian support, the Houthis are using increasingly sophisticated ballistic missiles and explosive unmanned aerial vehicles against our partners—including against civilian infrastructure and airports where American citizens are present. The Houthis also target military and commercial vessels in the Red Sea, threatening a major maritime corridor. Despite the spike in cross-border attacks on civilian infrastructure in the Kingdom by Iran-backed Houthi rebels, Saudi leaders supported a comprehensive ceasefire proposal made to the Houthi rebels on March 22.

Unfortunately, the Houthi leadership has prioritized offensive operations in Marib and repeated attacks on key infrastructure in Saudi Arabia over reaching agreement on the UN-brokered ceasefire proposal.

Partnerships: Levant and Gulf

The United States will only achieve its objectives for a more stable and secure region if it has capable partners with whom it can cooperate and burden share. For decades, we have invested in these bilateral partnerships to advance our collective security. U.S. national security depends on more than force posture and unilateral actions. Through our resources and network of partnerships and alliances, we seek to build local capacity, develop coalitions that can respond to future threats, and ensure the United States remains the defense partner of choice in the region.

Our partnership with Israel rests on shared democratic values dating back to the founding of the modern State of Israel in 1948 when we were the first country to recognize its independence. We are continuing and expanding a decades-long tradition of cooperation that spans virtually every aspect of our two defense establishments: from advanced technology and systems development to care for wounded warriors, from space awareness to counter-tunneling. Our own forces' capabilities benefit greatly from our cooperation in areas ranging from air and ballistic missile defense, armored vehicle defense, and long-range precision fires. The United States and Israel share common views of the major threats to regional stability and collaborate in countering them. Moreover, U.S. security assistance signals to the region and the world our unbreakable commitment to Israel's security. The Department supports ongoing efforts to normalize relations between Israel and Arab partners. The transfer of Israel to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility will provide additional opportunities for cooperation with our U.S. Central Command partners, while

maintaining strong cooperation between Israel and our European allies and partners. DoD also supports the Office of the United States Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority (USSC) in building capable and professional Palestinian Security Forces.

In the rest of the Levant and in Egypt, we maintain strategic partnerships focused on our shared interests in regional security and stability. Jordan is a steadfast and enduring partner, a key contributor to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, an invaluable partner in our search for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and a bastion of safety to the region's many displaced people. In Lebanon, we maintain a strong commitment to support the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which we have helped develop into a professional and capable counterterrorism and security partner since 2006. However, as the Lebanese political system and economic situation continues to deteriorate, rampant inflation has diminished the purchasing power of LAF salaries and strained the LAF's ability to maintain and sustain its capabilities. Strong U.S. interest in Lebanon's stability and security necessitates that we continue to assist the LAF as they take on additional duties in response to compounding crises.

In Egypt, we continue to support capacity building efforts focused on counterterrorism in the Sinai Peninsula, security of land borders, and partnership on maritime security to ensure the free flow of vessels in and around the Suez Canal. The blockage of the Suez Canal for six days in late March shows how important this waterway is to the world, and in particular to U.S. economic and security interests.

The recent reduction in tension and end to the Gulf rift that began in May 2017 offer opportunities to improve regional security, reduce tensions, and focus on the threat from Iran. Saudi Arabia remains a central pillar of our regional counterterrorism efforts, and is a key stakeholder in the Yemen conflict. The Saudis are an important partner for cooperation in

promoting regional stability, security, and countering Iranian influence. The United Arab Emirates remains a willing and capable partner in regional security efforts, including participation in maritime security initiatives 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 region, and continues to host the fourth largest presence of U.S. forces outside the United States. Qatar is a critical host for U.S. forces and is taking steps to increase its interoperability with U.S. and NATO forces. Bahrain is a key U.S. partner in regional coalitions and hosts the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, a critical resource in protecting the freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. The U.S. goal is to support multilateral cooperation among the nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Working together, these nations can enable a more secure region.

Afghanistan

For two decades, our mission in Afghanistan has been to prevent terrorist groups from using the country to threaten the interests and security of the United States, our allies, or partners. After two decades of U.S. military involvement, President Biden announced on April 14 that we have accomplished this objective. Following a rigorous policy review, President Biden has decided to draw down the remaining U.S. forces from Afghanistan by September, giving us the requisite time to conduct an orderly drawdown. We judge the threat to the U.S. homeland now emanating from Afghanistan to be at a level that we can address without a persistent military footprint in the country and without remaining at war with the Taliban. The President also announced that we will continue to support the government of Afghanistan and provide assistance to Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF).

I would like to thank members of this committee for your continued support for the men and women of the U.S. armed forces, civilians, and contractors supporting these critical missions, and for your enhanced support for the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) through which the United States provides the majority of funding necessary to sustain the ANDSF. This funding sustains ANDSF's combat operations while continuing to build their capabilities so they can secure Afghanistan, protect the Afghan people, and contribute to regional security. This funding is increasingly important as U.S. force levels and our advisory and enabler support reduce. As Taliban levels of violence remain unabated, we are focused on sustaining ANDSF combat power until a negotiated political settlement that ends the war can be reached. Accordingly, ASFF funds the key requirements that enable the ANDSF to remain cohesive – army payroll, aircraft and combat vehicle maintenance, maintenance training, fuel, and ammunition, among others. Given the Afghan government's limited budget, ASFF will be necessary to fund about three-fourths of total ANDSF requirements absent a peace settlement, and will be necessary post-peace to ensure Afghan forces remain viable to keep the peace.

The United States, our NATO Allies, and partners remain committed to supporting the ongoing diplomatic process. We have worked in coordination with NATO Allies and partners to plan for a drawdown of their forces in the same timeframe: beginning before May 1 and ending before the 20th anniversary of September 11th. We will remain in lockstep with them as we undertake this transition. We went in together, adjusted together, and now we will prepare to leave together. The Administration has continued the strong emphasis on the diplomatic process to help broker a settlement between the Afghan Government, the Taliban, and other Afghan stakeholders, while ensuring that we consult our allies and partners at every step.

Regional partners have also contributed to the Afghanistan peace process. For example,

Pakistan has used its influence to press the Taliban to come to the negotiating table, participate fully in peace negotiations, and reduce violence on the battlefield. We continue to work with Pakistan to advance regional stability. To the north, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan have taken an active role in supporting international efforts in Afghanistan. In addition to their critical role in providing logistical access to Afghanistan, they have also moved to strengthen their economic and political cooperation with the Afghan government and participated in various peace talks and conferences. At a Russian-organized meeting in Moscow on March 18, representatives of the “extended troika,” comprised of the United States, Pakistan, China, and Russia, issued a joint statement calling on all parties to accelerate the peace process. The Qatari Government continues to play a pivotal role in the peace process, hosting negotiations in Doha and facilitating discussions between negotiating teams. Turkey has similarly played an important facilitator role, notably by offering to co-host an Afghan senior leaders meeting, along with the United Nations and Qatar, on April 24 in Istanbul.

We are cognizant of the continued presence of terrorists in the region. In coordination with Afghan partners and other regional partners, we will reposition our counterterrorism capabilities, retaining significant assets in the region to counter the potential reemergence of a terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland from Afghanistan, and to hold the Taliban to its commitment to ensure al-Qa’ida does not once again threaten the United States, our interests, or our allies. And we will refine our counterterrorism strategy to monitor and disrupt terrorist threats to the homeland and to our interests in a way that contends with the dispersed threats we face today.

The Department remains confident that the best way to end the war in Afghanistan and achieve U.S. national security interests is through a political settlement, and we have the support of our allies, partners, and other regional actors in this effort.

Conclusion

I am confident in the Department's capacity to contend with the range of dynamic challenges facing the United States in Africa and the Middle East. The United States retains many advantages, including our formidable combination of economic power, innovative dynamism, democratic values, military might, and global alliances. As a result, we remain well positioned to deter, compete with, disrupt, and defeat adversaries throughout the Middle East and Africa.

Thank you.

Amanda J. Dory**Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs**

Amanda J. Dory served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. She is a career member of the Senior Executive Service on a faculty assignment with the National War College.

Past Experience:

Amanda served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense from 2008-2011, where she was responsible for strategy articulation, development of force planning scenarios, policy planning, and analysis of long-term trends and the future security environment. She received a Presidential Rank Award for her work on the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review and the security implications of climate and energy trends. She previously served in the same office as the Principal Director for Policy and Planning from 2007-2008 and as a Strategist from 1999-2002.

Following the publication of the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), Amanda served as the Chief of Staff for the Irregular Warfare and the Building Partnership Capacity QDR Execution Roadmaps, overseeing a broad range of implementation activities across the Department in these two focus areas.

From 2003-2006, Amanda served in the newly-established Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense as the Director for Planning and Integration. In this capacity, she was responsible for working with the Homeland Security Council/National Security Council, Congress, public affairs, strategic planning and analytic support, and education and training initiatives.

In 2002, Amanda was selected as a Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow. Based at the Center for Strategic and International Studies during her fellowship tenure, she conducted an independent research project on civil security – the role of the American public within homeland security post-9/11. She authored a CSIS report and related Washington Quarterly article on civil security. She also participated in the Beyond Goldwater-Nichols project on defense reform.

From 1996-1999, Amanda served as the Country Director for Southern Africa and the Country Director for West Africa in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. In the former capacity, she helped establish the post-apartheid defense relationship with South Africa. She also participated on the security working group of the National Summit on Africa.

Amanda joined the Office of the Secretary of Defense in 1994 as a Presidential Management Intern. Her non-governmental experience includes positions with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on Foreign Policy magazine and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Project. She received an M.A. in International Affairs from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies with concentrations in international economics and African studies. She received a B.S. in Foreign Service from Georgetown University with a certificate in African studies. She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

POSTURE STATEMENT OF
GENERAL KENNETH F. MCKENZIE, JR.,
COMMANDER, UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND
BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
20 APRIL 2021

Introduction

United States Central Command's (USCENTCOM) mission – to direct and enable military operations and activities with allies and partners to increase regional security and stability in support of U.S. enduring interests – remains as valid and vital to our nation today as ever before. While acknowledging military force is not the principal answer to the region's challenges, our presence in the region provides advantage, opportunity and leverage for U.S. diplomats to operate from a position of strength, prevents losing ground to our global competitors, and protects the security of the American people by meeting challenges abroad from state and non-state adversaries who threaten the U.S. and our allies, attempt to destabilize the USCENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR), and inhibit access to the global commons.

USCENTCOM aligns with the President's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance (INSSG) to work with like-minded allies and partners to advance our shared interests to address the four global challenges that manifest across the USCENTCOM AOR: China, Russia, Iran, and Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs). Maintaining an effective posture to meet these challenges requires making hard choices. While China will remain our nation's pacing competitor for the foreseeable future, the main challenges USCENTCOM faces in its AOR occur in the present. Iran's destabilizing actions reverberate through the region daily. Iran has not indulged in idle saber rattling against the U.S. and our partners. Iran has launched state-on-state ballistic missile, cruise missile, and unmanned aerial system (UAS) attacks, as well as attacks through its proxies and aligned groups that have killed and injured Coalition forces and innocent civilians; those attacks are increasingly directed at key U.S. partners. Every day across the AOR, VEOs like al-Qaida and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) operate without respect for borders or consequence, creating instability and human suffering in an attempt to destroy

sovereign nations to remake them in their own twisted vision. And where gaps open, China and Russia pursue steady economic and military measures that encroach on U.S. presence and influence in the region.

None of these current threats to our U.S. national interests are approaching sunset, and they all continue to unfold with speed and unpredictability. Since the beginning of the year, Iranian-aligned militia groups (IAMGs) in Iraq and Syria likely conducted more than 50 improvised explosive device attacks against Iraqi-operated, Coalition-contracted logistical convoys, and nine indirect fire attacks against U.S. diplomatic facilities or Iraqi military bases hosting U.S. and Coalition personnel. Protracted conflicts across the AOR and the destruction of government services and infrastructure have caused large-scale humanitarian crises. More than 20 million displaced people are spread across the USCENTCOM AOR, representing one fourth of the nearly 80 million people displaced globally. Millions sought refuge in neighboring countries, many of which struggle with their own economic and social challenges, while millions more internally displaced persons (IDPs) struggle to find daily sustenance. Meanwhile, the underlying socio-economic factors that sparked the “Arab Spring” movements in 2011 persist and contribute to recurring unrest.

The way forward requires a whole-of-government approach applying all of the elements of U.S. national power to address the underlying conditions threatening stability. Alongside our U.S. interagency partners, USCENTCOM will continue to work with allies and partners to set the conditions for diplomacy and development. By advancing our shared interests and coming together to face shared threats, USCENTCOM develops capable regional partners to act as guarantors of their own security and sovereignty, able to secure their own borders and ensure their internal stability.

Strategic Approach

USCENTCOM's actions and activities across the AOR run the spectrum from cooperation and collaboration, to competition and conflict. To ensure synchronization throughout our ongoing missions, we align our operations, activities, and investments along three lines of effort. These lines of effort support Department of Defense (DOD) and U.S. government priorities and are aligned with DOD guidance and the INSSG.

Recognizing the importance of enhancing stability throughout the region, USCENTCOM's first line of effort is to deter Iranian aggression against U.S. forces and interests, and strengthen our partners' capabilities to defend themselves against Iranian and proxy and aligned group aggression. USCENTCOM's second line of effort is aligned against the persistent challenge of disrupting and degrading VEOs that destabilize the region and threaten the U.S. homeland, our vital interests, and our partners and allies. USCENTCOM considers this an enduring effort covering a wide range of operations and activities from active campaigns against al-Qaida, ISIS, and other VEOs in the region, to supporting whole-of-government solutions to ensure good governance and to thwart efforts by ISIS and VEOs to radicalize and make appeals to vulnerable populations, including refugees and IDPs. Success in this campaign is not defined as the absence of violence. It is militarily impossible to defeat an ideology, but when force is required, we will employ it alongside international and local partners wherever possible to bolster effectiveness and legitimacy, share burdens, and invest others in success.

Our third line of effort is long-term strategic competition with China, combined with countering Russia. Both nations leverage their proximity to the region, historical relations, and a perceived decline in U.S. engagement to establish and strengthen opportunistic relationships. China and Russia each seek ends in their own self-interest using different approaches. Russia

plays the part of spoiler to the U.S., using military means, influence operations and grey-zone activities to undermine and disrupt U.S. influence and reassert its own global influence. China uses predominantly economic means to establish regional in-roads, with a long-term goal of expanding its military presence to secure vital routes of energy and trade.

Line of Effort 1 – Deterring Iran

Iran views the U.S. presence in the region as the greatest threat toward achieving its ambition of regional hegemony. The regime uses a combination of coercion and IAMG violence to bring about the removal of U.S. forces from Iraq, despite U.S. and Coalition forces being in Iraq at the request of the Government of Iraq (GoI). Iran's political maneuverings toward this end have failed to date, while the U.S. and GoI continue strategic dialogue to maintain momentum in the Global Defeat ISIS (D-ISIS) campaign.

Iran currently possesses one of the most capable militaries in the Middle East, and its offensive capabilities include nearly 3,000 short- and long-range ballistic missiles as well as an array of land-attack cruise missiles (LACMs) and UASs. The Iranian regime demonstrated both the capability and willingness to employ all of these offensive weapons in complex attacks against Saudi Arabia's oil facilities in 2019, and again against U.S. forces in Iraq in 2020.

Iran provides weapons, parts, and expertise to Houthi forces in Yemen for the purpose of attacking Saudi Arabia. Since January 2021, Iranian-aided Houthi forces have launched more than 150 ballistic missile, LACM, and one-way UAS attacks against military, infrastructure, and civilian targets in Saudi Arabia. These attacks have varied in scope and complexity, with UAS detection and interdiction particularly challenging not just for Saudi forces, but also for U.S. and Coalition forces supporting Saudi Arabia's defense. These small- and medium-sized UAS

proliferating across the AOR present a new and complex threat to our forces and those of our partners and allies. For the first time since the Korean War, we are operating without complete air superiority. As a result, USCENTCOM has made the counter-UAS effort one of its top priorities, and employs a variety of systems and tactics to defeat these threats. Until we are able to develop and field a networked capability to detect and defeat UAS, the advantage will remain with the attacker.

USCENTCOM remains committed to helping defend Saudi Arabia. U.S. assistance to the Kingdom focuses on providing information to Saudi Arabia's armed forces to assist them in thwarting Houthi UAV, ballistic missile, and explosive boat attacks that contravene international law and undermine diplomatic efforts. USCENTCOM does not provide offensive military support to the Saudi-led Coalition. Saudi Arabia understands that the only way to end the Houthi UAV and missile attacks is to end the war in Yemen. Deputy Minister of Defense Khalid bin Salman and other senior Saudi officials have engaged consistently and constructively with U.S. Special Envoy Tim Lenderking and UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths in an effort to find a negotiated end to the conflict. Under a proposed UN agreement, which Saudi Arabia has publicly endorsed, parties would agree to a nationwide ceasefire in exchange for the opening of Hudaydah Port and Sanaa Airport, then transition to political talks. USCENTCOM supports these diplomatic efforts and remains postured to support a UN-backed ceasefire if directed. However, international efforts to end the war have been met with political intransigence and more Houthi attacks, including a sustained ground Houthi offensive to seize Marib, an attack targeting the Republic of Yemen Government Parliament while it was deplaning in Aden, and unprecedented missile and UAS strikes against civilian targets in Saudi Arabia. The Iranian regime's provisioning of lethal aid to the Houthis to enable such attacks prolongs the conflict in

Yemen, exacerbates regional tensions, threatens the security of Saudi Arabia, and extends the suffering of the Yemeni people who are subject to widespread food and water shortages, malnutrition, and insufficient healthcare services.

In addition to USCENTCOM's regular force posture, the theater benefits from Dynamic Force Employment missions (DFE); Agile Combat Employment (ACE); and a balanced, visible maritime presence. Strategic bomber task force missions flown no-notice from bases in the U.S. to the Gulf from the fall of 2020 to the present and two fighter-squadron deployments demonstrate DFE over-the-horizon power projection, exercise seamless and rapid operational coordination between multiple combatant commands. They also enhance integration with numerous partners and allies across the region. Developing the capability to arm and fuel Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps aircraft from austere, expeditionary air bases in the Arabian Peninsula provides an example of how USCENTCOM generates and exercises ACE capabilities in an active combat theater. Meanwhile, U.S. carrier strike groups and other strategic maritime capabilities operating wherever international law allows provide USCENTCOM the flexibility of U.S.-sovereign deterrent options free from access, basing, or overflight restrictions.

As Iran's ballistic missile force is the most formidable in the region, USCENTCOM's missile defense assets incorporate Patriots, Sentinel and Avenger systems, and Navy cruisers/destroyers to form a layered defense, augmented by Theater High-Altitude Air Defense when ordered. Since Gulf nations field nearly 80 percent of all regional air-defense systems, USCENTCOM is working to develop a long-term, regionally-aligned effort focused on a centralized integrated air and missile defense (IAMD).

Other active and passive defense efforts to safeguard U.S. forces, deter Iranian destabilizing actions, and provide regional safety and security include:

- Critical mine countermeasure capabilities provided with Avenger-class mine countermeasure ships and MH-53E Sea Dragon heavy-lift helicopters help maintain freedom of navigation for U.S. and merchant shipping.
- ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) platforms, such as our MQ-9s, are highly useful in monitoring and identifying potential threats or malign activities, providing early warning and attribution.
- Pursuing opportunities to enhance expeditionary basing in less vulnerable portions of the USCENTCOM AOR.
- Conducting analysis on bunker hardening proposals and implementing blast mitigation measures to improve protective shelters within missile range and mitigate the risk of traumatic brain injury in the event of missile and rocket attacks.
- Counter Rocket Artillery and Mortar and Patriot missile systems that provide proven, effective ground-based air-defense platforms critical for U.S. and partner self-defense.

In addition, as the U.S. footprint in the AOR evolves, legacy KC-135 and replacement KC-46 refueling capabilities will continue to play a critical role, enhancing USCENTCOM's ability to execute essential missions across a vast region with limited suitable airfields.

Line of Effort 2 – Countering Violent Extremist Organizations

Countering Violent Extremist Organizations – Afghanistan

The U.S. strategic objective in Afghanistan, as it has been since 2001, is to ensure Afghanistan does not again become a safe haven for terrorist attacks against the U.S. and our allies and partners. Success toward this objective and the path to lasting peace remains an

Afghan-owned, Afghan-led process to achieve a political settlement and comprehensive ceasefire between the Taliban and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA). USCENTCOM remains steadfast in support of ongoing interagency and diplomatic efforts to achieve a negotiated political settlement, and is committed to working with our regional partners to ensure our ability to counter a potential reemergence of terrorist threats against the homeland.

Pursuant to President Biden's April 14 policy announcement, USCENTCOM will execute a deliberate and orderly withdrawal of remaining U.S. troops in Afghanistan before the 20th anniversary of September 11. We will execute this withdrawal in lockstep with our NATO allies and partners in a manner that ensures the safety of our people and security of our assets. We went in together, adjusted together, and will prepare to leave together. USCENTCOM's key focus during the withdrawal will be management of the transition and the safety of U.S., as well as NATO ally and partner personnel as they depart the country. We have told the Taliban in no uncertain terms that any attacks on U.S. troops as we undergo a safe and orderly withdrawal will be met with a forceful response.

The Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) is the primary source of funds for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) and remains a critical resource to Security Force Assistance, enabling an effective, affordable, and sustainable ANDSF. As the President has said, while we will not stay involved in Afghanistan militarily, we will continue to support the government of Afghanistan and keep providing assistance to the ANDSF. Overseeing the responsible execution of ASFF has been, and will continue to be, a team effort. USCENTCOM is committed to working with interagency partners to develop mechanisms that ensure continued oversight of and accountability for ASFF.

As we finalize this mission, I must express my deepest gratitude to those Americans who served and sacrificed on behalf of our Nation. I realize that not all of our troops returned from their deployments while others returned home wounded and forever changed. My deepest admiration and respect goes out to our heroes and their families.

Countering Violent Extremist Organizations – Iraq and Syria

U.S. and Coalition forces remain in Iraq at the request of the GoI for one purpose – to ensure the defeat of ISIS. In July 2020, Coalition forces under command of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) began Phase IV of the Global D-ISIS campaign in Iraq and Syria, transitioning from a focus on tactical-level Train, Advise, and Assist (TAA), to a focus on advising and enabling partner forces at the operational and strategic levels. This partnering model in Iraq uses a centralized advising approach toward the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) at higher echelons of command. The Coalition established the Military Advisory Group co-located with the Iraqi Joint Operations Command to provide on-site intelligence, operations, logistics, fires, and air support from a central location.

Iraqi Security Forces continue to make great progress, due in large part to the D-ISIS Coalition's investment in training and equipping thousands of Iraqi troops. Many ISF units are now capable of independently planning large-scale operations and executing with Coalition enablers. Operation READY LION was a 14-day Counter Terrorism (CT) mission conducted in March 2021 to clear ISIS remnants from mountain strongholds in northeast Iraq. This ISF planned and led operation, aided by Coalition enablers, eliminated nearly 200 ISIS hide locations. As our recent Strategic Dialogue with Iraq made clear, the transition of the U.S. and other international forces to training, equipping, and assisting the ISF reflects the success of their

strategic partnership and supports the ISF's continued efforts to ensure ISIS can never again threaten Iraq's stability.

USCENTCOM also established the Special Operations Advisory Group to provide similar advisory support to the Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service, one of our most effective partners in targeting ISIS leadership. Other necessary enabling functions include ISR and air strike capabilities still in nascent development in the ISF.

USCENTCOM recognizes that efforts to stabilize Iraq must go beyond CJTF-OIR's D-ISIS campaign and address the root causes of instability. NATO's contribution, through NATO Mission Iraq (NMI) is a separate, but complementary mission of Security Sector Reform targeting the institutional capacity of Iraq's Ministry of Defense. This mission is vital to taking advantage of the Coalition's hard-won gains in Iraq. Bolstering CJTF-OIR's efforts of advising and enabling partner forces, NMI is a non-combat mission that seeks to build the institutional governance of, and professionalize, the ISF at the senior levels. As CJTF-OIR's mission matures through Phase IV, NMI's role within Iraq will grow. The North Atlantic Council projects NMI's eventual end strength to expand considerably, contingent on the GoI's continued approval. USCENTCOM and NATO staffs collaborate frequently to ensure close coordination, and CJTF-OIR maintains two planners within the NMI staff to coordinate future efforts.

In Syria, efforts by Global Coalition partners and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) were critical in the territorial defeat of ISIS, and these partners remain essential to the ongoing D-ISIS campaign. Throughout 2020, the ongoing Syrian civil war, long-term displacement of civilians, destabilizing influence of Iran, disruptive role of Russia, and COVID pandemic complicated efforts to bring about the enduring defeat of ISIS in Syria. Despite these obstacles, our SDF partners continue to make progress against ISIS as the Coalition continues to provide

enabling support while developing capabilities for the SDF to operate independently. Partnered operations focus on enhancing planning, command and control capabilities, and the provision of key enablers for success to include ISR and medical support.

Notwithstanding significant attrition to its senior leadership and difficulties generating sufficient revenue, ISIS remains a learning, adaptive, and committed VEO with a dedicated core. It promotes a global cyber presence while retaining a cellular structure that allows it to carry out local attacks – with the ultimate aspiration to reestablish a physical “caliphate.”

Constant surveillance and consistent pressure by the ISF in Iraq and SDF in Syria, enabled by U.S. and Coalition forces, have prevented ISIS from conducting or enabling external attacks against the U.S. and its allies. As USCENTCOM’s D-ISIS campaign continues we assess attacks inspired, enabled, or conducted by ISIS will continue in the form of an insurgency. Our objective is to develop and enable the ability of the ISF in Iraq and SDF in Syria to address and contain these threats without external assistance. Throughout 2021, our partner forces will continue to benefit from a range of financial and materiel support provided through the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF) program that provided \$701 million of critical assistance in 2020.

As noted in the 2020 congressionally-mandated RAND study, “Strategic Evaluation of the Counter Islamic State Train and Equip Fund,” the CTEF program has proven a very effective tool in the Global D-ISIS campaign, predominantly because of the flexibility and speed with which it can be applied to dynamic conditions in Iraq and Syria. Key activities funded by CTEF include the acquisition of niche CT capacity for the ISF, support to the SDF, stipends for our Syrian and Peshmerga partners, detention facility support, and the repatriation of ISIS detainees. CTEF support for Syrian partner forces also facilitates ongoing operations to find, fix and finish

ISIS sleeper cells, and maintain control of key terrain and lines of communication in eastern Syria.

ISIS Detainees, their Family Members, and Refugees/Internally Displaced Persons

Two by-products of the Global D-ISIS campaign that cannot be solved by the use of military force are the repatriation of foreigners from detention centers and displaced persons camps in Northeast Syria and the pace of stabilization programs and reintegration of displaced people across both Syria and Iraq.

Presently, the SDF holds nearly 10,000 ISIS fighters, including nearly 2,000 hard-core foreign fighters, in more than two dozen makeshift detention centers across northeast Syria. Although U.S. forces do not directly supervise these detention activities, we mitigate risk using CTEF that helps enable the security of those facilities. While the SDF remains capable of responding to external attacks and quelling internal riots, threats persist. The SDF cannot, and should not be expected to hold these detainees indefinitely. Outside of detention centers, thousands of foreign women and children, many affiliated with ISIS detainees, are living in displaced persons camps. They too need to be repatriated. While several countries have taken responsibility to repatriate their own citizens, the overwhelming majority of countries have yet to do so.

Over the last year, increased violence in the Al-Hol displaced persons camp in northeast Syria has impeded the SDF's access to, and overall safety in, the camp, having a detrimental effect on humanitarian conditions. The adverse and insecure conditions create increased risk for camp populations and camp administration, as well as humanitarian relief organizations and non-governmental organizations operating in the camp. Al-Hol, one of the largest displaced persons

camps in Syria holds nearly 61,000 people. Ninety-four percent of Al-Hol's occupants are women and children, with two-thirds under the age of 18. Besides the near-term risk of an outbreak of disease or other conditions that could cause a humanitarian catastrophe, efforts by ISIS to radicalize elements of this population pose longer-term concerns.

Stabilization programs in northeast Syria implemented by USAID and DOS have responded to the need for basic services in communities of origin to incentivize voluntary, safe, and dignified returns of displaced populations and help maintain stability. Current resources from all international donors are insufficient to meet demand, resulting in a sense of community grievance which extremist elements attempt to exploit. This presents opportunities for ISIS to re-emerge and increases the risk to the SDF.

Countering Violent Extremist Organizations – Yemen

The critical U.S. interest in Yemen resides in maintaining our ability to conduct counterterrorism activities against al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS-Yemen. Without a lasting political solution and accompanying economic recovery, the conflict in Yemen will continue to threaten regional security and stability, and Yemen will remain a safe haven for VEOs aspiring to threaten U.S. interests and regional stability. USCENTCOM, in partnership with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and the Republic of Yemen Government, has been effective in degrading VEO external operations capabilities in Yemen over the past several years.

Strategic Competition with China and the Destabilizing Influence of Russia

The USCENTCOM AOR is, and always has been, a crossroads of global interests and a historically prime arena for foreign powers to compete for influence, resources and access. In

2020, China and Russia exploited ongoing regional crises, financial and infrastructure needs, perceptions of declining U.S. engagement, and the COVID-19 pandemic to advance their objectives across the Middle East and Central and South Asia (CASA) nations to gain or enhance influence in the region.

China's strategic engagement in the USCENTCOM AOR takes the long view with short and long-term objectives in mind. China's current interests and approach in the region are predominantly diplomatic and economic. China engaged with nearly every country in the AOR in 2020, using debt traps, the Belt and Road Initiative, and medical diplomacy to create dependence and expand its influence within the AOR. China's recent 25-year agreement with Iran could vastly expand Chinese influence in Iranian banking, telecommunications, ports, railways and dozens of economic projects in exchange for discounted oil. The agreement also proposes expanding military cooperation, potentially providing China an additional foothold in the Arabian Gulf while also undercutting U.S. efforts to negotiate with Iran. China has also emerged as an arms supplier to the region. Attempting to rival the U.S. as a "partner of choice," China sells military equipment at discount prices, unencumbered by U.S. deliberate processes, maintenance support packages, and end-use restrictions.

In 2021, China will continue to strengthen defense cooperation throughout the region through arms sales, exercises, and multilateral organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, seeking to establish and strengthen trade relationships across the Middle East, prioritizing access to energy resources. China's long-term goals are not just to cultivate trade relationships, economic investment, and comprehensive partnerships among regional states, but to exert coercive influence and eventually establish a permanent military presence in an area from which it imports nearly 50 percent of its crude oil and roughly 40 percent of its natural gas.

Russia, in contrast, does not play a long game, yet it is equally disruptive to the region. Russia seeks to undermine and disrupt U.S. influence to enhance its own, and improve its position on the global stage. Russia's engagement in the USCENTCOM AOR is largely opportunistic and transactional. Fueled in part by a desire to play "spoiler" to U.S. interests but also by a set of economic factors, Russia maintains oil production agreements and works to expand nuclear energy markets, trade, and arms sales. Russia increased its activities in Syria by establishing an enduring military presence where it regularly interferes with the Global Coalition's D-ISIS campaign, and obtaining a warm-water base for its navy in Tartus. Russian military expansion in Syria provides it with a proving ground to test emerging capabilities, technologies, and fifth-generation equipment used for electronic warfare, air defense, UAS, and information operations – all in proximity to U.S. forces. In September 2020, USCENTCOM deployed Sentinel radar and Bradley Fighting Vehicles to the Eastern Syria Security Area, and increased fighter patrols over U.S. forces in response to a dangerous increase in unauthorized, unsafe Russian interactions threatening Coalition forces. Russia will seek ways to challenge U.S. presence as opportunities present themselves, in an effort to position itself as an alternative to the West by offering to mediate regional conflicts, selling arms without end-use restrictions, offering military expertise, and participating in regional and multilateral organizations and military exercises. In Central Asia, where proximity to China and Russia is great and U.S. presence is comparatively small, every interaction holds significance. Opportunities to compete with China and Russia in this region manifest themselves through border security, counternarcotics, counterterrorism, and defense institution building.

As China and Russia compete militarily with the U.S. below the level of combat, USCENTCOM develops capabilities to address and mitigate gray-zone actions, safeguarding our

technology from rivals operating in the region. USCENTCOM represents the world's most active electromagnetic battlespace and requires a robust interoperability and information sharing capability in order to protect U.S., allied, and partner critical capabilities as we move forward with collective defense initiatives. Adversary jamming of our commercial satellite communications allows state and non-state actors to asymmetrically contest and complicate U.S. force projection. The increasing computational power and improvements in rival powers' cryptographic analysis capabilities makes it imperative that USCENTCOM and our partners plan, execute, and implement a cryptographic modernization plan to ensure maximum interoperability, mitigate potential cyber-attacks, and maintain a secure information exchange environment.

Regional Cooperation and Partnerships

As encapsulated in its overall mission, USCENTCOM will continue to focus on regional partnerships and cooperation. Two examples of maritime partnerships that promote regional collective security and demonstrate U.S. commitment to broad relationships and partners in the region are the Combined Maritime Force (CMF) and the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC). The 33 nation CMF conducts maritime security operations to ensure the free flow of commerce, actively deny the use of the high seas to terrorist and illicit networks, and curtail illegal shipments of narcotics and lethal aid. The IMSC is a cooperation-based framework ensuring safety of maritime shipping and the free flow of seaborne commerce through presence, surveillance, and attribution of malign activities in international waters in and around the Arabian Gulf and the Bab al Mandeb.

The normalization of relations between Israel and a number of Muslim-majority Arab states in 2020 and the realignment of the Unified Command Plan (UCP) moving Israel from U.S. European Command to USCENTCOM provide new opportunities for enhancing regional stability and security cooperation. The UCP change better aligns the combatant command areas of responsibility with the organizational boundaries of other federal agencies, creating coordination efficiencies for whole-of-government efforts in the AOR. USCENTCOM plans to achieve initial operating capability and the shift of combatant command authority and responsibility by September of 2021. The normalization of relations between Israel and other key USCENTCOM partners, manifested initially in diplomatic and economic cooperation, reduces tensions and holds potential for eventual expansion of military cooperation and alignment toward shared threats.

USCENTCOM's senior defense officials and defense attachés (SDO/DATT) live, work, and develop close relationships with host nation officials in every country in the USCENTCOM AOR except Iran and Syria. Our partners place great weight on these relationships, and the military rank of our SDO/DATTs conveys respect and importance as to how the U.S. views the partnership we have with each nation.

COVID-19 Impacts

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, several governments in the USCENTCOM AOR faced growing economic challenges. Most governments incurred significant expenditures and revenue losses during the pandemic that exacerbated pre-existing socioeconomic conditions contributing to deepening popular unrest. Government officials largely prioritized efforts to mitigate the spread of the virus over implementing needed economic policy reforms. Impacts to regional

economies will further fuel issues fomenting unrest to include provision and equitable distribution of services, medical care, and employment.

Across the AOR, USCENTCOM rapidly responded to the COVID-19 threat, implementing non-pharmaceutical interventions, obtaining and disseminating personal protective equipment, and adapting newly-developed treatment guidelines to an austere deployed environment. Despite the pandemic, military operations and medical support for combat and non-combat casualties remain fully mission capable. Extensive public health measures and medical support across the AOR resulted in zero COVID-19-related service member deaths.

In fall 2020, USCENTCOM worked closely with the Joint Staff, Defense Health Agency, and Defense Logistics Agency to identify requirements for emerging COVID-19 vaccines released under Food and Drug Administration Emergency Use Authorization in December 2020. USCENTCOM prioritized forward-deployed forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria for early vaccine delivery and voluntary inoculation efforts.

As of 14 April 2021, over 7,114 cases of COVID-19 were identified resulting in 276 personnel medically evacuated from theater. Since March 2020, constraints associated with COVID-19 resulted in cancellation of 20 Joint or Combined exercises within the USCENTCOM AOR, impacting mission readiness and partner-nation collaboration. While many events were cancelled due to COVID-19, partners remain committed to continuing larger, multinational exercises like BRIGHT STAR and EAGER LION.

Refinement of theater deployment physical standards for all personnel helped reduce the impact to U.S., Coalition, and partner-nation civilians. Vaccinations for forward-deployed personnel in Afghanistan and the Gulf region began in late January 2021. Continued entry of COVID-19 infected personnel, finite quantities of on-hand testing consumables, limited

quarantine and hospital capacity in theater, and irregular resupply remain significant obstacles to outbreak prevention and containment. In March, USCENTCOM significantly expanded vaccine distribution throughout the AOR with the intent to provide COVID-19 vaccines for all DOD personnel, dependents, and contractors willing to receive it to provide maximal force health protection. We have received a substantial portion of the required vaccines to meet that objective. Furthermore, USCENTCOM advocates providing COVID-19 vaccines for Coalition and partner forces working alongside U.S. forces. Continuing an aggressive vaccination program for forward-deployed units, combined with further emphasis on effective pre-deployment restriction of movement and testing, clean transit routes into theater, and prioritization of deploying personnel for a CONUS-based, Service-led COVID-19 vaccination program will ensure continued mission effectiveness forward.

At USCENTCOM headquarters, restrictions on travel and movement in both the AOR and the U.S. impacted face-to-face key leader engagements and regular personnel rotations throughout much of 2020. USCENTCOM instituted robust teleworking procedures, with on-site staffing reduced to 25 percent in March 2020. This percentage increased to 50 percent in September 2020. USCENTCOM remains a warfighting headquarters, postured to support multiple active campaigns across the AOR. Partial staffing, teleworking, and effective uses of technology since March 2020 provided short-term solutions to enable safe operations in the headquarters and continuous support to forward-deployed formations.

Taking Care of Our People

The USCENTCOM workforce operates at a warfighting tempo, whether deployed or working in the Tampa headquarters. The mental and physical stressors associated with the

demands of our operational environment, exacerbated by COVID-19, present significant challenges to our workforce. Meeting the mental health and spiritual needs of our people regardless of religious affiliation remains a high priority at USCENTCOM. Our chaplains provide professional, confidential counseling across the USCENTCOM workforce addressing essential matters of the heart and soul to include sexual harassment, extremism, personal relationships, stress, and suicide prevention.

Sexual assault and sexual harassment, extremism, and discrimination break down the trust and cohesion necessary for the USCENTCOM workforce to execute its missions effectively and efficiently. To combat these challenges, USCENTCOM places command emphasis on programs that build resilience, readiness, and cohesion. It is a leadership responsibility to provide a safe work environment, and to hold accountable those who seek to disrupt it. USCENTCOM leaders understand it is not just what our people hear their leaders say, but what they see their leaders do that makes an impact.

Improving diversity and inclusion across the force is an operational imperative to meet the demands of strategic competition. USCENTCOM takes deliberate actions to build a diverse workforce promoting equality and innovation. USCENTCOM established a Diversity and Inclusion position, singularly focused on advising the command on all matters relating to discrimination and institutional biases, as well as barriers to diversity and inclusion across the organization.

USCENTCOM remains fully committed to the prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment, improving our command climate and prevention efforts in both of these areas. We constantly work to ensure both our military and civilian workforce feel comfortable coming

forward and reporting any concerns, and ensure that leaders at all levels take appropriate action to build positive workplace climates.

USCENTCOM recently completed a command-wide stand down to address extremism. These stand downs were led by general/flag rank officers or senior civilians, and included virtual training modules featuring subject matter experts and facilitated small-group discussions to build awareness and help prevent actions associated with extremist behaviors. USCENTCOM's leaders are charged with the responsibility to continue this dialogue beyond the DOD mandate to make clear that operating in a command free of discrimination, hate, and harassment while accomplishing our mission is paramount to our success.

Taking care of our people is a very high priority for me personally as the USCENTCOM commander. I speak frequently to my subordinate commanders on these matters because this is commander's business. It requires the full attention of the chain of command, and in USCENTCOM, these critical matters have that full attention.

Conclusion

The USCENTCOM AOR remains challenging and dynamic. One constant in USCENTCOM remains the strength of our people. As nearly two decades and two of the longest conflicts in U.S. history begin to wind down, our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coastguardsmen, Guardians, Civilians, and their families remain steadfast in their commitment to our mission and the vital roles they serve in U.S. national security. Their service and sacrifice over many long years of conflict is humbling and inspirational, benefiting the lives of millions across the U.S. and the AOR. We honor those who have sacrificed by ensuring the mission continues, and their sacrifices were not in vain.

USCENTCOM fulfills its missions, appreciative of the efforts and support of our civilian leadership at the Department of Defense on our behalf. We acknowledge the teamwork of the interagency and thank the members of Congress, the Defense Committees, and their staffs, without whose consistent and timely support we would be unable to accomplish our missions in support of U.S. national security interests and the will of the American people.

Commander, General Kenneth F. McKenzie, Jr.

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

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
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

April 20, 2021

Africa: Securing U.S. Interests, Preserving Strategic Options

INTRODUCTION: *Strong return on our modest investment in this dynamic theater.*

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, and distinguished members of the Committee, It is an honor to come before you again to represent the dedicated and professional service members and civilians of United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM). Since the last time I briefed you, USAFRICOM participated in a Command review and has developed a new campaign plan to ensure our alignment with the National Defense Strategy (NDS). USAFRICOM's Campaign Plan (ACP) aligns with our nation's strategic objectives to protect our people and our homeland, assure our allies and partners, and counter malign actors. Our national interests guide our campaign plan and our mission: *U.S. Africa Command, with partners, counters malign actors and transnational threats, responds to crises, and strengthens security forces in order to advance U.S. interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity.* I am confident the American people are getting a good value for our very modest investment of defense resources in Africa.

The African Continent is important to the United States politically, economically, and militarily. It is home to the fastest growing economies and populations in the world, sits at crossroads of international commerce, trade and global force flow, and watches over important sea lines of communication. Our future security, prosperity, and ability to project power globally rest on free, open, and secure access in and around Africa. Activities of competitor states, violent extremist organizations, instability and fragility all challenge our access. Despite these challenges, this dynamic continent presents a number of opportunities for the United States to advance our interests.

The COVID-19 pandemic illustrates the coupling of challenges and opportunities in Africa. Our forces remained in place and continued to operate within the limits of our force health protection measures. Our nation's values and long-term whole-of-government commitment to support and build partner capacity has been our strongest assets over the last year. To combat and contain the pandemic, African partners have mobilized medical capabilities built over decades of U.S.-led efforts to combat infectious diseases. USAFRICOM supported U.S. efforts to provide COVID-19 assistance in 43

countries, including the delivery of nearly \$500M in medical supplies. While force health protective measures required us to re-scope many of our activities, we have stayed connected with our African partners during their time of need.

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT: *Incredible potential checked by incredible obstacles*

A Vast Continent of Opportunity and Challenge

The land mass of Africa is larger than the United States, China, India, Japan, and most of Europe combined. Over half of the world's arable land is on the continent, along with much of the planet's untapped mineral resources,¹ including strategic minerals. Africa is home to 11 of the world's 25 fastest growing economies, as measured by gross domestic product data for 2020.² Africa's population is young, growing fast, and expected to top two billion in 2050, when more than a quarter of the world's inhabitants will live on the continent. By 2100, Africa's population could nearly double again. Not only is the continent's growth rate the highest in the world, but the population is the youngest, with 41% under the age of 15.³ The growing size of the population, illustrates the rising global importance of the African continent and the momentum of Africa's expanding markets.

Africa's rapid population growth also amplifies several challenges. Over two-thirds of Africans live in poverty.⁴ Natural resource exploitation, impacts of climate change, and infectious disease outbreaks all fuel instability and conflict. Desertification, particularly in the Lake Chad Basin where the Sahara Desert is expanding into the Sahel, has dramatically reduced arable land, threatened food security, and created conditions for instability and insecurity. Lack of economic opportunities and a search for a better life lead to migration, which creates compounding challenges. An increase in

¹ Grow Africa: "60% of Arable Land is in Africa and it has Billions in Investment Potential," 2020.

² International Monetary Fund, 2020 GDP growth (annual %) <https://www.imf.org/> (South Sudan, Egypt, Rwanda, Benin, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Kenya, Ghana, Malawi, and Niger), 2021

³ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division World Population Prospects, 2019

⁴ 85% of Africans live off less than 5.50 USD per day, World Bank, 2019

migration across Africa, as well as into Europe and North America, feeds a lucrative market for extremist organizations and criminal networks. The Fund for Peace “Fragile State Index” captures the aggregation of these challenges. Fourteen of the world’s top twenty most fragile states are in the USAFRICOM Area of Responsibility (AOR).⁵ Despite these challenges, Africa’s potential and strategic location continue to attract investment and engagement by geo-strategic competitors.

Strategic Geography

Africa has global strategic importance relative to NATO’s Southern Flank, the flow of commerce through the Red Sea, and protecting access to the Middle East, Indian Ocean, and South-East Asia. Located at the crossroads of the world, Africa watches over strategic choke points including the Strait of Gibraltar, the Strait of Sicily, the Red Sea, the Bab al Mandeb, and the Mozambique Channel. The sea line of communication (SLOC) running through the Mediterranean and Red Seas, and a second, dipping around the Cape of Good Hope, connect the East Coast of the U.S. to East Africa, the Middle East, India, and South East Asia. These pathways are essential to global trade, ongoing operations and contingency plans of seven other Combatant Commands. These corridors facilitate one-third of the shipping between North America and Asia, and one-third of global oil shipping. U.S. and global security depend on unhindered access to these waters.

Strategic Competition

The NDS prioritizes geo-political competition due to the “magnitude of the threats [China and Russia] pose to U.S. security and prosperity, and the potential for those threats to increase in the future.”⁶ Both Beijing and Moscow have long recognized the political, military, and economic importance of Africa and each continues to seize opportunities to expand their influence across the

⁵ The Fund for Peace, “Fragile State Index” <https://fragilestateindex.org/data/> (Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Chad, Sudan, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Burundi, Haiti, Nigeria, Guinea, Mali, Iraq, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Libya). Three of the top 20 (Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq) represent \$1.5T in “war-related” expenses from FY01 to FY19 according to the DOD Comptroller., 2021

⁶ 2018 National Defense Strategy: Sharpening the American Military Competitive Edge, 2018, p 7.

continent. Unencumbered by international norms and standards of transparency, our competitors are able to combine both government and private resources to gain influence. Exploitative practices for trade, resource extraction, weapons sales, and debt manipulation ultimately weakens governance, slows economic growth, and fosters instability.

The People's Republic of China leads the international community in head of state and senior leadership visits to Africa over the last decade—investing heavily, pledging \$60B in infrastructure and development, and increasing arms sales to African countries. Beijing's activities in Africa are outpacing those of the United States and our allies as they seek resources and markets to feed economic growth in China and leverage economic tools to increase their global reach and influence. The People's Republic of China has 52 embassies in Africa, three more than the U.S., and they continue to expand their base in Djibouti into a platform to project power across the continent and its waters—completing a large naval pier this year. The base is only 12 kilometers from our 3,400 DoD personnel at Camp Lemonnier, the Department's primary forward operating location in the USAFRICOM AOR. Beijing seeks to open additional bases, tying their commercial seaport investments in East, West and Southern Africa closely with involvement by Chinese military forces in order to further their geo-strategic interests.

Russian strategy in Africa has long centered on building influence to facilitate economic opportunity, obtain political support for Russian initiatives, and increase military presence on NATO's southern flank. Russian private military companies (PMCs) are a destabilizing influence in Africa, frequently securing Russian investments at the expense of African interests. Russian PMCs almost certainly downed an unarmed, unmanned U.S. aircraft in Libya in November 2019 using a sophisticated Russian air defense system. This past year, USAFRICOM exposed the extent of the Kremlin's malign involvement, despite its continued denial, by identifying and publicizing their deployment of high performance fighter aircraft to Libya.

Iranian military capabilities threaten sea-lanes through the Red Sea and our posture locations in

the Horn of Africa. Iranian support to Yemen's Houthis further jeopardizes freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and increases tensions and instability in East Africa. Camp Lemonnier's geostrategic location makes it a critical posture location to support USCENTCOM plans and operations. To mitigate this risk to our people, this year USAFRICOM requested funding for improving force protection. I am thankful that Congress has authorized and appropriated these funds. With the inclusion of the Iranian threat, East Africa is a nexus of four of the five major threats identified in the National Defense Strategy: The People's Republic of China, Russia, Iran, and violent extremist organizations (VEOs).

VEOs are a Primary Threat to Many African Partners

When I meet with African leaders, their primary concern is often VEOs killing their soldiers, kidnapping their civilians, and challenging their authority to rule. Transnational VEOs, like al Qaeda and ISIS, are expanding in Africa at a rapid pace, taking advantage of weak governance and disenfranchised populations. They threaten our partners' capacity to govern effectively, protect their populations, and improve their economies. Their terror attacks on the continent exacerbate the challenges of vulnerable populations, and some of them remain committed to strike at U.S. interests in both the region and the U.S. Homeland.

East Africa is home to Al-Shabaab, the largest, wealthiest, and most violent Al Qaeda-associated group in the world. In 2019, 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. In January 2020, Al-Shabaab followed through on this threat, attacking our forces at the Kenyan Naval Base at Manda Bay. This complex and well-resourced attack killed three Americans and clearly demonstrated Al-Shabaab's willingness and capability to attack the U.S. outside of Somalia. In February 2021, Al-Shabaab emir Ahmed Diriye repeated his call for violent attacks against Americans. Today, Al-Shabaab is the primary African VEO threat to American interests.

The Islamic State is rapidly franchising across Africa, becoming increasingly more capable,

violent, and difficult for our African partners to defeat without international support. In West Africa, the primary VEO threats are ISIS networks in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, Boko Haram, and al-Qa'ida's Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM). Kidnapping for ransom, targeting Westerners, remains a common tactic for VEOs and criminal organizations. USAFRICOM's continued engagement in the Counter-VEO (C-VEO) fight in West Africa has developed the situational awareness and regional partnerships that sustain U.S. access and influence. These relationships enabled USAFRICOM to rescue Mr. Philippe Walton within days of his abduction in Niger last October. To conduct this rescue mission, USAFRICOM requested, and within hours received approval for, armed access, basing, and overflight from seven countries and permission to conduct a raid in Nigeria. Continued collaboration with, and support to, our French African partners as well as our European allies, is imperative to counter growing extremism with limited U.S. resources in the West. Bottom line: Our relationships and our counter-VEO efforts build U.S. influence over strategic competitors.

STRATEGIC APPROACH: *An ounce of prevention and cheap insurance for America*

A secure, stable, and prosperous Africa—aligned with the U.S.—is an enduring American interest. The U.S. must continue to work with our allies and partners to advance our mutual interests within the rules-based international system. Our campaign plan is focused on achieving four campaign objectives, developed and refined over the last year: 1) Gain and Maintain Strategic Access and Influence, 2) Disrupt VEO Threats to U.S. Interests, 3) Respond to Crises to Protect U.S. Interests, 4) Coordinate Action with Allies and Partners to Achieve Shared Security Objectives.

USAFRICOM resources offer cheap insurance and an ounce of prevention for America. Funds to support contracted ISR capabilities as well as personnel and recovery and casualty evacuation dramatically improve our ability to help our troops accomplish their missions and protect them with less impact on high demand military capabilities. Similarly, modest but sustained funding levels for

exercises, professional education and Section 333 and 332 activities are critical to our ability to build partner capacity to do more for themselves and to compete effectively with competitors.

Gain and Maintain Strategic Access and Influence

Strategic access to exert influence and project power enables a broad range of U.S. government activities. USAFRICOM competes and acts to maintain or expand U.S. influence and access. Our influence in Africa provides an advantage over competitors, deters conflict, assures partners of our commitment, and postures the U.S. to transition effectively to crisis or conflict if necessary. In cooperation with our allies, USAFRICOM builds trust and strengthens military relationships to allow for the rapid flow of forces and enable warplans when needed. As competition is increasingly global, Africa is rich with opportunities to counter, disrupt, tax, and win against strategic competitors.

USAFRICOM prioritizes access in key geostrategic locations to disrupt competitor efforts that threaten U.S. freedom of action and to check malign activities which exploit our African partners. While we focus our military activities in key locations, we stay engaged across the continent to maintain situational awareness, support partners and allies, and respond to emerging crises.

Disrupt VEO Threats to U.S. Interests

Persistent state fragility in Africa drives instability and violent extremism, but also invites competitor exploitation. VEOs remain a significant threat to the shared interests of the U.S., our allies, and our African partners. Many of these VEOs explicitly aspire to kill Americans. USAFRICOM, working with African and European partners, monitors these VEOs for indicators and warnings of attacks against the Homeland, our embassies, and our citizens. Monitoring VEO capabilities and intentions can be resource intensive but is a vital first step in preventing successful terrorist attacks.

Regional VEOs are the number one security concern for many of our partners. Access and influence stem from helping our partners with the problems they face. Shared efforts against VEOs

provide the best opportunity to strengthen partnerships and to ensure the U.S. is the security partner of choice in priority countries. In Africa, counter VEO efforts are strategic competition.

USAFRICOM contributes to multi-national efforts to disrupt VEOs while also conducting direct actions to degrade VEOs who threaten the Homeland. In the East, USAFRICOM capabilities support and enable the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the multi-national effort to defeat Al Shabaab, an arm of Al Qaeda, and build sustainable security in Somalia as outlined in the 2017 London Security Pact. In the West, USAFRICOM supports the French-led multi-national coalition, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), and the African-led G5 Sahel forces against Al Qaeda and ISIS affiliates. This sustainable, partner-centric approach protects the homeland, builds relationships, creates access, and thwarts competitor advances.

Respond to Crises to Protect U.S. Interests

The DoD often helps set the conditions necessary for subsequent whole-of-government efforts across Africa. The tremendous work of the Department of State (DoS), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and other organizations has dramatically reduced the impact of diseases like HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and COVID-19, strengthened educational systems, supported democratic elections, and encouraged economic growth. Whole-of-American government efforts are contingent upon the ability of USAFRICOM and the DoD to protect our embassies, our investments, and our people working in Africa to advance U.S. interests.

The DoS has designated 30 diplomatic facilities worldwide as High Threat, High Risk posts, 15 of them are in Africa. USAFRICOM shares many of our crisis response forces with USEUCOM to maximize savings and readiness to the department. In the last year, the attack on Manda Bay in Kenya, diplomatic engagements in Libya, the coup in Mali, recovery of an American Citizen, the order to reposition from Somalia and ongoing violence in Ethiopia have all tested our response capabilities across the spectrum of operations and across tens of thousands of miles.

As our service members operate in small groups in remote locations throughout the continent, USAFRICOM is continuously adjusting our limited collection, medical, transportation, and response assets to protect our troops. I would like to thank Congress for authorizing and appropriating funds to dramatically improve force protection, personnel recovery, and casualty evacuation efforts to provide our troops the medical care where and when they need it.

Coordinate Action with Allies and Partners to Achieve Shared Security Objectives

USAFRICOM maintains a well-developed constellation of allies, multi-national organizations (European Union, African Union, NATO, and the United Nations), and African partners.⁷ These relationships enable USAFRICOM to coordinate action, enhance interoperability, and share costs and risks to achieve mutual security goals.

USAFRICOM's active participation in multi-national efforts reinforces cooperation for mutual benefit, assures partners of U.S. commitment, and denies competitors opportunities to erode U.S. influence. Enhanced relationships and military activities enable USAFRICOM to help create time and space for our African partners to build the governance and economic growth necessary to gain the capacity to repel malign actors and VEO influences. Building partner capability is also an important tool in strategic competition, reinforcing the U.S. role as Africa's security partner of choice while furthering American values and influence. A great example of building relationships and trust is Exercise African Lion. Since 2002, African Lion has brought together partners and allies to enhance interoperability, build readiness and strengthen relationships. Trust is built over time – the relationships made while we develop partner capabilities provide America with long-term strategic alliances needed to address future challenges and ensure regional security and prosperity.

⁷ USAFRICOM maintains Foreign Liaison Officers representing 19 countries and multinational organizations.

REGIONAL ASSESSMENTS: *A large, complex, and dynamic theater***East Africa**

The strategic geography of East Africa remains vital to U.S. National Security. Despite a determined Chinese effort to assert influence in Djibouti and the region, our relationship with the Djiboutian government remains strong. The strength of the relationship built between the U.S. and Djibouti was evident in the opening months of the COVID-19 pandemic. As global travel became more difficult, senior Djiboutian leaders approved every one of our flight requests into and out of our three facilities that comprise the Djibouti Base Cluster. This vitally important base houses approximately half of the U.S. military personnel in the USAFRICOM AOR and enables the U.S. to protect the SLOC through the Red Sea and project power across East, Central, and Southern Africa as well as into the USCENTCOM and USINDOPACOM AORs. The base cluster supports global force flow, sustains forward staged response forces, supports strategic competition, and enables C-VEO activities in both USAFRICOM and USCENTCOM's AORs.

The recent Operation Octave Quartz demonstrated the agility and flexibility of the Joint Force. In just over 60 days, USAFRICOM received the order to reposition from Somalia, planned the operation, assembled a Joint Task Force of 13,400 service members from around the globe, and executed this high-risk mission ahead of schedule and without major incident. Once again, our strong partnerships with Djibouti and Kenya played a vital role in our successful repositioning. Our mission in Somalia has not changed, but our posture has. Ultimately, achieving our shared objectives in Somalia is tied to reconciliation between the Federal Government in Mogadishu and the Federal Member States, building institutional capacity across various sectors, and enhancing support to the troop contributing countries of AMISOM.

The collective efforts of the U.S. Government, international community, and regional partners, has created tangible progress in Somalia, albeit far slower, far smaller, and far more fragile than we would like.

AMISOM and the Somali National Army (SNA) have made slow gains in Al-Shabaab strongholds in the south, holding territory and establishing outposts. However, pre-election political friction between the Federal Government of Somalia and Somali Federal Member States has distracted Mogadishu from our common fight against Al-Shabaab. U.S.-trained and supported “Danab” SNA units, a result of the USG’s commitment at the 2017 London Security Pact, most often spearhead security operations but it is critical that AMISOM remain in the fight until the SNA is able to counter Al-Shabaab themselves. As this is written, USAFRICOM is working with the Joint Staff and OSD to review our mission, resources and authorities in East Africa as part of the Global Posture Review.

West Africa

USAFRICOM employs a small footprint in West Africa as part of our African-led, allied-assisted, and U.S.-enabled framework to counter the expansion of VEOs in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin and to monitor increased strategic competitor activities. We coordinate our efforts with the larger multi-national security activities in West Africa (G5-Sahel and Multi-National Joint Task Force) and provide bilateral support to partner nations. However, progress is slow because in much of West Africa governance remains weak and populations disenfranchised. VEOs remain a significant threat and their violence continues to grow and spread.

Extreme poverty, more frequent and intense weather events, vulnerable and marginalized populations, separatist movements, and illicit transnational networks overlap in the Sahel, creating opportunities for VEOs to establish safe haven, increasingly control the local populace and grow in strength. JNIM and ISIS associates have expanded in the region and now threaten the littoral states from the north—a development of increasing concern. ISIS-Core promotes ISIS-West Africa as a flagship network, while Al Qaeda supports their global network using revenue generated in the Sahel, mostly through kidnapping for ransom. Faced with these growing VEO threats, African countries seek U.S. support, making C-VEO efforts one of our most effective tools to counter competitor influence.

The People's Republic of China's "Belt and Road Initiative" is one competitor initiative that seeks to increase Chinese access and influence along the Atlantic Coast of Africa. Today, the People's Republic of China has invested heavily in large-scale industrial fishing infrastructure in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG), making the People's Republic of China the primary contributor to a growing food crisis that will further drive instability in West Africa. This exploitation—much of it illegal, unregulated, or under-reported illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU)—is not only counter-productive to our shared security objectives with West African countries, but also provides the economic pretense the People's Republic of China has previously used to justify increased military access. The way forward requires continued efforts with African partners and allies to build capacity to enforce their own maritime sovereignty. For example, Exercise Obangame Express is one way we seek to improve regional maritime domain awareness, capacity and cooperation. But, this annual event is insufficient by itself. A multinational maritime task force is a good option to address the plague of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. Additionally, piratical attacks in Gulf of Guinea have become more frequent and violent, causing risk to international commerce and threatening maritime security.

USAFRICOM will continue to work with Gulf of Guinea nations and other international partners to help strengthen regional cooperation and responses to piracy. Our European allies play critical roles in C-VEO operations in West Africa. France, who leads C-VEO multilateral efforts in the Sahel, is committed to security in the region with approximately 5,500 troops conducting security force assistance and direct action with support from a number of European allies. We mourn the loss, in recent months, of five French Soldiers killed fighting to secure our mutual security interests in West Africa. Our mutual support and cooperation with the French has had the effect of multiplying the resources available to advance our shared interests. The European Union and United Nations maintain multinational missions in West Africa and the continued effort of the U.S. Government help keep these international partners engaged in this fight and sustain France's leadership of this effort.

North Africa

The Kingdom of Morocco, first to recognize our nation in 1777, remains our strongest partner

through exercises, training programs, foreign military sales, and counterterrorism cooperation. The Tunisians are also strong partners in the fight against ISIS-Libya and reinforce our security assistance with national funds. Our military relationship with Algeria significantly improved in the last year. Once looking almost exclusively to Russia, senior officials in the Algerian Government have recently expressed their desire to continue improving relations with the U.S.

In Libya, the election of a new Prime Minister and an Interim Unity Government mark continued progress. In the last 12 months, USAFRICOM supported our State Department in formally establishing a diplomatic link and we appreciate our excellent cooperation with AMB Norland and his team. Libya has provided Russia access and influence along NATO's southern flank. The Kremlin has publically denied direct involvement in the Libyan conflict, while thinly masking their governmental activities under the banner of the Wagner Group PMC. Continued progress on the political front is the best chance for long-term stability in Libya.

Central and Southern Africa

The potential exists for stronger partnerships and opportunities in central and southern Africa. Botswana is a bright spot with its enduring democracy, continued stability, professional military, and good relations with the U.S.. South Africa, the second-largest economy and our largest trading partner on the continent, has been the hardest hit by the global pandemic. USAFRICOM provided COVID-19 aid with the help of the OSD, DoS, and USAID. In northern Mozambique, where U.S. and European energy partners have planned an approximately \$50B investment in liquid natural gas, we have seen a rapid increase in sophistication and violence from local groups that have evolved into the newest African affiliate of corporate ISIS.⁸

Despite emerging opportunities, the People's Republic of China and Russia currently have the inside track in much of central and southern Africa. Russia is testing its playbook for malign activity in the Central African Republic, where they are employing PMCs, extracting minerals, and buying influence. Likewise, the People's Republic of China provided welcome COVID-19 aid diplomacy in South Africa. Without significant forces in Central and Southern Africa outside of our embassies,

USAFRICOM maintains a limited supporting role to our U.S. diplomatic and development efforts in this region.

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

Economy of Force

A small investment in Africa goes a long, long way. What USAFRICOM accomplishes with a few troops and a few dollars, on a continent 3.5 times the size of the continental United States, is a bargain for the American taxpayer. Honest assessments and prudent investments ensure the U.S. maximizes the impact of every taxpayer dollar spent to secure American interests and support allies and partners. The locations where USAFRICOM resources and activities are concentrated represent the overlapping points where small teams of dedicated Americans can have outsized impacts on geo-strategic competition, protecting our personnel and homeland, and reassuring our partners and allies. Providing our service members with the support we expect and they deserve, while operating across a vast continent with limited infrastructure, requires that power projection platforms, force protection, ISR, response forces, communications equipment, and medical care be forward deployed and ready to respond. Our partners and allies already bear much of this burden through reciprocal support and the relationships developed in exercises, intelligence sharing, coordination, and engagements. We could not complete our mission and advance our national interests in Africa without operating by, with, and through our allies and partners.

An Ounce of Prevention

USAFRICOM remains ready to protect U.S. citizens, advance our interests and strategic access, and to respond to crises in Africa. The men and women of USAFRICOM, 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 and its surrounding waters will be even more vital to U.S. national security in the future than it has been in the past.

Africa is key terrain for strategic competition with the People's Republic of China and Russia and our support to C-VEO operations is necessary to protect the Homeland as well as America's citizens

and interests abroad. Today, we are reviewing our very modest resources to maximize our ability to protect and advance our national security interests. Persistent engagement by the U.S. military, in areas where our objectives are shared with our African and European partners, allows the United States to remain the security partner of choice across much of the continent. Furthermore, the United States has the opportunity to apply our asymmetric advantages in C-VEO experience, intelligence collection, and military professionalism in furthering international norms, good governance, economic development, and security cooperation against the challenges facing our African partners. Our investments to improve the security environment in Africa will pay ever-larger dividends in the future as African states are increasingly able to harness opportunities of the African continent.

It remains my honor to lead the service members, civilians, and families of United States Africa Command. Our efforts have made the U.S. safer, secured U.S. interests, and preserved America's strategic options in the region, while helping Africans do more for themselves. I hope you are as convinced as I am that USAFRICOM is a good investment in the future—for America, for Africa, and for the world. Thank you.

Gen. Stephen J. Townsend, U.S. Army

General Stephen J. Townsend, U.S. Army, became the 5th commander of United States Africa Command in July 2019. Headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, U.S. AFRICOM is one of six joint service geographic combatant commands and is responsible for all U.S. military operations and activities to protect and advance U.S. national interests in Africa.

General Townsend's previous assignment was commanding U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command where he oversaw all recruitment, training and education for America's Army.

From Griffin, Georgia, General Townsend was commissioned as an Army infantry officer upon graduation from North Georgia College in 1982. He has led and commanded troops at every echelon from rifle platoon to infantry division and Army corps as well as two combined/joint task forces.

General Townsend's operational experience includes Operation Urgent Fury, Grenada; Operation Just Cause, Panama; Operation Uphold Democracy, Haiti; Operation Enduring Freedom, Afghanistan; and Operation Iraqi Freedom, Iraq. In 2016-17, he led the multi-national effort to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria during Operation Inherent Resolve.

His career includes service with four Army divisions, the 82d Airborne, 7th Light Infantry, 101st Air Assault and the 10th Mountain; the 75th Ranger Regiment; the separate 3d Stryker Brigade, 2d Infantry Division; as well as command of the XVIIIth Airborne Corps. His past joint duty assignments include U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. Central Command, the Joint Staff, Regional Command-East in Afghanistan and Combined/Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq and Syria.

General Townsend holds two master's degrees and military qualifications and awards appropriate to his service as a career infantry officer.

General Townsend is married to Melissa, also from Georgia. They have two married sons, one an Army Captain, the other an Army veteran and university student. The Townsends happily spoil two grand-children and two large and unruly dogs.

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

APRIL 20, 2021

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. PANETTA

General TOWNSEND. Because security, development, and governance are mutually interdependent, we need to address them concurrently. Together with our international and interagency partners, we are reviewing our approach to strengthening all three areas. This approach places increased attention on strengthening governance institutions and basic service delivery. We see this as important in its own right and as a means of preventing VEO recruitment. Security is one of the basic services essential to this approach. Although interagency partners lead U.S. police professionalization efforts, AFRICOM can play a role in security sector reform efforts with West African militaries. Although AFRICOM has conducted security sector reform programs in West Africa in the past, they could be expanded. Security sector reform simultaneously helps counter VEOs and improves community-oriented service delivery. In order to do more, AFRICOM needs to be able to stand by its commitments and remain consistently engaged. Major reductions in AFRICOM security cooperation funding and exercise funding between 2018 and 2021 created a perception that the U.S. and AFRICOM are walking away. AFRICOM's presence on the continent, especially in terms of: Defense Attaché offices, posture (SFAB rotations), support to multilateral operations, exercises, and peace and security forums, must reinforce a sense of commitment that our allies and partners can count on. Another way in which AFRICOM can support this approach is by building the capacity of defense institutions. This contributes to improving governance by strengthening governance institutions within the security sector. AFRICOM has programmatic tools to help build the institutional capacity of partner militaries, and with the required permissions, could do the same for multilateral organizations, such as GS Sahel and ECOWAS. [See page 48.]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING

APRIL 20, 2021

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. LANGEVIN

Mr. LANGEVIN. What is the timeframe for shifting your priorities from C-VEO and Iranian containment to great power competition?

General MCKENZIE. (U) C-VEO efforts, deterring Iran, and countering Iran's destabilizing activities are all challenges in the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility. We will continue to prioritize these threats while also implementing the Department's guidance for treating China as the pacing challenge.

Mr. LANGEVIN. The renewed focus on near-peer adversaries means reprioritizing assets between combatant commands. Is your command prepared to lose ISR allocation? How do you plan to monitor stability in fragile areas?

General MCKENZIE. (U) Multi-layer and persistent intelligence, surveillance, and recognizance (ISR) are vital to my command. My forces are engaged in combat operations along with our allies and partner forces in multiple joint operating areas. In the past two years, we have experienced substantial reductions to our ISR allocation. While my staff and subordinate commanders have done well in effectively managing our allocated ISR and have developed creative ways to stretch our resources, our expected future ISR allocation will heavily impact our ability to conduct our missions. The constant reductions of persistent full motion video assets, coupled with the Big Wing ISR reduction to zero, will decrease my ability to monitor violent extremist organizations (VEOs); provide force protection overwatch; help to maintain a watchful eye against malign Iranian and proxy activity; and open seams for our enemies to operate unseen and unchecked within USCENTCOM. Insufficient ISR will ultimately result in a lack of ability to respond to events in a timely fashion and increases risk to our forces on the ground.

Mr. LANGEVIN. I am concerned that we will overly emphasize C-VEO because it most familiar to our force and that we have the muscle memory to keep doing it. How can we ensure that we're focused on all facets of great power competition without overly committing to C-VEO?

General TOWNSEND. The facets of competition in Africa span the DIME spectrum and require a whole of government effort. AFRICOM focuses on the military facet while supporting interagency partners leading other aspects of competition. AFRICOM maintains its focus on all facets of global power competition (GPC) through execution of its campaign plan, of which CVEO is only one of the four objectives. Our primary objective for addressing GPC is Objective 1: gain and maintain strategic access, recognizing a clear market for strategic access with competitors in China and Russia. AFRICOM structures its campaign around a prioritized list of countries, where geostrategic terrain is the primary consideration, not VEO threats. Our balanced approach of objectives and campaign design ensures that we do not over emphasize CVEO. VEOs are the primary concern of many of our partners in the Horn and the Sahel and can be significant concerns in other regions. In countries facing VEO threats, our VEO assistance serves to maintain these relationships and, as we have found is a form of GPC as well. In African countries where VEOs are not a concern, AFRICOM focuses on other shared threats, such as Russian PMCs or piracy. AFRICOM is engaged across the continent, and only supports CVEO operations in a relatively small number of countries. In these countries, we also reinforce our relationship through countering other transnational threats, monitoring and responding to malign activity, strengthening and professionalizing partner forces, and promoting regional security. What remains constant across the continent is that to maintain partnerships capable of standing up to Chinese coercion, AFRICOM must stand by our partners as they combat the primary threats to their security and ours.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. SCOTT

Mr. SCOTT. General McKenzie, you noted last year that ISR assets are critical for deterrence in the AOR, stating that consistent ISR is necessary to identify changes that shape force posturing. Do you have the ISR resources necessary to achieve this aim?

General McKENZIE. (U) For Fiscal Year 21, we have enough ISR to fully support one operation. Within the USCENTCOM area of responsibility there are currently two ongoing major combat operations in Iraq/Syria and Afghanistan, terrorists in Yemen, Iranian security issues in the Arabian gulf and choke points such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab El Mandeb strait. This results in my need to continuously re-prioritize limited allocated ISR against the most urgent problem set and assume risk in the others. The demand for ISR is relatively stable in the Command though the Services are reducing their ISR offerings every year since 2015. In addition, USCENTCOM has no assigned forces, requiring allocation from Joint Staff every year which has been decreasing due to National Defense Strategy priorities and Service ISR reductions.

Mr. SCOTT. In 2020, Congress responded to the combatant commanders' call for more ISR resources by appropriating \$250M for the ISR transfer fund, which funded additional ISR activities in the CENTCOM AOR. How did you leverage these additional resources in 2020? For 2021, the Pentagon did not request any funds for the ISR transfer fund and Congress did not appropriate any additional funds. How will the lack of ISR transfer funds in 2021 impact your mission?

General McKENZIE. (U) The USCENTCOM Partner Integration Enterprise (CPIE) Processing, Exploitation and Dissemination (PED) Facility is the only direct USCENTCOM activity that is currently funded by ISR Transfer Fund dollars, and an alternate funding strategy has already been identified to ensure its continued operation. Therefore, impacts to USCENTCOM-specific activities is negligible with the departure of the ISR Transfer Fund for Fiscal Years 21 or 22. That said, USCENTCOM fully expects it will 'feel' the absence of the ISR Transfer Fund from Service-provided/managed ISR capabilities. A key example is the U.S. Air Force's (USAF) Government Owned/Contractor Operated (GOCO) MQ-9s which are slated to terminate in June 2021 due to no available follow-on funds to continue operation in the USCENTCOM battlespace. The USAF had contemplated, and USCENTCOM was going to support, pursuing Fiscal Year 21 ISR Transfer Fund dollars for at least a portion of the MQ-9 GOCOs. With that funding not available, USAF reports no alternate funding strategy, which will result in full cessation of operations and only widen USCENTCOM/Components Full Motion Video shortfall (OIR projected to be 28,700 hours short in July 2021). USCENTCOM defers to the Services for a more detailed input regarding their respective equities that have been or were planned to be resourced via the ISR Transfer Fund.

Mr. SCOTT. General McKenzie, your predecessor noted last year that ISR continued to experience significant shortfalls despite its critical role in the success of U.S. operations. How do you assess your current ISR gaps? Could you provide any specific examples in which ISR was critical to the success of an operation in your COCOM?

General McKENZIE. (U) The fissure between the operational demands for ISR and the available theater ISR platforms to meet those demands continues to widen in the USCENTCOM AOR. While USCENTCOM leverages other available capabilities, like national resources, airborne ISR undergirds USCENTCOM's layered, multi-Intelligence discipline collection strategy. Consequently, as theater airborne ISR decreases in the USCENTCOM AOR, its ISR gap will increase and result in a command better postured to react rather than one able to anticipate strategic developments.

Mr. SCOTT. Do you think ABMS and Joint All Domain Command and Control will have enough operational capability to fill the ISR gaps that JSTARS will not be able to fulfill once it is parked?

General McKENZIE. (U) Until ABMS and Joint All Domain Command and Control are fully fielded and the Joint Staff determines how much will be allocated to USCENTCOM, it's a difficult question to answer. In its ISR role, JSTARS provided best of breed Moving Target Indicator (MTI) capability which directly resulted in taking many ISIS and AQ terrorists off the battlefield. MTI, like Full Motion Video (FMV), provides real time awareness of enemy actions, allowing me and my Commanders to act rapidly to get inside the adversaries' decision cycle. Without real-time ISR platforms such as JSTARS, we are reliant on time late intelligence from other non-airborne systems.

Mr. SCOTT. Do you think ABMS and Joint All Domain Command and Control will have enough operational capability to fill the ISR gaps that JSTARS will not be able to fulfill once it is parked?

General TOWNSEND. USAFRICOM does not use JSTARS, but relies on other capabilities for ISR and situation awareness. The Air Force's Advanced Battle Management System and the Joint All Domain Command and Control are undergoing development and testing, with recent tests showing promise. The Joint All Domain Command and Control will enable Joint Force Commanders and warfighters to rap-

idly translate decisions into integrated and synchronized actions across all domains, multiple platforms, globally and with Mission Partners to achieve operational advantage in both competition and conflict.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MRS. McCLAIN

Mrs. McCLAIN. The House of Representatives has passed H.R. 1392, the Protection of Saudi Dissidents Act, which would prevent arms sales to Saudi Arabia unless the President can certify Saudi Arabia isn't committing human rights violations.

Is the administration concerned that our allies in the region, like Saudi Arabia, might turn towards our adversaries like Russia or China if we do not continue to provide military support?

Could bills like H.R. 1392 signal to our allies that the United States is not committed to their defense and their counter-terrorism efforts?

Ms. DORY. Our competitors, like China and Russia, seek to exploit gaps in the security sectors of our partners. Saudi Arabia buys arms and weapons from China and is reportedly discussing purchases from Russia. The Department of Defense continues to invest in the defense partnership with Saudi Arabia and is committed to ensuring the United States remains its partner of choice even as we work to elevate human rights as a central component of that relationship.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. MOORE

Mr. MOORE. Can you describe the impact on the ability to respond to Iranian regional aggression if the U.S. returns to the JCPOA?

General MCKENZIE. (U) The administration is currently engaged in indirect talks with Iran on a mutual return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Regardless of the outcome of that process, the President has made clear that countering Iran's malign behavior in the region is a priority, including addressing Iran's ballistic missile program and support for terrorist groups and violent proxies in the region. The United States retains all of its capacities to push back against Iran's destabilizing behavior, and will not hesitate to defend U.S. personnel and vital interests. As the diplomatic process unfolds, I will continue to provide my best military advice to civilian leadership on how to best respond to any potential Iranian regional aggression and then implement as directed.

Mr. MOORE. The U.S. maintains a permanent military presence at various military installations throughout CENTCOM. In consideration of the Taliban's failure to adhere to the terms of the February 29th agreement and if wanted by the Afghan government, what utility would be served by maintaining a permanent military presence in Afghanistan?

General MCKENZIE. (U) The President has directed that no U.S. military bases remain in Afghanistan. Planning is underway for a residual military presence in Afghanistan to provide security for the U.S. Embassy Kabul in support of Diplomatic missions. The administration understands the need to work with regional partners to disrupt terrorist networks, address humanitarian crises, and resolve armed conflicts responsibly.

Mr. MOORE. Africa will account for nearly half of global population growth over the next two decades and by 2100, five of the top 10 most populous countries in the world will be in Africa. For decades the DOD has maintained a presence and invested heavily throughout various combatant commands. What is your long-term view of U.S. presence, mission, and investment in Africa and what is the Department doing to build sustainable military partner capabilities?

General TOWNSEND. Strategic long-term trends shaping U.S. interests in Africa include expanding instability and violent opposition, fragile power transitions shaped by identity politics, democratic backsliding, and a growing number of autocracies. The United States represents an alternative future, where the decisive element is capable governance enabled by a stable security environment. The primary means of this stable security environment is a capable, professional military, partnered with AFRICOM to address future threats. Interagency partners will lead this effort, but AFRICOM also has a role. To do that, AFRICOM must continue to strengthen partner militaries through exercises, security cooperation, mil-to-mil engagements, and institutional capacity building while maintaining cost-efficient presence and posture. There is immense value in developing and maintaining long-term relationships with African nations, specifically the excellent work done within our State Partnership Program. This multi-tiered approach is sustainable over the long-term, currently using only 0.3% of DOD's Operations budget for an area three times the size of the United States. However, as Africa's population grows, these efforts

may require additional resources to continue professionalizing and partnering with larger African militaries, police forces, and coast guards.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. MORELLE

Mr. MORELLE. Ms. Dory, what is your assessment of the goals of Russia in CENTCOM and AFRICOM, what do they gain by their interference, are they succeeding, and what measures can we use to limit their influence?

Ms. DORY. Russia is pursuing partnerships to challenge U.S. influence, in both the Middle East, and in Africa. Moscow probably views expanding security and defense ties will facilitate greater influence over the governments and lead to developing broader partnerships in other spheres. Over the last 5 years, we have seen Moscow expand defense engagement through arms sales, training, technical or counterterrorism assistance, and intelligence sharing, all of which could complicate existing or future U.S. security arrangements. Russia is also aggressively pushing to increase its access to the region through simplified port visit agreements, through its expansion of existing facilities in Syria, and they may be nearing an agreement for a naval logistics facility in Sudan. Limiting their influence will require a practical, tailored interagency approach to ensure we are aligned not just in countering competitors, but also in meeting broader U.S. goals across the region. The Department's efforts should be aligned with our interagency partners to help our partners and allies build capacity, improve transparency, and develop institutions that support sustainable security solutions.

Mr. MORELLE. General Townsend, in what ways is China seeking to expand its influence in Africa? And, in areas where China's approach is troublesome, what is the U.S. strategy to provide an alternative to regional partners and what more can the U.S. be doing?

General TOWNSEND. Unlike Japan and our Western partners who recognize the value of coordinated approaches, China prefers separate, bilateral engagements in Africa. This allows China to push for opaque, back room deals, including military agreements. China uses bilateral intelligence sharing, technology transfers, arms sales and training to influence African militaries. For example, China shared drone intelligence with Nigeria and donated patrol boats to Ghana to combat piracy. This is noteworthy because China justified its first overseas base in Djibouti based on counterpiracy cooperation in the Gulf of Aden and is now looking to expand its naval access along Africa's western coast. In addition to its preferred bilateral cooperation and engagement, China has recently stepped up its attempts to influence multilateral organizations in Africa as well. Chinese troops serve in six out of seven current U.N. peace operations and currently lead one U.N. mission. China also provides funding and equipment to the U.N., African Union, GS Sahel, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The AFRICOM Campaign Plan defends U.S. partnerships in Africa against malign Chinese activity through its competition framework and two lines of effort. The competition framework is based on a range of desired conditions supporting U.S. strategic and operational access. The two lines of effort are to "Gain and Maintain Strategic Access & Influence" and to "Coordinate Action with Allies & Partners to Achieve Shared Security Objectives." In support of these efforts, AFRICOM closely monitors Chinese military activity, weighs the long term strategic implications of China's full spectrum of diplomatic, informational, military and economic activities, and works with our African and international partners to address shared threats together. In order to do more, AFRICOM needs to be able to stand by its commitments and remain consistently engaged. Major reductions in AFRICOM security cooperation funding and exercise funding between 2018 and 2021 created a perception that the U.S. and AFRICOM are walking away. AFRICOM's presence on the continent, especially in terms of: Defense Attaché offices, posture (SFAB rotations), support to multilateral operations, exercises, and peace and security forums, must reinforce a sense of commitment that our allies and partners can count on.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. MOULTON

Mr. MOULTON. As we draw down to zero combat troops in Afghanistan, it sounds like there are currently many options on the table for over-the-horizon capabilities and that General McKenzie is relatively confident in the U.S. military's ability to conduct "find, fix, and strike" operations for counterterrorism in Afghanistan to ensure it does not yet again become a base for international terrorist operations. But our interests in Afghanistan extend beyond counterterrorism—our national interest is to have a relatively stable Afghanistan with a government that remains an ally

of the United States. Ms. Dory and General McKenzie, what is your plan for ensuring that we can still provide support to the Afghan government, as well as security support to ensure a U.S. embassy and diplomatic presence in Afghanistan?

Ms. DORY. The Department remains committed to continuing a close defense relationship with the Afghan Government focused on supporting the Afghan forces through the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund, which is critical to their ability to defend their country, and to maintaining a relatively stable Afghanistan whose government remains an ally of the United States. The United States will also maintain a counterterrorism capacity with military and intelligence assets in the region that can counter the re-emergence of terrorist threats in Afghanistan and deal with it if it does emerge. We will also hold the Taliban accountable if they are not doing what they have committed to do in the February 2020 U.S.-Taliban agreement, particularly preventing any group or individual, including al-Qaeda, from using the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and our allies. The only remaining military presence in Afghanistan will be the force required to protect our diplomats. We have undertaken extensive planning of our own and have consulted with our allies and partners to ensure that our diplomats in Afghanistan will have what they need to fulfill their important and enduring mission.

Mr. MOULTON. Ms. Dory, you state the DOD is not the lead player in Africa, but provides support to other U.S. departments and agencies. As the CCP looks to gain footholds in African infrastructure through “debt trap diplomacy,” are U.S. government efforts like the State Department’s Blue Dot Network and USAID’s Clear Choice sufficient to reduce or replace PRC influence in Africa? Are there additional tools you would like to see the Department or broader U.S. government provide to this effort to secure U.S. interests in Africa and ensure PRC influence does not become a larger security threat? How would you prioritize the use of these tools against other regions, such as eastern Europe and South America, where the PRC is expanding its reach and attempting to establish dominance in areas like 5G?

Ms. DORY. DOD’s partnerships with African governments and militaries play an important role in U.S. whole-of-government efforts to counter malign Chinese activities on the continent. By providing African partners with superior training and equipment that meet their security needs, and doing so transparently and responsibly, DOD offers African nations a preferred alternative to Chinese security wares. Key partnership tools employed by DOD that translate to strategic competition gains include senior leader engagements, joint exercises, port visits, personnel exchanges, the State Partnership Program, training events, and other security cooperation programs. These DOD tools help advance mutual security goals and enhance partner resilience to malign activities, especially in the maritime space as China expands its investments in critical port infrastructure. Professional military education, which is coordinated with the Department of State, is also essential as it enables longstanding ties between military leaders in the United States and in Africa. DOD employs these tools based on each partner nation’s needs and capabilities and with a view to alignment with mutual security priorities.

Mr. MOULTON. I recently co-led a letter with Representative Wittman to Secretary Austin and Deputy Secretary Hicks expressing concerns about the impact the current rate of additional Requests for Forces (RFFs) above the GFMAP has on overtaxing our forces and resources and delaying services’ vital modernization efforts. General McKenzie, you state that this is a natural tension between those who provide forces and those who employ them, but my sense is that the Department in recent years has leaned too far in favor of the COCOMs, often USCENTCOM. By remaining overly focused on short-term risk, we are trading our readiness for great power competition. General McKenzie, how can you as a Combatant Commander better support this balance and assist the Secretary in making the choice to prioritize military modernization?

General MCKENZIE. (U) Our Service Chiefs’ role in military modernization is to seek future technologies and field new equipment necessary to out-pace our near-peer competitors, namely China and Russia. At times, the result of this long-term focus is a shortage of critical force element capabilities in the near-term. A combatant commander’s (CCDR’s) role is to identify required capabilities to meet directed operations and approved operational plans. These demand signals are registered, and if validated by the Joint Staff, proceed as force requests to the Services to source. However, sourcing our numerous CCDRs at once is not sustainable especially based on the existing Service capacity or inventory. To better seek a balance in the risk to force and risk to mission, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as the Global Integrator, will make Best Military Advice recommendations to the Secretary of Defense who will make final decisions. With a decision to not source, CCDRs will mitigate the lack of sourcing of near-term capabilities with potential reductions or changes in requested capabilities, identify suitable in-lieu-of capabilities,

or revise their operational plans under supply-informed constraints. The CJCS and Secretary of Defense are ultimately the fulcrum in the balance of the Services' military modernization and the CCDRs' global campaign plans and regional directed operations. As stated in my testimony, the process works well to inform our senior military and civilian leadership so that they can determine their tolerance in accepting the near-term or long-term risks.

Mr. MOULTON. As we draw down to zero combat troops in Afghanistan, it sounds like there are currently many options on the table for over-the-horizon capabilities and that General McKenzie is relatively confident in the U.S. military's ability to conduct "find, fix, and strike" operations for counterterrorism in Afghanistan to ensure it does not yet again become a base for international terrorist operations. But our interests in Afghanistan extend beyond counterterrorism—our national interest is to have a relatively stable Afghanistan with a government that remains an ally of the United States. Ms. Dory and General McKenzie, what is your plan for ensuring that we can still provide support to the Afghan government, as well as security support to ensure a U.S. embassy and diplomatic presence in Afghanistan?

General MCKENZIE. (U) First, I would like to be clear that while I believe we can conduct counterterrorism from over the horizon, it will not be easy. The United States will maintain a counterterrorism capacity with military and intelligence assets in the region that can counter the reemergence of terrorist threats in Afghanistan and deal with it if it does emerge. Second, USCENTCOM is developing plans to conduct management of the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund, contracted logistic support, and end use monitoring from over-the-horizon. The Department of Defense is working with the Department of State to ensure the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan has the necessary security resources to protect U.S. diplomatic personnel and facilities after the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. BACON

Mr. BACON. The Kurdish Peshmerga have been key allies in our fight against ISIS in Iraq and critical to our efforts in promoting a stable Iraq. How does a professional, well-trained and properly equipped Peshmerga Forces support the national security interests of the United States and provide stability in the region? What role do you believe the Peshmerga can play to ensure future threats like ISIS do not res-pawn?

Ms. DORY. Working by, with, and through vetted partner forces, U.S. and Coalition forces are able to maintain pressure on ISIS and establish security conditions to address stabilization needs. The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), which includes the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs, are the cornerstone of this approach in Iraq. Working within the ISF architecture and under the command of the Government of Iraq, the Peshmerga play a critical role in denying ISIS safe haven in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and denying ISIS freedom of movement across the Iraq-Syria border. Further security engagement with Iraq—including with the Peshmerga—will continue to help the ISF's counterterrorism capabilities improve and contributes to U.S. national security objectives.

Mr. BACON. The UAE has been a key U.S. ally and has made monumental progress in its relationship with Israel through the Abraham Accords. It's been reported that the U.S. administration has recently approved a deal to sell F-35s to the United Arab Emirates. What do you see as the operational and strategic advantages to the United States of the UAE being equipped with F-35s? What concerns does DOD have the sale of the F-35 to UAE?

Ms. DORY. As has been discussed with Congress, the administration intends to move forward with these arms sales to the UAE, even as we continue consulting with Emirati officials to ensure we have clear mutual understandings with respect to Emirati obligations and actions before, during, and after delivery. Implementation of these sales is an indication of the strength of our strategic partnership with the UAE and supports shared national security interests to counter regional threats and enhance interoperability with one of our most capable security partners in the region. This sale comes with the high expectation that U.S. technology and advanced weapons systems will be protected and used in accordance with all applicable laws, including the law of armed conflict. We anticipate a robust and sustained dialogue with the UAE to ensure that any arms transfers meet our mutual strategic objectives while protecting U.S. technology.

Mr. BACON. How can the US Congress best ensure that sufficient security assistance is provided to support the Peshmerga in counterterrorism operations and in maintaining general military readiness? Do you see CTEF program as the best way to support the Kurdish Peshmerga in the future? Do you see 333 security assist-

ance authorities playing a key role in ensuring the readiness and sustainment of Peshmerga?

Ms. DORY. The Department of Defense currently relies on Section 1236 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year (FY) 2015, as amended, and the Counter-ISIS Train & Equip Fund (CTEF) to support operations to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Iraq. Section 1236 and CTEF remain essential to ensuring we can achieve this objective, working by, with, and through the Government of Iraq (GoI). The Ministry of Peshmerga is organizationally and doctrinally a part of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). It takes direction from the GoI and also receives funding and equipment from the GoI. The Peshmerga also coordinates regulations and doctrine with the Iraqi Armed Forces to establish commonality and interoperability. For example, the Peshmerga have the same radios as the Iraqi Army in order to improve their connectivity and ability to be interoperable. Further, Peshmerga units can be, and have been, deployed outside the Kurdistan region in support of other Iraqi missions. As a general matter, we understand that Peshmerga forces are under the command and control of the GoI. The Peshmerga's functional responsibilities include conducting counterterrorism and border security operations, which are supportable mission sets under 10 USC 333(a). This presents opportunities to develop traditional security cooperation and institutional capacity building mechanisms with the GoI gradually. Peshmerga eligibility for Section 333 assistance would be determined at the time a Section 333 program is proposed.

Mr. BACON. The Kurdish Peshmerga have been key allies in our fight against ISIS in Iraq and critical to our efforts in promoting a stable Iraq. How does a professional, well-trained and properly equipped Peshmerga Forces support the national security interests of the United States and provide stability in the region? What role do you believe the Peshmerga can play to ensure future threats like ISIS do not re-spawn?

General MCKENZIE. (U) Professional and well-equipped Peshmerga Forces have been a valuable partner for the U.S. since 1991, and currently play a critical role in the ongoing fight against ISIS. A stable Iraqi Kurdistan enables all of Iraq's stability. Furthermore, professional and well-trained Peshmerga forces are a bulwark against a potential resurgence of ISIS. To maintain continued pressure against a resurgence of ISIS and other malign actors in and around the IKR, it may require a CTEF enabled Pesh Support commitment through, FY23 at a minimum. The concern is the ability of Government of Iraq to properly fund the KRG in accordance with the Iraqi Constitution given the difficulties in implementing the recently approved budget law, the COVID-19 impact on the IKR, and the current low market prices of energy resources.

Mr. BACON. The UAE has been a key U.S. ally and has made monumental progress in its relationship with Israel through the Abraham Accords. It's been reported that the U.S. administration has recently approved a deal to sell F-35s to the United Arab Emirates. What do you see as the operational and strategic advantages to the United States of the UAE being equipped with F-35s? What concerns does DOD have the sale of the F-35 to UAE?

General MCKENZIE. (U) The UAE is among our most capable military partners within the USCENTCOM area of responsibility and a major security partner. The sale of F-35s, MQ-9s, and relevant munitions—for which there are signed Letters of Offer and Acceptance, will provide the UAE credible defense capability and enable continued interoperability with U.S. forces. This equipment represents a significant increase in capability over current airframes in the UAE's inventory. I refer you to Ms. Dory's response to this same question regarding any concerns DOD has regarding the sale.

Mr. BACON. How can the US Congress best ensure that sufficient security assistance is provided to support the Peshmerga in counterterrorism operations and in maintaining general military readiness? Do you see CTEF program as the best way to support the Kurdish Peshmerga in the future? Do you see 333 security assistance authorities playing a key role in ensuring the readiness and sustainment to the Peshmerga?

General MCKENZIE. (U) CTEF support to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) remains essential to our "by, with, and through" approach to the counter-ISIS campaign. With respect to the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs (MoPA), which is a component of the ISF, CTEF currently remains our best option to sustain an adequate level of counter-ISIS operations and general military readiness. CTEF addresses immediate tactical requirements (e.g., cash stipends and classes of supply) of vetted, unified, Kurdish Security Forces (KSF) personnel primarily assigned to Regional Guard Brigades (RGBs). There are opportunities to explore future security cooperation with the MoPA through Section 333, which could gradually improve the security assist-

ance relationship by building specific capabilities aligned with long-term U.S. objectives with the Government of Iraq.

