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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 SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC, Thursday, March 7, 2019.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:01 a.m., in room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Adam Smith (chairman of the committee) presiding.

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

The CHAIRMAN. Good morning. I call the meeting to order.

Welcome. Before we get started, just one quick announcement. I made the announcement yesterday and sent it around. We are going to, on the questioning, go in reverse order this morning, so least senior and on up.

So welcome to this hearing. We are having our posture hearing this morning focusing on CENTCOM [U.S. Central Command] and AFRICOM [U.S. Africa Command], and we are very honored this morning to have with us General Thomas Waldhauser, who is the Commander of U.S. Africa Command; and General Joseph Votel, who is the Commander of U.S. Central Command; as well as Ms. Kathryn Wheelbarger, who is the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

I want to begin by thanking General Votel and General Waldhauser. I know you are very sad that this is your last opportunity to testify before Congress and have this hearing, but I want to make special note of it and thank you both for years of outstanding service to our country. It has been a pleasure working with both of you.

And this morning we are going to hear specifically from you about what is going on in your areas of responsibility, and they are areas where there is a lot going on in terms of our national security concerns.

Beginning in Africa, we have a presence throughout that continent, and there are a number of issues we are concerned about. I think it begins with the threat from transnational terrorist groups, both in the Horn of Africa and in West Africa as well. We look forward to hearing an update on how our efforts are going there, both to keep those transnational terrorist threats at bay, also how are we working with our various partners both in the region and allies in NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] to help contain that threat.

And then the overall issue in that region continues to be stability, particularly in Somalia and Libya, and how are we doing on building sustainable governments in those places so that we can reduce the threat.

We are also curious, as we have made the transition from better than a decade of primarily focusing on the transnational terrorist threats to a new era of great power conflict in Russia and China. And Russia and China I know are involved throughout Africa, also in various places within the CENTCOM responsibility, so hearing about what they are up to as well will be of concern.

In CENTCOM, we continue to have a specific focus on Iraq and Syria as the caliphate is just about wiped out, but ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] is still a presence in that region, as are other transnational terrorist threats, and certainly the same is true in Afghanistan. So getting an update on that is our primary concern.

Now, as a general rule, we want to try to get to the point where we do not have to have a military presence in as many places in the world as we have. That is my personal objective. We would like to rely on partners, reduce the necessity of us having troops abroad, but at the same time, we have to make sure that we are meeting our national security objectives and protecting ourselves from that.

And the one comment I will make, and I know this is not either of your gentlemen's doing, but we need a consistent policy that our allies can rely on. I think it is problematic when we make dramatic altering decisions in what seems like the blink of an eye in a Presidential tweet.

It is not that I don't think we need to get to the point where we reduce our troop presence in Syria and Afghanistan; it is just not something we should do in that ad hoc a manner. It catches our allies off guard and creates problems.

I was reading extensively where it has significantly damaged our relationship with President Macron in France. He was caught completely by surprise by our decision that we were going to pull out of Syria.

Now, the truth is, we are building towards a drawdown in Syria. The point was, you know, we wanted to build up to defeat ISIS, remove the caliphate, and get to the point where we could pass responsibility off to partners in the region.

And if we had discussions with our allies and announced those plans in a rational way, I think that would help maintain the strength of our alliances. So we are concerned by the way the policy seems to bounce around from day to day.

The same is true in Afghanistan, as the announcement was made a couple months back that we were going to—I believe the tweet was completely pull out of Afghanistan. I know that hasn't happened and I know there has been updates since then, but a more consistent policy, I think, would help us maintain our allies and help build the confidence in the United States that is necessary to maintain those allies and maintain our interests.

I look forward to testimony from both of you.

And also, Ms. Wheelbarger, appreciate you being here as well. You are not retiring, I am sorry. It is sort of like their day in that

regard. But we appreciate your work as well. We thank you all for being here.

With that, I will turn it over to the ranking member, Mr. Thornberry.

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

Mr. THORNBERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I too want to welcome our witnesses and express my appreciation and respect for General Votel and General Waldhauser. My understanding is General Votel's change of command will be at the end of this month, General Waldhauser's sometime this summer.

I think it is worth just stopping for a second and reflecting on the significant progress that has been made against certain terrorist networks in recent years. To me, 2014 doesn't seem that long ago, but ISIS controlled an area the size of Great Britain, and today, we are talking about the last village and a tremendous change of affairs on the ground.

Somalia has been a challenge for us when it comes to terrorism for a long time, and my sense is that we have made tremendous progress there as well. Now, this progress is a result of a lot of folks, including some decisions by this administration, to untie the hands of our military to be more effective. But the two gentlemen before us had been at the center of those efforts in various capacities—SOCOM [U.S. Special Operations Command], CENTCOM, AFRICOM, commands on the ground—and each of them has played a leading role in making this progress. And I think it is important to step back and reflect.

Like you, Mr. Chairman, I share the concerns about where we go going forward. We made a lot of progress on terrorists, but they are not gone. As a matter of fact, in some ways, they have spread out and are more difficult to locate. And so we must maintain pressure on terrorist networks, and yet because of the rise in great power competition, our resources have to be spread in a variety of different ways.

And while we maintain pressure on terrorist networks in CENTCOM and AFRICOM, there is great power competition going on in both of those regions as well, which we cannot lose sight of. Many of us have seen that firsthand as we travel to Africa as well as to the Middle East.

So there is a lot to talk about. I want to, again, just return to appreciation for the—not only their service, but the successful results of their leadership in these challenges that we have faced, and I look forward to the conversations to come.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

And we will begin with Ms. Wheelbarger.

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

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Thank you. Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, distinguished members of the committee, thank

you for inviting me to testify on policy matters related to the United States Central Command—

The CHAIRMAN. I apologize, but could you pull the microphone a little bit closer to your face there.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Sure. I will try to speak up.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. WHEELBARGER [continuing]. Alongside commanders General Votel and General Waldhauser. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the men and women of the Department of Defense, their families, whose dedication—and their families. Their dedication, their talent, and sacrifice enable us to execute our policies around the world every day.

You said this may be General Votel's last hearing. This is my first, so I wanted to take this opportunity to thank the committee for your strong collaboration and bipartisan support that you provide the Department of Defense. That is a vital contribution this committee makes to our dialogue on defense issues nationwide.

My time as a senior staff member with national security committees in both the House and in the Senate instilled in me a great respect for the leadership that this committee provides and the invaluable contribution you provide—connection you provide to the American people.

Students of military history spend a great deal of attention on the relationship between military commanders and statesmen or, rather, the proper level of civilian oversight of military activity and operations. An equally important component of military history is understanding national will, and that is the will to see threats clearly, approach them with sound policy, and remain committed to the country's defense even when the cost seems high.

In the American system, the U.S. Congress is a fulcrum point where thoughtful oversight and sustained national will can come together. It is a noble and sometimes difficult challenge, and we at the Department appreciate your unique role in ensuring our military has the resources, authorities, and the legitimacy necessary to deter and defeat any foe.

It is a great privilege and honor for me to be here today with two very devoted commanders to explain our defense policy to these regions. Our policy approach is nested in the guidance from the 2017 National Security Strategy [NSS] and the 2018 National Defense Strategy [NDS].

In support of the NSS goals to protect the American people, defend the homeland, and promote prosperity and peace from a position of strength, the NDS focuses on three aspects of U.S. power: our lethality, our partners and allies, and our institutions. It sets long-term competition with other states as our top national security priority even while we continue to address regional and terrorism threats.

To compete in today's complex security environment, to defend future generations of Americans against near-peer competitors, and to manage ongoing threats from North Korea, Iran, and terrorist groups, we must make certain adjustments to our posture. We must also avoid prioritizing urgent problems at the expense of building readiness and capacity for potential high-end conflict into the future. We must deter and confront adversaries, while avoiding

miscalculation or escalation that would distract and ultimately undermine our national security interests.

In the Middle East and Africa, our policy objective is to increase regional stability and secure and advance U.S. interests working by, with, and through a network of international partners. By enhancing the capabilities and capacity of our partners, we reduce the risk to our homeland while increasing the internal security and stability of vulnerable states, often playing a supporting role to other government agencies and partners in the region.

Specifically with the Middle East, it remains vitally important to our national security interests for four fundamental reasons: First, we are involved in active operations at the request of and support to our partners in countering extremists that threaten the region and the homeland; second, the Middle East is the crossroads of global competition with Russia and China; third, we face an aggressive Iran whose actions destabilize the region; and finally, our national security and economy depend on open commerce through the Middle East maritime domain and the free flow of natural resources. We must remain postured and engaged throughout this region.

To that end, DOD's [Department of Defense's] policy objectives are to ensure continued success in our campaign against ISIS and al-Qaida and in support of our partners in the region, while also preparing to compete with China, Russia, and Iran for regional and global influence. We also invest in sustainable partnerships to reduce vulnerabilities of weak states as part of a whole-of-government effort to address instability.

With our partners, we have ongoing CT [counterterrorism] campaigns in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. We also are investing in defense partnerships that continue to allow us to gain far more than we invest in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, and throughout the Gulf. Our partners are key to securing our interests in the region.

We understand the importance and trust emplaced upon the Department of Defense for the security of every American, and our commitment to our national security and prosperity in this theater remains strong even as we address a host of other current and future threats.

In Africa, vast, diverse, and dynamic, Africa is a continent of opportunities as well as challenges, with a possibility of surging in either direction. The Department must remain engaged in the region to foster positive trends and arrest the negative ones.

As outlined in the 2018 DOD Strategy for Africa, the Department will continue to pursue African-led security solutions while maintaining the ability to act unilaterally to protect U.S. citizens and interests. As such, DOD supports U.S. whole-of-government efforts to address African security challenges, leverages international partnerships to support U.S. security objectives, maintains strategic access and influence, and seeks low-cost, resource-sustainable, and innovative security solutions.

Employing our by, with, and through approach, we use a variety of tools, including capacity-building programs, security assistance, military equipment sales, education, training, and exercises to work closely with African and other international partners to achieve our policy goals. Those goals are to, first, seek to advance

U.S. interests and influence in the region and maintain strategic access, which is especially important in an era of increasing near-peer competition; second, we seek to deny safe haven to terrorists and disrupt their ability to direct or support external operations against the U.S.; third, we seek to support our Department of State and other interagency colleagues by securing U.S. diplomatic posts; fourth, we strive to grow current partners and develop new relationships; and finally, we seek to enhance African partner capability to achieve our shared objectives into the future.

In conclusion, the Department is well positioned to address the range of dynamic issues facing the United States in the Middle East and Africa. Our balanced approach helps ensure the Department can meet a variety of present and future threats, while enhancing the strength and agility of our forces.

I thank you for the opportunity to share our views today.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Wheelbarger can be found in the Appendix on page 53.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.
General Votel.

**STATEMENT OF GEN JOSEPH L. VOTEL, USA, COMMANDER,
U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND**

General VOTEL. Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, distinguished members of the committee, good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored to testify alongside Acting Assistant Secretary Katie Wheelbarger and my friend and fellow Minnesotan, General Tom Waldhauser.

I come before you today on behalf of the men and women working tirelessly across the Central Command area of responsibility. They are the best, and I am proud to stand among them as their commander. All of these great Americans have families and communities across our country that support their service members from near and far, and we are equally proud and appreciative of their service and sacrifice as well.

CENTCOM remains a dynamic, challenging, dangerous, yet hopeful area of responsibility, an area of great contrast and contradiction, rich with history, culture, youth, and resources, but riven with sectarianism, violence, disenfranchisement, and economic disparity. It is an area where we retain vital national interests, preventing attacks on our homeland, countering malign and destabilizing influence, preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and ensuring freedom of navigation and commerce through critical international waterways.

I would like to use my time this morning to give you a quick overview of our key ongoing operations and opportunities. In Afghanistan, the President's South Asia strategy is working. The efforts of our Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, show there is a path to progress, but there is much left to do to achieve our end state of reconciliation between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban.

Toward this end, our military efforts are focused on supporting the Afghan Security Forces and providing Ambassador Khalilzad the maximum military pressure and leverage to support his diplomatic efforts to establish a framework that will lead to an Afghan

dialogue, a reduction in violence, and ultimately, a negotiated settlement.

Importantly, we cannot forget that Afghanistan was used as a platform to attack our citizens and homeland in 2001, and we have to ensure this never happens again. Safeguarding this national interest and preventing violent extremist organizations like al-Qaida and ISIS in the Khorasan from plotting attacks against our country is also a continuing effort for our forces, one that we will need to be prepared to address as long as violent extremists can operate from this region.

In Iraq and Syria, the unrelenting efforts of the 79-member Defeat-ISIS Coalition, the determination and bravery of the Iraqi Security Forces and our Syrian Democratic Force partners, has largely liberated the so-called physical caliphate of ISIS. An area of 34,000 square miles which they once controlled, now reduced to less than a single square mile. Reduction of the physical caliphate is a monumental military accomplishment, but the fight against ISIS and violent extremism is far from over.

While ISIS has been battered by the Syrian Democratic Forces and coalition forces, we should be clear that what we are seeing now is not the surrender of ISIS as an organization, but a calculated decision to preserve the safety of their families and preservation of their capabilities by taking their chances in camps for internally displaced persons and going to ground in remote areas and waiting for the right time to resurge.

Recent observations by our men and women on the ground highlight that the ISIS population being evacuated from the remaining vestiges of the caliphate largely remain unrepentant, unbroken, and radicalized. We will need to maintain a vigilant offensive against this now widely dispersed and disaggregated organization that includes leaders, fighters, facilitators, resources, and, of course, their toxic ideology.

And the broader international community will need to determine how we deal with the thousands of fighters and family members now being held and safeguarded by the Syrian Democratic Forces. In my view, this is a serious generational problem that if not handled properly will sow the seeds of future violent extremism.

As the Defeat-ISIS campaign in Syria transitions from liberating terrain to enabling local security forces and addressing the ISIS clandestine insurgency, we will continue our deliberate withdrawal of forces and capabilities as directed by the President, but also retain a residual force on the ground to continue our mission and safeguard our interests. These details are being developed now and will emphasize campaign continuity and capitalize on the contributions of our coalition partners.

In Yemen, the fragile cease-fire on the port of Hodeidah is a promising albeit increasingly challenging to implement step, demonstrating some willingness on both sides of the conflict to negotiate and end this humanitarian disaster. Towards this objective, CENTCOM supports the diplomatic efforts and work of the United Nations special envoy to facilitate the peace process by providing advice and assistance and serving as an interlocutor through our trusted relationships in the region.

We also remain steadfast in reminding the Saudi-led coalition partners of their obligations under the law of armed conflict and ensuring that the fight in Yemen does not spread across the region, sowing more instability and threatening critical infrastructure and U.S. lives and interests.

In Yemen, we also face a threat from violent extremist groups. To address this, we work closely with our indigenous partners to disrupt these organizations to ensure they do not have the capability or opportunity to attack our country or citizens or those of our partners. I assess that our current efforts are keeping these organizations in a state that limits their ability to conduct external operations. We must continue to do this.

Against the backdrop of these conflicts is the Iranian regime. Their efforts are not limited to the support they provide to the Houthis in Yemen. They strive to be a regional hegemon and use malign influence, qualitatively and quantitatively expanded capabilities, and facilitation and support to multiple proxies to exert pressure, threaten other countries in the region, supplant U.S. and Western influence, and threaten access to critical waterways vital to global commerce.

Our military efforts here are focused on supporting a broader U.S. Government pressure campaign through deterrence, assurance, and competition. Our longstanding military relationships with partners across the region are critical to this effort. The Iranian regime remains the long-term destabilizing factor in this region.

We do see reasons for optimism across the region. The capabilities and resilience of the Afghan special operations forces are notable and mark them as a reliable counterterrorism partner for the future.

The emerging relationships in the Central Asian states look to provide us opportunities in an area long dominated and influenced by Russia and China. An Iraqi Security Force that has risen from the ashes of 2014 and now proudly and capably protects their country against ISIS resurgence can be a bulwark to future extremism.

Egyptian armed forces have more effectively fought ISIS in the Sinai and are now taking active measures to address the underlying issues that give life to these violent extremist groups and are helping to contain the threat.

Steadfast partners like Jordan are making the most of the support we provide to maintain their singularly unique role of moderation in the region.

A highly innovative and increasingly professional Lebanese armed force is emerging as a legitimate protector of their nation and a good partner to us.

And partners across the Gulf join us in countering terrorism, providing security in the maritime environment, and effectively defending against missile threat.

And so it goes in the Central Region today and every day, great promise and opportunity mixed with contradiction and conflict.

Let me conclude my remarks where I started, with our people and their families. They are the best America has to offer, and they continually demonstrate commitment and devotion to our Nation, our mission, and to each other. They deserve the best equipment,

the best pay, the best health care, and the best housing. Their commitment is surpassed only by the families that support them, and they deserve our best as well.

As I conclude my tour in the next few weeks as the Commander of U.S. Central Command, I want to thank all of you, members of this committee and your staff, and indeed all of the Members of Congress and the staff, for your strong support to our men and women in uniform, our Department of Defense civilians, and their families.

I ask for your continued support to provide our service men and women everything they need to accomplish their missions and lead healthy, fulfilling lives in continuing service to our Nation. Thank you again for allowing me to represent CENTCOM before you today. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Votel can be found in the Appendix on page 72.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.
General Waldhauser.

**STATEMENT OF GEN THOMAS D. WALDHAUSER, USMC,
COMMANDER, U.S. AFRICA COMMAND**

General WALDHAUSER. Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to update you on the efforts of United States Africa Command. I am also honored this morning to be here with General Votel and Assistant Secretary Wheelbarger to discuss the challenges we face in our respective areas of responsibility.

I would like to begin this morning by remembering the soldier we lost on the continent during operations in Somalia this past year. I offer my sincere condolences to the family of Staff Sergeant Alexander Conrad. We honor his commitment, service, and dedication to duty.

We also honor the sacrifice of our African partners who pay the ultimate price advancing peace and development across the African continent. Additionally, we thank our families, our service members, our civilian workforce, especially those who serve on the continent, oftentimes in remote locations, for their professionalism and commitment to AFRICOM'S mission.

2019 marks the beginning of AFRICOM's second decade as a combatant command. As we enter this period, we have adapted our strategy for Africa based on updated national guidance, which includes the President's 2017 National Security Strategy and the Secretary of Defense's 2018 National Defense Strategy.

Specifically, the National Defense Strategy has shaped the focus of the armed services, outlining broad guidance to enhance readiness for high-end combat, while instructing the combatant commands, among other things, to strengthen alliances and attract new partners.

The recently released U.S. Strategy Toward Africa, the Department of Defense Strategy for Africa, and the National Strategy for Counterterrorism refocused our whole-of-government approach in the era of great power competition to advance U.S. influence and maintain strategic access across the globe.

Taken comprehensively, the overall U.S. strategic interests in Africa are very clear: Support the U.S. whole-of-government efforts to address security challenges; leverage partnerships to prevent transnational threats from overwhelming African governments or endangering U.S. interests; maintain strategic access and advance American influence, including economic opportunities; counter violent extremist organizations; and protect U.S. citizens and the homeland.

To underscore the strategy for disrupting extremists, we remain committed to synchronizing our kinetic authorities. Persistent pressure on Al Shabaab, ISIS, and the al-Qaida associated groups remains necessary to prevent the destabilization of African nations.

U.S. strategic interests on the continent cannot be solely advanced through the use of military force alone. AFRICOM uses the military tool in concert with diplomacy and development in order to negate the drivers of conflict and create opportunity for the African citizens.

In Somalia, we work closely with the ambassador, now permanently located in Mogadishu, and the USAID [United States Agency for International Development] mission director to help the Somalians assume responsibility for their own security and prosperity.

In Libya, our counterterrorism commitment supports the U.S. chargé who works closely with the international community to prevent civil conflict and facilitate the political reconciliation process.

Additionally, our engagements, exercises, and activities throughout Africa are designed to increase U.S. influence, strengthen local security forces, and ensure our status as the preferred security partner. For example, in East Africa, our programs continue to modernize partner security forces as in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, who export security and contribute forces to the African Union Mission in Somalia.

In North Africa, we have seen significant return on investment with Tunisia and Morocco demonstrating the capacity to absorb advanced U.S. programs and lead the security-related exercises and operations.

AFRICOM provides training, advice, and assistance to the western African nations which make up the G5 Sahel Force, as well as to the multinational joint task force working to contain violent extremism and secure the borders within the Lake Chad basin countries.

Our partner networks and influence ensures access for U.S. forces in times of crisis to protect U.S. personnel and facilities, such as in Djibouti, a location with strategic significance to multiple combatant commands.

In conclusion, the most important use of the U.S. military tool on the African continent is when our engagements emphasize relationships, capacity building, and professionalism. Our activities go beyond military maneuvers and tactics. They focus on a range of professional values, such as respect for the rule of law, human rights, and the integration of gender perspectives.

I am proud to lead a team of professionals who have built strong and trusting relationships with African partners, the U.S. interagency, and the international community to foster security, stability, and prosperity in Africa.

On behalf of the service members, civilian employees, and the families of United States Africa Command, thank you for your support, and thank you for the opportunity to be with you here this morning.

[The prepared statement of General Waldhauser can be found in the Appendix on page 114.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you all very much.

When we get into the questions—this has come up—we try to keep it to 5 minutes. And I apologize to the witnesses, if we hit the 5-minute mark, I will try and cut you off. If there is a question you haven't answered, sometimes you can submit that for the record, although we try to keep it to 5 minutes both in terms of the answers and the questions.

And with that, we will start with Mrs. Luria.

Mrs. LURIA. Well, thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

And thank you, Ms. Wheelbarger, for mentioning the Middle East maritime domain, because that is what I would like to focus on today.

Approximately 5 years ago, the Navy implemented the Optimized Fleet Response Plan, which resulted in more surge capability but less deployed on-station time for our carriers, basically switching from a 24-month cycle to a 36-month cycle.

And, General Votel, in fiscal year 2019, was your request for carrier strike group presence met?

General VOTEL. Congresswoman, no, we did not have carriers all the time that we would like them, and so we had to work solutions that included other platforms and other coalition partners to help meet those requirements.

Mrs. LURIA. So understanding that this is, you know, an unclassified hearing, could you quantify just maybe one-half, one-fifth, one-third, approximately the amount of carrier presence you received versus what you requested?

General VOTEL. Congresswoman, I will take that for the record so I can give you a precise answer.

[The information referred to is for official use only and retained in the committee files.]

Mrs. LURIA. Okay. So you alluded to this a little bit in your previous comment, but was your allocation for carrier presence sufficient to meet your ongoing security needs that you have in the region?

General VOTEL. The presence that we have had has been sufficient to support the ongoing operations that we have been supporting in Afghanistan and Iraq and Syria in conjunction with our land-based capabilities.

Mrs. LURIA. And would you feel that they meet the requirements that you have for maintaining maritime presence in the AOR [area of responsibility]?

General VOTEL. In some cases, we have been challenged in these areas of continuing to do that, so this, again, is something that we have to work with our coalition partners on to help offset this and—at times when we will not have the presence that we would like, and we look to use our coalition partners to help do that. And I think we have successfully done that.

Mrs. LURIA. So pivoting back to the impacts on you as a combatant commander of the Optimized Fleet Response Plan and the idea that it creates more surge capability versus more deployed capability, as a combatant commander, which of those is more important to you?

General VOTEL. Well, I think certainly in CENTCOM, a key part of our responsibilities is assurance, and we do that through our presence, engagements, and other things we do, and deterrence against, you know, the influences in the region that would pursue malign activities.

So those to me are the most important aspects that they provide for us, and, of course, you know, directly supporting the freedom of navigation and commerce through the critical choke points that exist in the CENTCOM area of responsibility.

Mrs. LURIA. So to leverage on your comments, the surge capability that is being created by the Optimized Fleet Response Plan where the carriers are, for the most part, remaining CONUS [continental United States] but available on demand, obviously adding a transit time to report to your theater, is limiting some of the capability you might have to respond in a contingency?

General VOTEL. Well, I think we are early on in the concept right now. So, you know, I know the Department has successfully done this in other combatant commands. I have benefited from some of that capability residually being able to operate in my area and come down in my area. So we will look for opportunities. We are looking for opportunities where we can apply that concept as well.

So I think we have a ways to go yet before we declare that this is not a concept that works. I think we have seen it work in other combatant commands, and we look forward to trying it in CENTCOM as well.

Mrs. LURIA. Okay. So finally, just to wrap up, do you feel confident in your ability to execute contingency plans potentially from our adversaries who might become a maritime threat within the region based off of the limited carrier presence that you have had over the last year?

General VOTEL. Congresswoman, I do. I do.

Mrs. LURIA. Thank you. I yield the balance of my time.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Waltz.

Mr. WALTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen, thank you. I especially want to thank your families who truly bear the burden of your service. You love what you do, I know, but they truly have to bear the burden. It is a team effort.

So I think broadly what the National Defense Strategy is trying to do, and it is a tough one, is how do we deal with the metastasizing Islamic extremist threat, peer competitors, rogue states, Iran, North Korea, overlaid with \$22 trillion in debt? And what strikes me about your AOR is that it really is the cross section. It is really the confluence of China's One Belt, One Road, Russia's Middle East—push into the Middle East, of Iran's hegemony and, of course, the heart of the extremist threat.

In reading your written testimony, what concerns me a bit, what I want to ask you about specifically as it comes to a couple of the theaters, is just kind of language in there shifting to being a supporting command, of doing more with less, of doing with less re-

sources, particularly in the AFRICOM AOR. And while, of course, we do and this committee needs to help you invest in those near-peer or peer, I would say now, adversaries, I am very worried of the pendulum swinging too far and taking our eye off the ball in this extremist threat that is maybe on its back foot but is absolutely not defeated.

And looking at your testimony in the Senate, I think you agree that ISIS and al-Qaida, you know, ISIS in particular may be defeated as a caliphate but not as a movement. In fact, I would argue, and tell me if you disagree, that that movement is growing and metastasizing, particularly across North Africa and absolutely can return to threaten the United States again.

So looking at Afghanistan in particular, where half the world's terrorist organizations emanate, where the 9/11 attacks emanate, and reading recent reporting of a withdrawal based on a 5-year timeline as part of General Miller and Zal Khalilzad's negotiations, you know, I feel like I am getting transported back to 2009 with President Obama announcing withdrawal timelines.

Do you, General Votel, think timelines as part of our strategy is a good idea, and have you been consulted on that timeline? Is that your best military advice?

General VOTEL. I think, Congressman, I think most of us would say that these decisions have to be based more on conditions than on specific times. But I am certainly aware of the ongoing discussions here and, you know, have provided my advice. My advice is that any decision to reduce forces in Afghanistan should be done in full consultation with our coalition partners and, of course, the Government of Afghanistan. It should pivot off political progress in the reconciliation process.

Mr. WALTZ. Do the conditions on the ground now merit a withdrawal? And that is both a question for you and for you, Ms. Wheelbarger.

General VOTEL. Congressman, we have not been directed to withdraw. There are no orders to withdraw anything. I have no orders—

Mr. WALTZ. But—and your advice is do the conditions merit a withdrawal, a reduction of forces, but whether it is the conditions of the Afghan Army, which I would think we would agree is not ready to stand on its own, or the battlefield conditions from a CT perspective.

General VOTEL. Well, it certainly is a function of the conditions on the ground, but it is also a function of the conditions in the political process as well.

Mr. WALTZ. Right.

General VOTEL. And so as I indicated, as I talked about, my best military advice is that we should make decisions based on the political process—

Mr. WALTZ. I am sorry, General, just in the interest of time, do the conditions now merit a withdrawal and your advice on—you know, 4 years at CENTCOM, on your way out?

General VOTEL. The political conditions where we are in the reconciliation right now don't merit that.

Mr. WALTZ. Okay. General Waldhauser, I only have a few minutes. If I could ask you for the record to submit where we are on

American citizen Jeff Woodke held hostage in Mali, what assets are being dedicated to find him. I think we owe the families that and all American citizens that, where we are. If you could submit that for the record, it would be great.

I understand with optimization you are shifting to a 25 percent withdrawal in a theater that was already an economy of force where, again, the Chinese and Russians are increasingly involved and we have a growing extremist threat. What are you not able to do with that reduction? What risk are we taking?

General WALDHAUSER. First of all, Congressman, on the Woodke issue, I will submit that, and we can talk about it in closed session.

Mr. WALTZ. Thank you.

General WALDHAUSER. Secondly, with regards to optimization, I know we just have a few seconds left to go here, but I just want to emphasize the fact that optimization on the African continent has to do with counterterrorism strategy only. It is a very small niche.

And what we have been directed to do and what we have said we will do are two different things. And moreover, we have been directed to do a cut for the first—an optimization or adjustment or cut for the first 18 months, which takes us out to June of 2020, and I think the number the Pentagon has used was about 10 percent.

So it is difficult to get into the numbers because they move around all the time. But if you say that there is 6,000 military people on the continent today, then that number is roughly close, but in the next 18 months we will optimize some conventional forces and some special operations forces, primarily in areas where their work is pretty much done, where they have—

The CHAIRMAN. I am sorry. The gentleman's time has expired. If you could summarize.

We will move on to Mr. Golden.

Mr. WALTZ. Thank you.

Mr. GOLDEN. Thank you. Just to follow up a little bit on my colleague's questioning about Afghanistan. General Votel, could you tell us, in your opinion, if there were a negotiated withdrawal of U.S. forces without a Taliban-Afghan peace deal that accompanied it, could the Afghan Security Forces at this time provide for their own security and maintain a stable government without U.S. forces on the ground or air support on the battlefield?

General VOTEL. My assessment is the Afghan forces are dependent upon the coalition support that we provide to them.

Mr. GOLDEN. Thank you. This question is for Assistant Secretary Wheelbarger. You know, it has been widely reported that our government is engaged in peace talks with the Taliban. In your opinion, or have you seen any indication at all that the Taliban is willing to consider expanding talks to include the Afghan Government at this time?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. I will preface by saying that Assistant Secretary Schriver actually is responsible for Afghanistan, Pakistan. I do cover NATO, so it is very important for me to follow so we can stay in close alignment with our RSM [Resolute Support Mission] colleagues.

All indications I have is that the negotiations are proceeding with—in a positive direction. I think we all agree that it is impor-

tant if we are going to reach the level of agreement where the insurgency is no longer a concern, it is going to have to involve an Afghan-Taliban reconciliation.

Mr. GOLDEN. So to summarize, given the current security situation on the ground, without, let's say, tri-party negotiations and a settled peace deal between the Afghan Government and the Taliban to include the United States, we are not on, let's say, a roadway to getting to withdrawal?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Again, I would want to defer to my colleagues who cover this specifically, but I do think that we are seeing that this is an opportunity that we have not necessarily seen before and the military is poised to continue supporting the efforts of the reconciliation talks.

Mr. GOLDEN. Thank you. Just shifting gears a little bit. And, General Waldhauser, Semper Fi. Very good to see you, sir. Last year, you testified in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee that climate change was causing some security challenges in Africa in Sahel. It has been about a year, and I saw some recent reporting with ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] noting that temperatures are rising about 1.5 times faster than the global average, and I think in this region we have got about 50 million people who depend upon livestock and therefore need land. And I think your comment was that you were seeing grasslands receding on average about a mile per year, which is pretty significant.

I just want to give you the opportunity here, about a year later, to follow up on that testimony and tell us how you perceive the evolving situation in Sahel, what impact climate change is having on the security situation in the region in regards to competition over scarce resources, and how does this impact the mission of AFRICOM? What kind of steps are you having to take in order to ensure that we don't see conflict?

General WALDHAUSER. The climate change situation continues. The area between—in the Sahel, between the desert to the north and the savannah in the south, the grasslands, those continue to recede. And this has caused problems between the farmers and the herders. And oftentimes, governments aren't able to establish control or laws or legislate that particular situation. So consequently, this becomes an opportunity for armed engagement within the various farmer-herder populations. Secondly—so that is on the security side, if you will.

Secondly, on the humanitarian side, the issue of food insecurity and displaced personnel is a huge issue which continues. So this climate issue has some security aspects both kinetically, if you will, as well as humanitarian.

Mr. GOLDEN. Thank you. I yield back my time.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Bergman.

Mr. BERGMAN. Thank you, Chairman. And, General Waldhauser and General Votel, thank you for always, during your long and very successful careers, setting the highest standards and being an outstanding example of not only keeping those standards, but raising the bar. As someone who served a few days in uniform myself, I am proud as I look at what kind of leadership the young soldiers,

sailors, airmen, Marines, and coastguardsmen have today. So thank you for your long service.

A little over a decade ago, having had the opportunity to sit in some interesting meetings in places like Fallujah or others and participating with various entities, tribes who wanted to come and talk to American military leadership, could you, if you will, describe—I have my—in the memories in my mind what those meetings were like. Could you describe what security cooperation and coalition building, give a couple examples in your arena, some of the—for some of our folks who maybe haven't sat in one of those meetings?

General WALDHAUSER. Thank you, Congressman. I will take a shot at that first. You know, we are building an airstrip on a Nigerien compound in Agadez, in northern Nigeria—Niger. And one of the first times I went up there I met with the local population because they were very interested in what was going on. And you have a very, very diverse group of individuals who have different and sometimes overreach in terms of expectations about what we can do with them.

And so not only to build the airfield there, we have a significant civil-military engagement program so that we work with the schools there to provide desks, we work with the medical people there to provide extra care, and we do things like find children who are lost in the middle of the desert, to help that population.

So the bottom line is, your actions speak louder than words, and sometimes with diverse groups, small things go a long way. And it is important to understand the capabilities and limitations, and their expectations therefore can be met.

Mr. BERGMAN. Thank you.

General VOTEL. Congressman, I would add that one of the most successful coalition efforts that we have in CENTCOM is our coalition maritime force that operates in the waters of the Gulf and, in some cases, outside of the Gulf. And these involve nations in the region and, in fact, some nations from outside of the region who contribute people and ships to our—to the combined maritime force and help us conduct operations that are focused on counter-piracy, on combating terrorism, and on providing security in these critical waterways.

And in all of these cases we have three subordinate combined maritime forces that operate under our naval commander in the region. These are all led by coalition partners. And these are all deeply valued relationships and missions by our coalition partners.

And the authorities and the resources that are provided to us by Congress to maintain these things I think are being very well used. And it is one of the ways that we help make them more resilient, more capable of addressing their own security concerns. So of many coalition efforts, this is one that stands out in my mind.

Mr. BERGMAN. Would either of you, just using Djibouti as an example, in an unclassified way, explain why we are there in that particular place, and also what other countries might be exerting a presence there now that maybe weren't there a while ago?

General WALDHAUSER. The strategic geography of Djibouti is significant to our national strategies, and although it is in the AFRICOM AOR because as Djibouti is, various CÔCOMs [combat-

ant commands], to include CENTCOM, utilize that location: CENTCOM, SOCOM, EUCOM [U.S. European Command], TRANSCOM [U.S. Transportation Command]. So this is a very strategic location for us.

And I would tell you that this issue of either optimization or being able to share assets, CENTCOM and AFRICOM share assets, in this particular case ISR [intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance] assets, attack aircraft assets, and we use Djibouti as a hub that allows us to be more efficient in use of some of our material.

General VOTEL. No, I would absolutely agree. And I think it also makes better use of our resources. When we are able to shift resources back and forth across our combatant command boundaries, I think we are making better use of the resources the American people provide to us, and I think we are actually being more effective in terms of it.

So locations like Djibouti, I think, are incredibly important to what is going on. Of course, it sits astride the Bab al-Mandeb, one of the three critical choke points. We do see the presence of others in the area. Certainly, the Chinese have interests here and are steaming in the waters of the Central Command on a regular basis.

Mr. BERGMAN. Thank you. I hate to cut you off, but I know the chairman is going to say my time is expired.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. But thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I appreciate you for doing that for me. But thank you.

Ms. Haaland.

Ms. HAALAND. Thank you, Chairman, Ranking Member, and thank you all for being here this morning. Really appreciate it. And thank you for your service to our country.

I understand that the framework for the negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban would see Taliban vow to prevent the country from being used as a hub for terrorism in return for a U.S. military withdrawal.

While Taliban leaders have recently expressed willingness to acknowledge some fundamental women's rights, I am deeply concerned that respect for human rights be a core part of the framework for peace. Any negotiated settlement must include respect for human rights and the rights of women in particular. Women's equality is enshrined in the Afghan Constitution, and the women of Afghanistan should have a seat at the negotiating table.

General Votel, can you tell me how the framework addresses the rights of women in Afghanistan and how women are being included in the negotiation process, if you can?

General VOTEL. Thank you. Thank you, Congresswoman. So I think at this particular point where we are in the ongoing talks is that Ambassador Khalilzad's efforts are really focused on developing a framework that can lead to intra-Afghan discussions. And this involves, I think, overcoming some obstacles that right now are preventing the Taliban from talking to the Government of Afghanistan. But, again, Ambassador Khalilzad is working through those issues. And then once that—once those intra-Afghan discussions are commenced, then I think we will have the opportunity to address the issues that you are talking about directly.

But I am aware, while these are being led by our Department of State colleagues and Ambassador Khalilzad in particular, I am aware that, exactly as you state, it remains key points that we are interested in ensuring are included in the overall discussions and framework.

Ms. HAALAND. Thank you so much for that.

I would like to turn now to the Afghan women serving in the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. And if you can answer this question, how many women are currently serving in the Afghan National Army, and how are the challenges in recruitment and retention being addressed, and is that recruitment sustainable?

General VOTEL. Congresswoman, I will take that question for the record so I can provide you a precise response.

[The information referred to is for official use only and retained in the committee files.]

Ms. HAALAND. Thank you so much.

And this question will go to Assistant Secretary Wheelbarger. Thank you so much for being here. Can you tell me how your office is pursuing the implementation of the United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. I don't directly cover that issue, so unfortunately, I think I am going to have to take that for the record, and I will converse with my colleagues who are responsible for it.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 155.]

Ms. HAALAND. Okay. Thank you so much. I would appreciate that.

And I yield back my time, Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Mitchell.

Mr. MITCHELL. Thank you very much.

And thank you, both of you, for—I join my colleagues in congratulating you on your careers. I wish you well in your retirement. Your families deserve some of your time.

I would like to follow up on Mr. Waltz's questions about AFRI-COM, if I could. Given the discussions about reducing our footprint there, could you define for me what impact it may have on our counterterrorism effort in Africa, and does that undermine or threaten some of those efforts?

General WALDHAUSER. First of all, let me just say that with regards to the terrorism effort, for sure. Somalia and Libya will really have—there is no impact there. There is no optimization. There is really no cutback. We will maintain our capability and capacity there. And by the way, those are the two countries on the continent where we have authorities to conduct kinetic operations.

In other areas in the continent where we were directed to take a look at this, we looked at the locations where we have been training with partner forces for some time, in some cases, 5, 6, 7 years. And so for the most part, those units are prepared and ready to execute on their own, and they have been for quite some time. So that is where we made the cut in our first tranche, if you will.

But moreover, we continue to provide intelligence. We will continue to provide logistic support. And with partners like the French

in Western Africa, we have got a great relationship with them and will maintain that partnership.

So as I said, at the moment, we have been directed to conduct tranche one, which takes us out to June of 2020. So that is roughly, you know, 300 or so people coming off the continent, half of whom are conventional forces. And so at the moment, we don't see a significant issue there. And whether we will ever be directed to execute the second half is to be determined.

And the final point I would make is what we have told the secretary, is that every one of these decisions will be made individually, and if we feel that it is not in our best interest to do so, we will reclama and push back on the plan that is in place at the moment.

Mr. MITCHELL. Let me ask you, it may not be appropriate here but maybe in closed session, to summarize systemic changes that have been made since the incident that happened in Niger where we had the four soldiers lose their life there. It may not be appropriate here, but I think it is appropriate in terms of some forum to get some feedback on that. I would like it because I am concerned the reduced footprint puts more people at risk.

I was in Landstuhl right before the holidays and spoke with an officer there that is working on intelligence, and we can't get into where, but frankly, support for him was a long way away. And I am concerned, given the size of Africa, that we are not putting resources into that that we need to deal with that.

I guess it lets me pivot to the next question. Maybe it is more—I think for both of you and the secretary. Given the increased engagement of China, in particular in Africa, both in terms of their investment, and with that almost instantaneously comes to military engagement, do we have enough resources there both military as well as diplomatic and development resources to address those concerns? Because I know we deal with counterterrorism, but we have near-peer concerns I think we are overlooking.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Well, I will start by saying that we definitely see China's influence in Africa as a key priority for us. Our efforts are multilateral in the sense of we look at all of our activities on the DOD side, whether it be exercises, training missions, military—

Mr. MITCHELL. Let me interrupt you. I apologize, but he will be a tough guy on time. The question I have for both of you is, are—do we have enough resources both in terms of military, development, and diplomacy to address the threats we have in Africa from not just terrorism, but from our near-peer adversaries? That is what I would like to address. Do we have them, and what do we do to get them?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. I think particularly on the development and the commercial side where China has a much more focused capability to, you know, bring resources to bear, we are challenged to keep up. And we could, particularly on the nonmilitary side of our government efforts, we could be seeking ways—we should be seeking and I know the interagency is very focused on finding ways to compete in the private commercial sphere in particular.

Mr. MITCHELL. What do you think, General?

General WALDHAUSER. Very quickly, on the Niger thing, we can talk in closed session, but the bottom line is we have instituted practices and procedures that negate some of the issues that have taken place there in the past, as you referred to.

With regards to the Chinese, and what is important for AFRI-COM, in the Defense Department strategy on China, it specifically states in there that we can expect to get no more resources and maybe less. So that is fine. That is the umbrella. That is the intent.

So my point would be is that we need to—we have 6,000 or so conventional forces plus special operations forces on the continent today. We need to maintain that threshold force in order to accomplish what you just described.

Mr. MITCHELL. Do you believe that is sufficient?

General WALDHAUSER. It is adequate.

Mr. MITCHELL. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

I yield back my time.

The CHAIRMAN. I think we will have to have a dictionary definition between what is the difference between “sufficient” and “adequate.” I will let you guys discuss that later.

Ms. Escobar.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thanks to our panel. Thanks, especially, General Votel and General Waldhauser, for your service. Please thank the men and women who serve with you for their service as well on our behalf.

I am especially concerned about something that the chairman mentioned in his opening statement about how our posture meets the threats, and obviously all of us here are interested and concerned about that, and what risks exactly, as he said, we are willing to accept.

And to the question that just came before me and to the definition of “adequate,” I would like to expand a little bit on that. What is—at what point does it become inadequate, and what are the risks that we will have to accept if we don’t move out of the adequate phase?

General WALDHAUSER. Congresswoman, one of the challenges we have on the African continent is trying to accurately characterize the threat that we are up against. So, for example, one of the reasons why the Department gave us the optimization task is because the threats that we are working against aren’t necessarily a threat to the homeland and may not be a threat to the region overall.

Because many of these groups, you have the intersection of jihadist philosophy with crime, historical influence, criminal activity, shipping of weapons, drugs, people, cattle, and so forth. So because these groups may hang out a shingle and say we are with ISIS today, they may or may not have the intent or capability to attack outside their particular part of the country.

So that is one of the challenges that we have. And so when it—again, to come more in compliance with the National Defense Strategy, to get more in line toward depth to dwell time, if you look at some of the threats on the African continent, sometimes, even though they may call themselves al-Qaida or ISIS, sometimes it is difficult to say they are a threat to the homeland.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Well, and last year, the Pentagon announced a reduction in forces to the AFRICOM region by 10 percent, obviously over time, but what will that reduction mean?

General WALDHAUSER. So, again, I want to emphasize that 10 percent reduction is in the counterterrorism forces only. And so the conventional forces that are on the continent every day right now conducting—for example, we have a shipping port in Algeria today. We have numerous small engagements across the continent. We have exercises that are ongoing that are conducted by our Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps components. We need to make sure those things maintain. We need to make sure we have threshold force for that. And then as we continue to observe and watch the threat from these counterterrorism groups, if we believe they are at a point where they have grown and their intent is perhaps more along threats to the United States, then we have to go back and ask for that.

So in sum, I want to make sure that the line that we are walking away from the continent or we are leaving the continent, you have to remember that the task we were given was counterterrorism forces only. We have tried to take forces that have been involved in working with units that have been trained for quite some time and that their threat for the homeland is questionable, at best.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you. Now, despite opening up a military base in Djibouti, some analysts say that China does not intend to grow its military presence in Africa but rather use telecommunication, infrastructure projects, and trade as their primary tools of influence on the continent. How will these avenues of influence change our ability to work with African partners?

General WALDHAUSER. Well, there is no doubt about the fact that in AFRICOM, we are the only place really on the planet where China has an overseas base in Djibouti, as we have discussed, and we have talked about why that location is important for us and the challenges that it brings to AFRICOM and as well as the other combatant commanders. One of our key tasks is to maintain influence and gain influence vis-a-vis the Chinese. And so we want to make sure we are the partner of choice, and we will do that militarily through our training, through our equipment sales because of the quality, and so forth.

But I think one of the things that needs to be done for the whole-of-government approach, which is what the Chinese do very well, is they work at the relationship. The number of high-level officials who come to visit just to say hello and just work at the relationship is very high, and that is very meaningful to the Africans. The Africans don't want to be in the middle of great power competition between the U.S. and China. They want to be our partner of choice, but they will make decisions in their own best interest at times. But I think one of—again, one of the things we have to do from a whole-of-government approach is, if we want to be the partner of choice, we have got to work at the relationship with high level of visits and engagements.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you so much, General, for your testimony today. And I am so glad that I had the opportunity to meet you. I know this is your final hearing, and so I feel very fortunate. Thank you for your service.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Cheney.

Ms. CHENEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all very much for being here today.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to enter for the record a piece by Tom Jocelyn and Bill Roggio, "The cost of withdrawal from Afghanistan," from December 22.

The CHAIRMAN. Without objection, so ordered.

Ms. CHENEY. Also, "al-Qaida continues to view Afghanistan as a safe haven," by the same authors, in the Long War journal. And a third piece by Ambassador Ryan Crocker, "I was ambassador to Afghanistan, and this deal is a surrender."

The CHAIRMAN. Without objection, so ordered.

Ms. CHENEY. Thank you very much.

[The information referred to was not available at the time of printing.]

Ms. CHENEY. General Votel, I appreciate your determination and your commitment in your testimony today to talking about how important it is that we be guided by conditions on the ground. But I have to say, when I look at the situation in Afghanistan and the policy that I am afraid we are pursuing now here, it looks like we are aggressively setting those conditions aside, aggressively ignoring the conditions on the ground. In particular, the discussions that are underway that both you and Assistant Secretary Wheelbarger have referenced that Ambassador Khalilzad is leading, I think you mentioned them as a path to progress, and then Assistant Secretary Wheelbarger said that they were going in a positive direction.

We seem to be pursuing the same fantasy that we did in the Obama administration, which is that al-Qaida is somehow distinct from the Taliban. When I look at what has happened, when I look at the fact that Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of al-Qaida, has sworn an oath of allegiance to the Taliban. More recently, Ayman al-Zawahiri, the same leader of al-Qaida, claimed that the Taliban's resurrected Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan would be, quote, the nucleus of a new caliphate.

So when I look at the situation there and I look at the extent to which we are dealing with the very entity that attacked us on 9/11, none of us want what the President has called endless wars; however, it would be far worse if we handed a victory to our jihadist enemies. And it would be, God forbid, far worse if we had another mass casualty attack in the United States.

So I wonder, General Votel, if you could point me to anything that the Taliban has said or done to either renounce violence, to abandon their alliance with al-Qaida, or to say that they will abide by the Constitution of Afghanistan that should give us any hope that these talks are anything but a fantasy.

General VOTEL. Well, they haven't made any of those statements, Congresswoman, as you know. But, again, as I have tried to cover in my opening statement here, this—we are very early in the process of this. There have been no agreements from either side. We have not given anything up and they have not given anything up.

Ms. CHENEY. But, General, is there anything you see that gives you confidence that it would be your best military advice that we

could, in fact, negotiate any kind of agreement that you could count on the Taliban to uphold?

General VOTEL. I think the fact that we are actually having discussions is a point that we have not reached in the 18 years we have been involved in this.

Ms. CHENEY. Well, General, I am sorry to interrupt. We actually did have discussions during the Obama administration. Secretary Clinton initially set these conditions and then completely abandoned them. And, you know, I don't have to tell you the history when we released the prisoners from Guantanamo in exchange for Bergdahl. So we have gone down this path before.

But my concern is, even if, let's say for the sake of argument, that you believe that those negotiations could lead someplace, that we could, in fact, be doing the best we could for our national security by talking to the Taliban who are inextricably linked with al-Qaida, the organization that attacked us on 9/11, would it be your best military advice that withdrawing forces in the middle of that would, in fact, help to increase our credibility?

General VOTEL. Congresswoman, we have remained very focused on the terrorism and counterterrorism mission that is happening.

Ms. CHENEY. But specifically the withdrawal of forces.

General VOTEL. We could withdraw forces and not have an impact on our counterterrorism mission—

Ms. CHENEY. That is right, but, General—

General VOTEL [continuing]. Against al-Qaida or any other groups.

Ms. CHENEY. Thank you, General. But you mentioned making sure that we had the maximum military pressure on the Taliban and on al-Qaida. And I fail to understand how it could be the situation that announcing withdrawal of forces is maintaining the maximum military pressure.

An additional question would be, how is it conceivably possible that a negotiation that actively leaves out the very government that we say we are trying to help to encourage and sustain would lead us in the right direction?

General VOTEL. It is not leaving out the government. Ambassador Khalilzad is well engaged with the Government of Afghanistan—

Ms. CHENEY. But the Taliban continues to refuse to talk to the Government of Afghanistan.

General VOTEL. And this is the purpose of the framework discussions that are underway right now. I want to get to that point.

Ms. CHENEY. Thank you, General. I remain very concerned that we are headed down an extremely dangerous path. We will continue this in the classified setting, but this would be, were we to leave, a jihadist victory for the very forces that attacked us on 9/11. And while we have got to ensure that we are engaged in countering great power conflict in the threats we face, we cannot go down the path of ignoring the fact that these were the folks that provided safe haven to al-Qaida for the attacks on 9/11.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Hill.

Ms. HILL. Thank you, Generals and Ms. Wheelbarger, for being here. I also want to give a shout-out to the fellow Centurion in the room. I think we are the only two Katies from Saugus [California] who are in Washington, DC, right now.

I want to dig in a little bit more on the focus on the great power competition. You all have mentioned the increased engagement in Africa and the Middle East by our near-peer adversaries, including referencing the regions of the crossroads of global competition with Russia and China.

So, General Waldhauser, you mention in your report that Russia is actively involved in Libya and is invoking Qadafi-era relationships. Reporting also indicates that Russia is supporting the Libyan National Army. How is this challenging our efforts to help the current Libyan Government and our counterterrorism efforts in the country, and what are Russia's aims in Libya overall?

General WALDHAUSER. We have three missions in Libya. One of them is the counterterrorism piece, which we have been at for quite some time. After the liberation of Sirte, if you will, where we had over almost 500 strikes, we have had 13 strikes in the last 2 years of a CT effort, but we maintain that. That is the first thing.

The second thing we do, we are trying to—one of our missions is to prevent civil war, and we do that by not going one side or the other.

And the third one is support the political process. And so what the Russians have done is overtly they have supported the U.N. [United Nations]-GNA [Government of National Accord]-President Sarraj framework. But behind the scenes, there is no doubt about the fact they have supported the LNA [Libyan National Army] with all kinds of equipment, people, training, and the like. And they have supported Haftar, who has moved now from the east to the west, and essentially has taken a lot of real estate to get into a good position for leverage for diplomatic talks.

Ms. HILL. And why would they want to do that?

General WALDHAUSER. Well, I think when the music stops, they want to be on the winning side. And right now, you know, Sarraj has been the President for over 2 years. He has been a good partner for us. Special Representative Salame is trying to get elections by the end of year. And it is unclear whether Haftar would run for election, but he is going to be involved in some way, shape, or form. So when the music stops, the Russians want to be on the side if he gets in.

Ms. HILL. But what strategic advantage would that give them?

General WALDHAUSER. It gives them influence and it gives them influence in a key location in the southern Med on the southern part of NATO, if you will. And it allows them then to reinvigorate some old Qadafi era-contracts in the oil field, weapon sales, and the like. So there is a strategic interest for them to be behind both sides, but primarily really Haftar.

Ms. HILL. So it is about resources and access to being closer to the southern border of—

General WALDHAUSER. Correct. And influence as well.

Ms. HILL. Okay, great. Not great, but thank you.

You also discuss the Russian efforts in Central African Republic, which leads me to ask what are the Russian objectives on the con-

continent more broadly? Why there? What are the other areas where they're—

General WALDHAUSER. What the Russians are doing in the Central African Republic is very concerning, because they have the paramilitary group, the Wagner group, which is heavily involved there, not only in training, but also in influence at the highest levels of the government, to include the President. And meanwhile, they have been able to work the situation so they can have mineral extraction and so forth, gold, et cetera, to generate revenue as well.

And so this model is very concerning in that if you bring in a paramilitary group, they influence the government, they extract resources. This is very concerning if that model would be applied in another country.

Ms. HILL. Thank you. General Votel, in your assessment, how did the Russians react to the President's December announcement to withdraw from Syria?

General VOTEL. I think they viewed it positively.

Ms. HILL. The Russians viewed that decision positively?

General VOTEL. They did, Congresswoman.

Ms. HILL. Can you describe what advantage Russia gains with our withdrawal from Syria—proposed withdrawal from Syria and Afghanistan?

General VOTEL. Well, I think what they looked at that, they looked at this as an opportunity to fill the void that we had provided in the support to the partners that we work with on the ground there. So they look to gain and perpetuate what the Assad regime was doing.

Ms. HILL. And, again, why? What does this do for us? What harm does this potentially cause us and our allies? How does this help Russia as a whole as it is trying to regain its power?

General VOTEL. Well, it makes Russia a bigger player in this area. And as we move, albeit slowly, towards some kind of end state in Syria, it puts Russia more in the driver's seat in terms of what that solution might be. And, of course, it solidifies their presence in the Middle East in this critical part of the Levant right here. So I think that is an important objective of theirs.

Ms. HILL. So to put it very bluntly, the President's proposals directly allow Russia to gain more influence in the Middle East, potentially endangering us and our allies?

General VOTEL. No, I don't think that is what I said. I said our withdrawal from there gave them the opportunity to fill the void. Obviously, things would come after that would increase their influence in pursuing, you know, some kind of political settlement, but it would certainly give them the ability to be in a better position.

Ms. HILL. So, again, the proposal to withdraw troops from Syria and Afghanistan provides an opportunity for Russia to gain additional power and to potentially grow the global threat?

The CHAIRMAN. I am sorry, the gentlelady's time has expired.

Ms. HILL. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. I do want to ask one quick followup on that. As of right now, is there any specific plan on the withdrawal? And you can tell me what is classified and what is not. A timeline, I know the President announced it in a tweet, as I said in my opening remarks. I don't think that was a particularly wise way to set up pol-

icy, and then we sort of set up the policy after he tweeted. But what is the timeline, if there is one, on withdrawal from Syria? And what do the numbers look like?

General VOTEL. I look forward to talking about this in the classified session.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay.

General VOTEL. But what I would say is that what is driving withdrawal of course is our mission, which is defeat of ISIS. And so that is our principal focus, and that is making sure that we protect our forces, that we don't withdraw in a manner that increases the risk to our forces. There is not pressure on me to meet a specific date at this particular time. And I look forward to talking more in details in a closed session.

The CHAIRMAN. I am sorry. We can do it in closed session. I just want to make one final, you know, policy political point. What seems to be driving the withdrawal is the President's split-second decision to send out a tweet saying we are going to get out of Syria. Okay. Now, I hear what you are saying in terms of what you are working on, but in terms of the public perception, the international perception, is that prior to that tweet, it wasn't planned. He sent it out, now we are responding.

So I take your point, and that is obviously the argument we want to make, is that what is driving our military decisions is military necessity. It does not appear that way in this case, given the way the President has communicated.

Mr. Banks.

Mr. BANKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Votel, you have already heard a great deal of skepticism expressed about Special Envoy Khalilzad's negotiations with the Taliban for reconciliation. Why shouldn't we be skeptical?

General VOTEL. Congressman, my view, we have come further in the last 6 months than we have at any time in the last 18 years. Since the announcement of the South Asia strategy by our President, the Government of Afghanistan, the President of Afghanistan has announced that he is willing to meet. We have had a cease-fire. The first time we have done that, both sides did that. It was short, but it gave a glimpse of what could be. And the meetings and the sessions that have taken place over the last 5 or 6 months I think have moved this further along than it is.

It is a difficult problem. We are still at the front end of this. I acknowledge that. And we have a ways to go. But the Taliban has come to the table. We have seen Pakistan play a more helpful role in helping that occur. So to me, these are things that we have not seen in the past that we are now seeing.

Mr. BANKS. I appreciate that, but with all due respect, the vagueness of what we hear about timelines and conditions, it paints a skeptical picture for me and so many others in wondering if this path will lead anywhere. But yet in a rose-colored world, if these negotiations were successful, if there was an agreement that was signed between us and the Taliban, what would happen at that point in that rose-colored world?

General VOTEL. I think if you look at what I think winning in Afghanistan means, it means two things, Congressman. It means a negotiated settlement between the Government of Afghanistan

and the Taliban, and it also means safeguarding U.S. national interests, particularly ensuring that this country, this region can't be used to attack our homeland. So that would have to be satisfied as part of any overall agreement here in terms of that. And I think that is a lot of the nuance of the ongoing discussions that are taking place right now.

Mr. BANKS. Is ISIS-K potentially a threat to the homeland?

General VOTEL. I think ISIS-Khorasan does have ideations focused on external operations towards our homeland, yes.

Mr. BANKS. General, some of your predecessors have testified before this committee before and articulated a sustained presence strategy in Afghanistan. Would you agree with that approach, maybe articulate what that means?

General VOTEL. I think as long as there is a terrorist threat, whether it comes from al-Qaida or ISIS or any other group that perpetrates threats against our country, I think we have to ensure that they are either through our own presence or through whatever other arrangements we can make, that we can address that particular threat.

Mr. BANKS. So therefore a sustained presence in Afghanistan in some shape or fashion would allow us to combat that ongoing presence of ISIS-K or other threats that might be posed from Afghanistan?

General VOTEL. That would certainly be one way of doing it, Congressman.

Mr. BANKS. What would a sustained presence look like?

General VOTEL. Well, again, I think this might be a better discussion for a closed-session hearing to give you a little bit more detail. But I think it looks a lot like it looks right now. It looks like making sure we have got partners on the ground we can operate with; it looks like we have the right collection assets in so we can keep an eye on this; and it means that we have the right unique capabilities from a U.S. standpoint to address this particular—and keep the pressure on this network like we have been doing.

Mr. BANKS. General, when should the American people and members of this committee expect a better defined idea of the timeline of these negotiations between Special Envoy Khalilzad and the Taliban?

General VOTEL. I think I would have to refer you to the Department of State on that since that is who Ambassador Khalilzad works for, and they would probably be better to provide some type of timeline, if there is one.

Mr. BANKS. So no reasonable expectation of when that timeline would be?

General VOTEL. Congressman, it is underway right now. I mean, it is proceeding, and it is a complex environment. In my estimation, I think Ambassador Khalilzad is doing the very best that he can to move this forward. And our job, my job as a CENTCOM commander is to make sure he has the military support to move forward on that objective. Our end state here is reconciliation, that is the end state of the President's South Asia strategy and that is what we are focused on. So the whole of our efforts is supporting Ambassador Khalilzad.

Mr. BANKS. I appreciate that. I had hoped today that I could eliminate some of my skepticism, but the vagueness of the nature of these negotiations and what I have heard today leave me even more skeptical than before. I am not sure that Special Envoy Khalilzad's best that he can do is good enough.

With that, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Slotkin.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Thank you.

Thanks to our witnesses. I certainly know, Ms. Wheelbarger, exactly how it feels to be exactly in your shoes. And to both generals, I have really enjoyed my time working with you.

And, General Votel, since you were so short, I think it is worth noting you are one of the most creative, out-of-the-box thinkers we have in our senior leadership. Your career defines what it means to fight in the post-9/11 world. And I think the American public will probably never know what you did to help us protect ourselves from terrorist threats. So I thank you for everything you have done.

And I would be remiss if I didn't take advantage of this opportunity with you with more—just 3 weeks left to ask you kind of some bigger picture questions on how the U.S. fights in the post-9/11 era. The theory of the case for me is that we cannot fight global threats without a global coalition, that without partners and allies, our ability to protect ourselves is at least diminished, at best diminished, and at worst leaves us less safe.

So can you just walk me through what you believe happens if allies and partners are not providing support to us in these global fights in your region?

General VOTEL. Well, thank you, Congresswoman. So very clearly, we are very dependent upon our coalition partners, not just for basing and accessing in the region, but certainly for the additional capabilities that they take. We bring a lot, the United States brings a lot to these operations, but we don't bring everything. And so many of the unique capabilities that we rely on in these coalitions do come from our coalition partners, whether it is medical, whether it is sustainment, whether it is training, whether it is advising. They augment, they supplement, they complement the things that we are doing. And so that is an important aspect.

But the other thing is it brings with—the coalition aspect brings with it the will of the world, if you will, or the will of the coalition. So it is more than just one nation who is standing up for something. In the case of Iraq and Syria, it is 79 nations and international organizations that are saying we are focused on this particular mission right here. So to me that is one of the most important aspects of the coalition approach.

Ms. SLOTKIN. So many of the members of this committee went on a bipartisan congressional delegation to the Munich Security Conference. We heard in real time from our allies their deep, deep concern with the way that the U.S. and the administration was handling informing them about our plans in the world, particularly, as was referenced, the tweet to get out of Syria, when many of them are fighting with us in Syria.

In your experience, if we alienate our allies and make it politically difficult for them to join with us in these operations, what happens to the quality of our operations? Do they go up or do they go down? And kind of—I know General Mattis was really clear about this in his final letter, but if you could just talk to us about, you know, the quality of our operations if these partners and allies just say no to joining with us.

General VOTEL. Well, Congresswoman, I think it certainly makes it more difficult to pursue some of these missions without the partnerships that we depend on out here. And as I have already mentioned, we lose capabilities, we lose some of the sustainment that comes along with our operations there. So I think it makes it much more difficult without—doing these things without partners.

Ms. SLOTKIN. And, you know, we were—a number of us wrote a letter, a bipartisan letter to the President asking that he reconsider his decision to fully pull out of Syria. A number of us are very happy to see that a small force is going to be remaining there. We all take note when you say that ISIS, while the caliphate has certainly been depleted, that ISIS has largely gone to ground, that they have not sort of had a change of heart in how they feel.

Tell me, if you could in an unclassified setting, what you believe the likelihood is that we will, with the small force that we have staying behind, ability to keep them suppressed at least from returning at least a piece of that caliphate.

General VOTEL. I am confident in this. And I think we have to look at the force, not just as U.S. forces that remain on the ground, but other coalition forces. We need to look at our Syrian Democratic Force partners that number 60,000. And then we need to look at our over-the-horizon capabilities that we can bring to bear. And as we go through the planning of this, we are looking at all of those capabilities. As I mentioned, this is ongoing right now. But I think by looking at all those different pools of forces and capabilities that we have, we will have the capabilities we need to do the mission we have been asked to do.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Thank you. And to both generals, congratulations on your retirement, well earned, and thank you for your service.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Gaetz.

Mr. GAETZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Waldhauser, I have a number of constituents who contribute to the train and equip mission in Africa. Can you share with us the circumstances where we have been most successful at moving the needle in the capabilities of our partner nations and then where there are places where we haven't made as many strides as we would have hoped?

General WALDHAUSER. Well, I think one example that I will always use is Tunisia, Tunisia, where the whole revolution began and so forth. And over the past few years, they have done a tremendous job to essentially restructure their entire military towards a threat that is relevant to them. And they have been a willing partner. They have been able to absorb a lot of institutional-level guidance and training, so they have been a success story as well.

And I think in other places, even like Cameroon, for example, with the challenges there with the Anglophone region and the like,

the Buea force has been a good counterterrorism partner, and they have progressed to the point where they are operating on their own and so forth. And I would just mention that as part of that, you know, the whole law of war, the whole battlefield ethics speech, that is always a part of the training and equipping that we do. And so we have programs across the continent, these 333 programs where we will put equipment in various countries, you know, whether it is Djibouti or Somalia or Burkina Faso, these are very, very important to us. So those are a couple of examples where we have had success.

Mr. GAETZ. And where have we not met our expectations regarding capabilities of partner nations?

General WALDHAUSER. Well, without singling out specific nations, I think the point is, is that when we embark on these engagements, we have to make sure we understand what the country can absorb. And we can't do things or expect things if they don't have the institutional capacity to deal with logistical training, to deal with sourcing and so forth.

Mr. GAETZ. Should I make much of the fact that you didn't identify many Central African nations among the successes?

General WALDHAUSER. Well, the Central African nations that we work with to a large degree our train, advise, assist, and equip piece is probably not as robust in other places. I mean, the countries that we deal with to a large degree have the terrorism threat, because one of the key things is to fight that threat over there and keep it over there. And our engagements with other countries, we take our cues from State Department too. If there is issues in terms of law of war violations or governmental problems, we sometimes take our cues from the State Department with regards to how much we engage.

Mr. GAETZ. Very illuminating. General Votel, is Yemen a failed state?

General VOTEL. Yes, I do consider Yemen a failed state.

Mr. GAETZ. Thanks.

I will yield the remaining time to General Bacon.

Mr. BACON. I appreciate the leadership and your careers. Congratulations on your retirement, and thanks to all three of you for being here today.

I just want to add my skepticism as well on our negotiations with the Taliban. You know, they continue to be closely aligned with ISIS, al-Qaida. They have murdered thousands of—continue to murder thousands of people in Afghanistan. And I think it looks terrible when we are negotiating with them without the Government of Afghanistan, so I just wanted to publicly state that.

In Syria, what are we going to do with 800 or so detainees I have been hearing about that are from ISIS? General Votel.

General VOTEL. Well, this is a matter for our Department of State and Department of Justice to work with international partners. As the President has said, they need to go back to their nations where they can be properly prosecuted right here. The Syrian Democratic Forces are performing a service for the world by holding these foreign terrorist fighters right now, and they need to go home where they can be dealt with properly. So that is the principal mechanism that we are pursuing right now.

Mr. BACON. That would be a terrible development if they get released, one way or the other way, outside of being a threat to us and Europe and beyond.

In Yemen, are we still seeing evidence of Iran arming the Houthi rebels?

General VOTEL. Absolutely, Congressman.

Mr. BACON. And when was the last time we saw Scud missile launches or any other kind of ballistic missile launch into Saudi Arabia? Because I think that is not being widely reported that that was going on, and that has been part of the reason the Saudis are taking actions the way they have.

General VOTEL. We have seen a decrease in ballistic missile launches, and there is some reasons for that that we can talk about in the closed session, but we have seen an increase in unmanned aerial systems and, again, this at the hand of Iran providing these advanced capabilities to the Houthi rebels.

Mr. BACON. Our political debate on how to support Saudi Arabia, whether to or whether not, that is just a forgotten part of what is going on with Iran, helping the rebels and how they are also attacking the Saudis.

One last question to General Votel. Are we having any success or progress of Pakistan in the safe havens they are providing the Taliban?

General VOTEL. We have had—as I mentioned a little bit earlier, we have had success with Pakistan. They have been more helpful in terms of bringing the Taliban to the table as we have requested them. We have seen instances where they have taken action against the safe haven areas. Clearly, there is more they can do, and we have encouraged them to continue to do that. But we have seen some positive indications.

Mr. BACON. Thank you. I thank my friend for yielding, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Torres Small.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, General Votel and General Waldhauser, so much for your service. Thank you as well, Assistant Secretary Wheelbarger.

I specifically appreciate your discussion about coalition building. And Congresswoman Slotkin as well as Congressman Bergman, both recognized that need as well. And we also had some discussion about China and their impact on Africa and how that affects potential coalition building.

So we have seen China open up the military base in Djibouti, but it appears and some analysts think that they are increasing their focus more so on the telecommunications, the infrastructure, and the trade. Do you see those avenues as more of a threat for our engagement with African partners than if China had opened up more military bases, for example, or conducted training or conventional military operations?

General WALDHAUSER. That is a very interesting question and complex in several different ways. Obviously, Djibouti is the first overseas Chinese base. I have said before, I don't believe it will be the last. They are looking for other areas and so forth, especially ports. Because what they want to do to a large degree, the infra-

structure they build—ports, roads, bridges and whatnot—is tied to the extraction, mineral extraction they are conducting in those countries. So consequently, there is a tie there.

Now moreover, their military growth for the future, although unclear, they certainly want to protect those investments. They want to protect the population and the workers that they have there. So some would say that this was just a first step and that they are getting many lessons learned. Because it is a challenge to have a base in Djibouti from China. And there is a lot of growing pains with that. But they are learning from that, and some would say that—and we have some reports that I could probably go into in the closed session that they may look to increase their contributions to some of these groups that are in the counterterrorism effort. So I think that in the future, it is very likely that they could increase their military presence.

But real quickly on the trade business. You know, when Secretary Tillerson visited there a while back as a previous Secretary of State, you know, he talked about how the Chinese should be very careful—or the Africans should be very careful about some of the deals they make with the Chinese, because it is no secret about the debt issue in Djibouti that the Chinese own. There is other countries where some of the projects that the countries are walking away from because either it is too expensive or they have figured out the deal is really not good for them. And so there are some challenges.

But, again, those countries need to make those decisions for themselves. And that was one of the issues that senior—you know, Paul Kagame, who at the time was the AU [African Union] chairperson, made that point that these governments can make those decisions for themselves. And our point is, when you make those decisions, just go into them clear-eyed and understand what you are signing on the dotted line when you sign with the Chinese.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Speaking to that clear-eyed aspect, has China operated this way with other regions? And if so, are there additional phases of involvement that we might anticipate?

General WALDHAUSER. Well, I think that—I will just speak to the African continent. I mean, the Chinese have been there for quite some time. Their investments in infrastructure, they do a great job. They will build soccer stadiums. You know, they will do things for the population that, you know, gains and maintains influence. Meanwhile, we do things like Millennium Challenge Corporation, power programs in the Senegal or even in Niger, these huge programs over a 5-year period, \$437 million in Niger, for example. This is a whole-of-government approach too. And we need to do a better job of publicizing those things that we are doing on the soft side of power that will help our influence, vis-a-vis China.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. In my short amount left, I want to switch very quickly to Yemen and touch base about the end of the in-flight refueling Saudi coalition. When did CENTCOM make the decision to end that mission?

General VOTEL. We ended that in November of 2018, Congresswoman.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. And who made that decision to end it?

General VOTEL. That was a request by the Saudis, but it was directed to me by the Secretary of Defense at the time.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Under what authority was CENTCOM operating when the decision was made not to charge over \$300 million in U.S. fuel in in-flight refueling services?

General VOTEL. Thank you for asking that. And, Chairman, I would just ask for a little allowance here so I can address this in a little bit of detail.

First of all, it is—as the CENTCOM commander, it is my responsibility. I am responsible for everything that happens within CENTCOM and doesn't happen within CENTCOM. And so when we fail to charge properly on this thing, I accept the responsibility for that on behalf of our command.

There are a variety of things that went wrong. Mostly, we ignored our own well-developed protocols and procedures in this case. We identified those problems that we began identifying that last fall and put together a team, a cross-agency team to make sure that we understood what was happening and that we could. We worked through the issue, identified what the costs were, and then delivered those to the appropriate countries. And we will receive full and proper reimbursement for that.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. It's a mark of a great leader to take responsibility. I deeply appreciate that.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Gallagher.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to pull the string on a previous line of questioning. I think it is important, because when we talk about NDS implementation, it is easy to focus myopically on INDOPACOM [U.S. Indo-Pacific Command] and EUCOM. And I am glad that we have had a variety of questions about Chinese influence and access in the CENTCOM and AFRICOM AORs.

And I just would just ask, General Votel, to what extent does the Shanghai International Port Group's agreement regarding the Haifa port in Israel represent a problem for the U.S. military over the long term? We heard some reporting that the U.S. Navy was considering reducing some commitment to Israel. I know that sort of spans a lot of different COCOM authorities there, but just to what extent do you view that as a problem, and what do you think we should do about it?

General VOTEL. Congressman, again, I would remind you that the Haifa port is in Israel and is outside of my area of responsibility, but I do recognize that that does have influences on areas. So we are concerned about that, the fact that there is—the great power competitors have access into those ports along the Mediterranean that have very direct access into the region. I think this is a reason for concern.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Can you, both of you, I just—what parts, as you look at the Belt and Road initiative in your respective AORs, where would it present a difficulty for us in terms of operational access, either in terms of our ability to operate with key partners or new potential access by Chinese forces? Just help flesh that out for us a bit.

General VOTEL. Congressman, in the CENTCOM area of responsibility, the principal place for seeing this is in Pakistan, with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is an artery of the One Belt, One Road aspect. So that is in progress right now. And it is—and there is definite Chinese influence in that particular area. So as they develop that land route, what they are attempting to do then, we expect, is they will then be looking for ports that they can connect that to, ports in southern Pakistan, leaving the ports in AFRICOM. And then for us, it is going to lead to a permanent presence of Chinese maritime—military maritime activity in the region that we will need to be concerned with.

General WALDHAUSER. So with regards to AFRICOM on the ports, let me just first say that overall—and I am not an expert in port operations, but the Chinese have equities in ports around the globe. So it is not unique, for example, that they have equities in Israel. It is not unique that they have equities in Djibouti and other places. That is the first point.

The second point is, with regards to the Djiboutian port, you know, this is the maritime piece of the One Belt, One Road initiative, if you come into Djibouti in that part of the continent up into Africa. So that is a big part of their strategy, and they are trying to tie it together.

Inside Djibouti, you know, the port facility there has about five or six separate ports. The one we are concerned about is the Doraleh container port. Last year at this time when I testified, the Djiboutians just took it back over from the Emiratis. The fear is that if the debt issue with Djibouti is not taken care of, that perhaps the Chinese could take that port over.

But I can tell you that in conversations that I have had with President Guelleh and other leaders have had with President Guelleh, they have assured us that that is not going to be the case, that they will make sure that we have access to that particular port. Because 98 percent of what the logistics effort that we need on the eastern part of Africa, in Somalia, in Djibouti comes through that port there.

Mr. GALLAGHER. I take your point about, to the extent I understand it, that the Chinese obviously have legitimate economic interests in a variety of ports around the world. But the whole reason we did the comprehensive review of our CFIUS [Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States] process last year was because the line between legitimate economic interests and CCP [Communist Party of China]-directed espionage and PLA [People's Liberation Army] military duty is often very opaque. Right?

I wonder, do you have conversations with your partners sort of in the way we have conversations amongst ourselves about CFIUS and foreign investment about the structures they have in place to analyze Chinese investment and really determine what is legitimate and what isn't? In either order.

General WALDHAUSER. Well, I can say—and perhaps, Katie, you should take that—I know our country teams and ambassadors do that. From the military perspective, we try to make sure that we make the case that we are the best partners and try to give that top cover.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. I will most definitely say that is a key point with all of our engagements with the international community, not just in these AORs but in Europe as well. And I know the previous Congresswoman touched on telecommunications infrastructure. That is a priority of our Department right now, to highlight the real challenge that we will face both militarily as well if the Chinese build out these 5G networks all over the world. The telecommunications security is sort of a backbone security requirement for all of us. So it is very much a top line in all of our engagements.

Mr. GALLAGHER. I yield my 2 seconds left.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I appreciate the benefit. And I was going to say, we have a hard stop at noon. We will get to as many people as we can.

Mr. Crow.

Mr. CROW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to all three of you for your insightful, candid testimony.

General Votel, always good to see a fellow Ranger. Rangers lead the way. Thank you for your continued service.

In my time in Iraq and Afghanistan, I learned of the value of our partners and our alliances. And I have been very troubled by some of the comments of this administration with regard to those partnerships and those alliances. And I know, General Votel, you weren't consulted in the Syria decision. Have the three of you had to spend time in the last 2 years talking with our partners and our allies, NATO and others, to reassure them that we remain committed? And have you received questions and concerns from those allies?

General VOTEL. I will start, Congressman. Certainly we have. I think this is a very standard thing that we talk with all of our partners about routinely here, about our strategies and where we are going with this and reassurance on our commitment to the collective security of the region here. So it certainly is something we talk with our partners about all the time, have for the entire time I have been in this position.

Mr. CROW. But within the past, let's say within the past year, especially with respect to comments on unilateral withdrawal from Afghanistan and Syria, has that created especially acute concerns?

General VOTEL. Well, it certainly has. I mean, some of the rather sharp announcements here are things that have caught their attention, and we have had to talk about that. But again, this is something that we have routinely talked about. As I came into this position in 2016, a big topic was JCPOA [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action] and our decision to enter into that. And so that was a big discussion point with all the partners in the arrangement, many who did not agree with that decision. And so we had almost the opposite situation in that particular case. So I think this is something we always have to talk to our partners about.

General WALDHAUSER. Very briefly, I would just say that this is a conversation we always have, and we will always continue to have. Because the bottom line is it is important to have a good working relationship, mil-to-mil relationship. Because if for whatever reason the political relationship goes off tracks or hits a bump in the road, if you have a strong mil-to-mil relationship, if you have

a good partnership, that will carry the day. And that is where we try to come at it for the military side.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. In particular with respect to on the political side or the policymaking side, the coalition, particularly the 79-strong D-ISIS [Defeat-ISIS] coalition is a huge value, as the general said, to sort of the moral authority of the global campaign—or the global effort to address a global threat. I think in the days and weeks after certain decisions, yes, we obviously keep up the level of transparency as much as possible.

I mean, everybody knows that the Syria tweet was somewhat of a surprise. And so, you know, I did call all of the core group of the coalition the day after to make sure that they understood both what it was but also what it wasn't. And it wasn't sort of they are all leaving tomorrow. Of course, as decisions evolve and we are living in a dynamic world, we are living in a dynamic policymaking world as well, you know, we continue to keep them as informed transparently and in connection as possible.

Mr. CROW. Thank you. One last question. Do you all believe that you have sufficient data and information regarding the emerging threats posed by climate change, namely disease outbreaks, pandemics, displacement of populations, and drought to take into account as you develop your op [operation] plans within your respective commands?

General VOTEL. Congressman, I do. That is provided to us at the Department of Defense. And from my staff's standpoint, I believe we do.

General WALDHAUSER. I believe we do as well. And I would just echo the fact that in the AFRICOM AOR, this is a big part of whatever we do. A crisis response not only is kinetic, but tied to the Ebola outbreaks, the disease outbreaks, and it is a big part of our strategy with regards to containing that type of threat on the continent.

Mr. CROW. Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Kelly.

Mr. KELLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I just don't think I can go and let people say things without responding. First of all, our failure to respond in Syria in 2013 left a void, which the Russians quickly filled where they had not been before, but because we had no action whatsoever for a long period of time, even a delayed reaction after the gassing, the government gassed their own people. That is part of the reason that we have Russian influence in Syria now, not just the tweets of recent days.

Second, I had a much different experience in the Munich Security Conference with Senator Inhofe, with our allies and our people there, than obviously other people, my colleagues did. Because what I found in our European allies and allies across the Nation, we met with Germany, we met with Afghan President, we met with Poland, is there is a much greater participation in meeting their 2 percent GDP [gross domestic product] requirements as to their militaries across Europe, which means we have partners who are actually contributing rather than talking. So I think that is very important to point out.

We also went to Africa and met with President Kagame, with Prime Minister Dr. Abiy in Ethiopia. I think those relationships with Senator Inhofe and us as Members of Congress can be sustained long term. He has been doing it for over 25 years, but I think many times they are much more valuable, even in those who have stayed some time, as well as the mil-to-mil relationships.

All that being said, I guess now I am going to try to get to a question. First of all, General Votel, thank you for your leadership of my 155th BCT [Brigade Combat Team], my old brigade in Operation Spartan Shield, and my 184th ESC [Expeditionary Sustainment Command], which are currently deployed and doing logistics missions over there.

General Votel and General Waldhauser, after I ask this question, I want you to respond what we can do better with the State Partnership Program in Africa. But Mississippi has a State partnership with Uzbekistan. We have made great, great strides there. As a matter of fact, almost every time I go, I meet with the President of Uzbekistan and all of their cabinet.

General Votel, how valuable are those in the negotiations when we are talking about negotiating with the Taliban or logistics contracts? How valuable is that State Partnership Program?

General VOTEL. Across the region, Congressman, State Partnership Program is a diamond for us, frankly. And it is highly sought after by partners across the region. It not only augments the things that we do with the Active forces and the other rotational forces, as you highlighted, that come into the region, but more importantly, it provides a long-term sustained relationship with these countries.

As you have experienced in Uzbekistan, I know we recently had the minister of defense visit your State for an exercise here. Thank you for hosting him. We cannot replace these types of relationships. This is absolutely vital to the things we are doing.

Mr. KELLY. And, General Waldhauser, I think there are some opportunities in Africa to sustain long-term relationships. Do we have good partnership programs or is there opportunity there?

General WALDHAUSER. Congressman, I could take the rest of the time and really the rest of the day up till noon and beyond to talk about the value of these programs. Let me just give you one quick example. We have 13 State Partnership Programs in the continent. We appreciate the funding that comes from them, and we would certainly ask for more there.

Recently, we had an exercise in Burkina Faso. There have been some issues there as to the uptick in attacks and whatnot. And just recently here in January, the District of Columbia, DC, just signed a State Partnership Program with Burkina Faso. So on one hand, you could say that are we doing enough there? But this is another tool in the tool kit for long-term continuity with relationship building and so forth in an area where there is a counterterrorism issue. This is a big plus for us. I can't say enough about the State Partnership Program in AFRICOM.

Mr. KELLY. And, finally, I guess this is just a comment. Ms. Wheelbarger, you can comment if there is time left. But I don't have a problem with negotiating with the Taliban or any other. You know, as we just saw our President do in North Korea, it is

okay to have a meeting and to walk away with that meeting if your objectives are not achieved. It is not okay not to ever have a meeting, because I can tell you, you can never reach consensus if you are not talking.

And so I think we have a lot of opportunity. I am skeptical, just like everyone else, General Votel, but I know we also have Uzbekistan involved in that, I know Pakistan is involved in that. I know there are a lot of people involved in the peace process there. And I am quite confident that our President and our military and our State Department will walk away if we don't get the conditions met that we need to for peace, but we have to talk to get the peace.

And if you could comment very briefly, Ms. Wheelbarger.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. Sure. I will just briefly say long-term insurgencies mostly need to end by reconciliation; that is sort of the history of these kind of conflicts. And I also agree that the military, both U.S. military, but in conjunction with our partners on the ground will continue the military pressure during these talks.

The CHAIRMAN. I completely agree with Mr. Kelly's assessment that we do need to talk. That is the only way to get there.

Ms. Houlahan.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you to the chairman. And thank you to the panel for coming.

In addition to sitting on the Armed Services, I also sit in Foreign Affairs in Africa and the Asia Subcommittees. And in the Africa Subcommittee, human rights is a center area of that. And it has been lovely to also hear about China in this conversation too.

So my question is for General Waldhauser. I was wondering if we could talk a little bit about the importance of supporting women and particularly the impact that they have on bolstering economies, which is one of the best ways that we have to combat VEOs [violent extremist organizations]. And as we continue to provide support to our African partners to combat VEOs, are there members of our current Multinational Joint Task Force that have not perhaps passed the Leahy vetting or who have raised human rights concerns, especially as they relate to women and girls?

General WALDHAUSER. Thank you for the question. Let me just talk real quick about the women, peace, and security initiative that we have in AFRICOM and one of the things that I think we do very well. And I will just give you several examples. So over the past couple of years, we have introduced women from the military in the communications field across the continent through various exercise engagements. And since we have emphasized that, we have noticed the numbers of women who participate in that particular event has grown.

We also do an intelligence assessment and training for the women of intelligence branches around the continent. That number has grown. We have a leadership that we run out of AFRICOM every year. It is a small group, around 50 or 60, but we take them around the country to various bases and they talk with various leaders, and we promote leadership for women in a small way, but we think a highly effective way.

And here recently, we've had the operation I mentioned in Burkina Faso, it is a special operations operation where we have brought women together to have conferences, discuss their way

ahead, and try to get them and highlight their visibility for the military. So we take that seriously, and I am very proud of our women and peace program.

With regards to the Leahy vetting, look, one of the things that we do with all of our training on the African continent is this whole issue of battlefield ethics, law of war compliance, and the like. And even though, you know, we run into issues every once in a while, we maintain that this is a big part of how we train. And we make it very clear to these governments that if there is violations or allegations of violations, that they have to look at them for investigation and be transparent with what they do.

So on one hand, the question of Leahy vetting, yes, sometimes, you know, there are some issues we have to work around because of whole units for one individual. But in the main on the African continent, we need to maintain that because the human rights piece is a big part of how we train, and we just have to try to perhaps streamline some of the Leahy issues, but we can't walk away from that.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Sir, are there curing processes or curing timelines if you do see some sort of violation that—I understand that you can't help if you are not there. Is there any sort of process that is codified that helps with that?

General WALDHAUSER. I would have to take that for the record, ma'am.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 155.]

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you. My next question is also for you. And I read in your written statement that Niger remains very unstable and that you are worried about that because of the youth, the age of—that is a large part of the country. And my question is, you also seem to indicate that the people who you were withdrawing in the 10 percent reduction were counterterrorism related. Is that true? Doesn't that provide some sort of angst on your part that you have got this sort of unstable, very young nation-state and we are withdrawing the very people who may be helpful if there is some sort of VEO activity there?

General WALDHAUSER. So I don't want to get into specific countries and specific numbers, but the short answer to your question is yes. We have to take a look at where we optimize. And as I tried to indicate previously, for the first tranche, we have taken individuals from locations where they have been training for quite some time and those units are on their own. And so, yes, you know, every country, especially in Western Africa, where we have bilateral agreements and where we train with them, we are concerned. But we understand the intent, and so far, there has been minimal impact. And if we continue to work with our partners, primarily the French in the west, and we watch, if the groups grow, we may have to revisit some of these decisions.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you, and with my last 50 seconds, my last question is also for you, which has to do with Congo and the most recent Ebola outbreak. We have had about 550, 560 deaths so far and 800 people who have fallen ill again. And I just wanted to ask you sort of to assess the biosecurity threats in the area and whether or not you feel as though we are doing enough or the right

things to build partnerships across the African partners that we have, and whether or not you think you are appropriately staffed in that particular area, and how you are working with USAID and the State Department to make sure we don't all get befallen by a pandemic.

General WALDHAUSER. So I am looking at the time countdown and I am counting the questions and trying to—the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a very, very complex place right now. They just had a reelection. Joseph Kabila, finally after a long time, is gone.

The issue on the Ebola crisis in the east is one of the most remote parts of the African continent. There are numerous violent extremist organizations, groups there. That is one of the problems, it is one of the threats. And we have been asked to look at what it would take security-wise by the State Department if we upped our footprint, and we have done that.

I would just finally say just for perspective, when the big Ebola outbreak took place several years ago, 28,000-plus cases, 11,000-plus died. So as you said, about 900 cases thus far, 600, 550 or so died. A key has been vaccinations. Over 70- to 80,000 have been vaccinated. But the security environment there is very difficult, and that is what makes this one a particular challenge and a concern.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

We are going to stretch a little and try to get the last few people in here, so we probably won't start the classified until 12:15. But the last—if the last few people can help out at all with any time there, it would be appreciated.

Ms. Stefanik.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to follow up on the previous lines of questions regarding the future of Afghanistan. Like many of my colleagues, I am deeply concerned about the ongoing talks with the Taliban. And last month, I also attended the Munich Security Conference with some of the members here. And we had the opportunity to meet with President Ghani, who made it very clear that he does not respect the validity of these talks, considering the fact that the democratically elected government is completely excluded from these talks.

So my question for General Votel is, I share that concern that the democratically elected government is not a part of these negotiations. And at the same time, we are heading towards presidential elections in Afghanistan. So how do the ongoing talks impact the overall legitimacy of the upcoming elections and the overall stability as we head into the upcoming elections?

General VOTEL. Well, I think certainly the fact that there is an upcoming election is a factor in the overall situation right at this particular point. So, you know, I can't dispute the fact that that is an aspect of this. But, Congresswoman, I am not orchestrating the talks that Ambassador Khalilzad is doing. We speak with him obviously very regularly. We support him as closely as we can. It is my observation, from my close discussions with him, that he is in fact consulting with President Ghani on a regular basis, keeping him

well informed, and that the actual initiation of these discussions was done with President Ghani's knowledge and support.

So I—we are—he is continuing to do that and he continues to do that throughout this process. We recognize that the discussions and the negotiations ultimately have to be Afghan-to-Afghan discussions, and that is what Ambassador Khalilzad is focused on at this particular point.

Ms. STEFANIK. I appreciate that, General Votel, but President Ghani's message to us was crystal clear, that not having the democratically elected government have a seat at the table during the negotiations nullifies how they could come to a positive outcome. So I just wanted to share my concern, particularly as it relates to the legitimacy of the upcoming elections and how we are potentially undermining that by engaging in these talks with the Taliban.

My next question is also for you, General Votel. You talked about shrinking the physical caliphate to less than 1 square mile, which is an enormous achievement. Can you talk about this next phase that as ISIS fighters go underground, you said, quote, "They are unrepentant, unbroken, and they are still deeply radicalized." What does that next phase look like from your perspective?

General VOTEL. This will look very much like an insurgency, meaning that what we will see is we will see low-level attacks. We will see assassinations, we will see IED [improvised explosive device] attacks, we will see ambush-type things as they begin to emerge from this. So therefore, what our focus has to be is working with our partners on the ground, as we are doing in—fairly effectively in Iraq right now, is working with our partners on the ground. We are going to have to keep pressure on this. Our intelligence capabilities will continue to be very, very important in feeding their operations. Our train, advise, assist, our enabling capabilities on the ground will be very, very important to this.

So what we are attempting to do is prevent those things from disrupting the other stability operations that we are trying to conduct with local governance, local security forces.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you.

And, General Waldhauser, I wanted to follow up on your opening statement. What I noticed was absent is lessons learned regarding the fateful attack in Niger that took place in October 2017. How has USAFRICOM, along with interagency and by, with, and through partnerships, what have we learned? How have we updated our intel collection, how are we making sure that our operators have access to the most up-to-date, accurate exquisite intel possible? And I also wanted to ask, when can we expect to see the report in section 1276 of the fiscal year 2019 NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act]?

General WALDHAUSER. So first of all, Congresswoman, there has been many lessons learned and changes to procedures since the Niger incident awhile back. And at the tactical level, which I won't go into in great detail, I can assure you that minimum force, reaction times for MEDEVAC [medical evacuation], standard procedures for how orders are issued and who approves those orders, those have all been really dealt with and taken care of at the component level, and those are all in place. The investigation itself had 23 findings, 19 of which required action; 7 of those were work for

AFRICOM, the others were for the Army and for USSOCOM [U.S. Special Operations Command].

The items that AFRICOM had, as an example, would be formalizing memorandums of agreement with the French for MED-EVAC, which we have done; updating the number of blue force trackers, for example, that troops have on the ground and those type of things. So for the AFRICOM perspective, all the tactical items which weren't part of the investigation but needed to be fixed, those have been taken care of, and we can talk in closed session if you want more detail. And as far as the investigation goes, we are good.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. We can talk more. A lot of this is better in a closed session. We can talk more when we get upstairs.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Cisneros.

Mr. CISNEROS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all for being here today, and thank you for your service to our country.

I will keep this brief, but, you know, since the seventies, spending for military and civilian tools of national security have ebbed and flowed; during the eighties, they both went up; during the nineties, they both went down. Former Secretary of Defense James Mattis said, if you don't fund the State Department fully, then I have to buy more ammunition ultimately. You both have been on the record as saying how important diplomatic relations are and humanitarian aid are to national security.

With the budget coming out and we kind of expecting maybe another cut in both in the State Department, USAID, oversees contingency operations, I mean, would you both agree—or all of you agree that reduced resources for the State Department and USAID will have an impact on national security in your regions?

General WALDHAUSER. Absolutely, yes.

General VOTEL. Yes, I would absolutely agree, Congressman.

Mr. CISNEROS. Okay. So by failing to address like famine, disease, humanitarian catastrophes, education, whether it be Syria or Niger, Yemen, anywhere in your regions, as these resources are cut, what kind of impact is that going to have on national security in your regions?

General WALDHAUSER. Well, Congressman, I think first of all we have to understand the global effort in some of these areas, the global NGO, nongovernmental organizational effort that really have done a good job. So in places like Somalia, for example, where this year, food insecurity is somewhere around 4.2 million people, we have offered assistance to the NGOs, for example, logistical, even intelligence, but for the most part, they have learned a lot of lessons, staged a lot of logistical support, and they are dealing with that situation.

Now, with regard to the U.S. specifically though, I mean, our engagement and our involvement needs to be maintained, because there is like 12.5 million displaced persons on the African continent, which causes security issues and challenges for the governments to have to deal with them from a fiscal perspective.

General VOTEL. Congressman, I would agree with General Waldhauser on this. I think our involvement in this continues to be ex-

traordinarily important. As we look and clear through areas as we conduct our counterterrorism operations, such as we are doing against ISIS right now, the resources that come along with some of the stability aspects that must always follow these combat operations we are doing, are absolutely essential to bring people back into their communities, to start standing up the essential services, and to give the local governance, local security an opportunity to begin to reestablish life in these areas.

So I would agree this is absolutely essential and we have to stay engaged in this.

Mr. CISNEROS. So just to follow up on that. As you have kind of talked about how the Chinese and the Russians are kind of filling the void diplomatically in some of these regions. Are they filling the void humanitarian as we cut humanitarian aid or are they kind of picking up their humanitarian efforts in order to build better relationships with these foreign governments?

General WALDHAUSER. To a certain degree, yes. I mean, they have got about 2,000 U.N. peacekeepers. They have tried to insert themselves. I don't say that in a negative way, but they have tried to contribute to the Ebola crisis we talked about in the DRC [Democratic Republic of the Congo]. They want to become a leader in that particular medical technology. They have made, you know, strides in that area and, you know, at the end of the day, that is not bad.

I mean, there are places certainly on the African continent where, you know, we have to cooperate with the Chinese, but there are times we have to confront and also compete with them. But when they build infrastructure, if they contribute to, you know, vaccinations and the Ebola crisis and so forth, that is not necessarily bad; it is actually helpful.

Mr. CISNEROS. I yield back my time.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Kim.

Mr. KIM. Thank you so much for coming out here and answering our questions. I wanted to address General Votel. First of all, I just want to echo the comments of a lot of my colleagues and just thanking you for your service. As someone who has been working this space before, I know we are indebted as a Nation for what you have done and the great work that you have done over the years.

I wanted to follow up on something you said earlier. You were talking about how a lot of the efforts that we are engaging now in Syria and in Iraq, in particular, which is what I am focused on with this question line, is about now shifting towards dealing with an insurgency. That a lot of the territorial land held by ISIS has been taken back. We are in some ways changing the mission in terms of what we are trying to be doing now. And my question to you is just trying to get your honest assessments of where the Iraqi security forces are in terms of that.

You know, we have been working so much with this by, with, and through, and I am just trying to get a sense of what is different now in 2019 compared to 2013, specifically in terms of how they are ready to handle this newer mission of averting back to dealing with an insurgency.

General VOTEL. Thank you, Congressman. From our perspective, we don't look at this as a change of mission. Our mission still is, at the invitation of the Government of Iraq, to assist them in defeating ISIS. So from our perspective, we look at it very much the same. My assessment of the Iraqi security forces right now is that they are doing a pretty good job of keeping pressure on the remnants of ISIS that exist in Iraq. In some cases, they are doing this unilaterally, and in other cases, they are doing this with our assistance.

Each of their units across the country have different levels of readiness and different levels of capability, and we are continuing to work to raise those to a higher standard so they can be self-sustaining. But they are continuing to do that. What is different, I think, is that they have been, from 2013, 2014, whatnot, they have been well supported by their civilian government. The current Iraqi leadership is very, very strong supporters of their military. The former prime minister, Prime Minister Abadi, was an extraordinary wartime leader, in my opinion, and he provided exceptional support to them. I think the military leaders saw this. They saw the necessity of the situation, and they rallied behind the coalition support that we provided to them and rose to the occasion. Good leaders emerged on the Iraqi side that helped them orchestrate this campaign, and we are continuing to see that today.

They certainly have more that needs to be done. It needs to be a more inclusive force, it needs to include more Sunnis, it needs to include more Kurds in it, and we are working towards that. We are going to have to address popular mobilization forces, these elements that are part of the security forces as well. But I am very confident in the current military leadership that we see in Iraq in this, again, moving in the right direction.

Mr. KIM. That is right. I share a lot of those concerns going forward about how we can do this and make sure that the skills that we have been building up aren't going to atrophy as we start to move on. And as we have seen before, we have certainly seen a lot of success with the counterterrorism service and others in terms of going in, being able to penetrate ISIS defenses, but we have also seen the difficulties of what happened in 2013 and 2014 when the Iraqi security forces were asked to hold onto territory and what is their ability to hold. And that is where I am just trying to delve off of.

Just one last question here. I know that, you know, in your past work you have done a lot with the Counter Terrorism Service in Iraq, and I know that they were such a critical force there that had gone through a lot over the last couple of years, in terms what was asked of them, in terms of going through some very difficult circumstance. Specifically with that organization, the CTS, what is their current capacity? And how crucial are they in this now mission—again, I agree with you it is not a changing mission, but certainly a focus more on hold rather than the other components. How crucial is the CTS in maintaining that?

General VOTEL. CTS remains extraordinarily critical in terms of—and it is their desire and our support to that desire to return the CTS to their more traditional missions of counterterrorism operations, and that is what we are working on. So we stayed with

the CTS when we left in 2011. That was important. And that was a reliable force, and they carried the heavy load over the campaign. And as we move in the future, we have to sustain that, but we also have to stay with the Iraqi security forces as well. The Iraqi Army can be the bulwark against extremism in this country, and we need to support them.

Mr. KIM. Well, I certainly hope so. I will do everything I can from this angle to be able to support those missions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Ranking member.

Mr. THORNBERRY. A major focus for both parties and the administration in the last 2 years has been to repair the readiness of our forces. I had one of your fellow combatant commanders tell me recently that he can already tell a difference in the forces that are being rotated through his command. I don't know if it applies so much to CENTCOM because you-all have been the priority theater for 17 years. But my question to each of you is, can you at this point tell the difference yet in the readiness of the forces that are rotated through your commands?

General VOTEL. Congressman, from our perspective, I think we certainly can. As you know, we have been dependent upon the services to provide us well-trained forces, and we have been the lucky recipients of that for a long period of time. So I remain very, very grateful for that.

I would highlight one thing. The Army's investment in security force assistance brigades I think is a good example of how our services are really supporting us in the way that we need. This is an organization that is specifically designed to help with the by, with, and through approach that we are applying so effectively on the ground in a number of areas. And so to me, I think the services, my service in particular in this case, I think is doing an excellent job of providing us the capabilities that we need to pursue these missions.

Mr. THORNBERRY. And just to emphasize, you can tell the readiness level is improving already?

General VOTEL. It has always been uniformly high in CENTCOM, and so it is certainly sustained. And I have no concerns about any of the forces that are coming into the CENTCOM area of responsibility.

Mr. THORNBERRY. General Waldhauser, is it getting better yet?

General WALDHAUSER. Congressman, a little bit more nuance, I think, for AFRICOM, and that is, I would say that the special operations forces that we have that are engaged in the kinetic activities are as good as they ever have been. Their readiness has been always good and continues to be so.

I would just say a quick point on the SFAB [security force assistance brigade] that General Votel mentioned. We have—we would have a lot of work for them if we had one assigned to AFRICOM. There is plenty of things they could do to contribute.

And finally, I would just say that also in AFRICOM, we have locations with ranges and so forth that will allow readiness to be maintained and even improved, and we would like to sell that to the services too. Sometimes they think that perhaps on the African continent they will lose readiness, but we always like to say that

they can gain—maintain and even gain readiness at some of the places where they could train.

Mr. THORNBERRY. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. We are over time, but, Mr. Gallego, I will yield to you. We will have to do it quickly. Got to get upstairs for the classified session. When we are done here, we will move up.

Mr. Gallego.

Mr. GALLEGO. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

General Waldhauser, last week, The New York Times published an account of an Operation Sudan in 2013 that suffered from problems eerily similar to what we saw in the Niger ambush of 2017. I personally as a Marine know what it is like to have bad leadership and bad equipment but still be required to go into combat several times. I can tell you, General, it is an awful feeling.

So please tell me, General, what has AFRICOM or DOD done to change the way they do business so that we don't see more Niger ambush situations or Sudan or any number of unreported incidents in your command over the past several years that are no longer, quote/unquote, "situation normal"?

General WALDHAUSER. So, Congressman, as indicated earlier, some of the things that we have done since Niger incident have to do with the tactical actions and procedures on the ground. And minimum force requirements, timelines for MEDEVAC and CAS-EVAC [casualty evacuation] coordination efforts, weather and so forth, overhead armed ISR where it is applicable, ISR together with that, and then when you tie in with what we have been doing recently, after a long time of working with these units, we are now advising them at a higher level where we do mostly at the battalion level and to a large degree remotely. We have the ability to do the same thing, and so those are some of the things we have changed since.

Mr. GALLEGO. Thank you, General. And I am aware of some of that. One of the things that I am not aware of is who has been held responsible for this epic failure that had cost some men our lives. So far what I have read is that the Army brass is basically trying to blame junior officers both before and after the Niger ambush. So who is being held responsible? You are the AFRICOM commander. Who is responsible for these failures? And it is not junior officers.

General WALDHAUSER. So, Congressman, the issue of the investigation right now lies with the Secretary of Defense. The issue of accountability and awards and so forth come from SOCOM. I know—I am not privy to those discussions, but I know they have been ongoing. But perhaps, Katie, I don't know from the OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] perspective the status. But I would just say, again, this—the investigation completed and the actions—

Mr. GALLEGO. How much longer is the investigation going to take place? This is almost 2 years now.

Ms. WHEELBARGER. I will just add that the report and that very question on the responsibilities and the awards is with Secretary of Defense. He takes this very seriously. Obviously, we have had a transition of authority within the—having a new Secretary. He is reviewing this carefully, and we are expecting you to get that final report here shortly, which will answer that very question.

Mr. GALLEGO. And once that report comes out, you are going to actually go hold the DOD personnel, whether they be generals or below, responsible for this disaster, correct?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. That is a decision with the Secretary at this moment, and he will be able to provide you that information as soon as he finalizes his decision.

Mr. GALLEGO. Okay. Ms. Wheelbarger, section 1212 of last year's NDAA required a review of advise, assist, and accompany missions from the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. There were clearly issues about these missions as laid bare by the ambush. So why haven't you provided this report to us?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. I believe this report is tied up in finally having the Secretary's complete decisions on all of the recommendations going forward. And as soon as he does, we will provide the report.

Mr. GALLEGO. Okay. I would also like to know what is the—and it could be either General Waldhauser or General Wheelbarger, or Ms. Wheelbarger, I apologize, what is the status of providing redacted reports of the Niger investigation to the families of the deceased U.S. soldiers?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. My understanding is all of the reporting requirements are—will be released as soon as—including the redacted reports to the families as soon as the final decisions that are outstanding are made by the Secretary.

Mr. GALLEGO. So that is including the autopsy reports?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. I would have to take that back.

General WALDHAUSER. Well, my understanding is that once the Secretary signs off on this, then those redacted versions will go to the family first, just like we did at the outset of this. As you may recall, the team went to each family and spent hours with them to give them the first look at this, and I am sure it has been taking a long time, and I know that they have had a lot to process and probably have more questions. But it is my understanding that—

Mr. GALLEGO. General, without a doubt that the family has actually been able to process this, I think the problem that we have is we actually can't process what actually occurred because we are not getting a full report. I think that is my dissatisfaction right now, because there are currently, you know, operations probably happening in AFRICOM, and I have zero doubt that it is actually being fully changed because I don't know who actually was responsible for this major mess-up. And it scares me that the DOD is at this point still hiding this information, and it has been 2 years.

So I hope that that will be coming up soon, because I think then we will have to take extraordinary measures to actually get that to happen.

I yield back my time.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Just quickly at the end, the only comment I will make, I know a lot of people have raised concerns about Afghanistan, and no matter which path you take, there are going to be concerns about Afghanistan. But trying to find a negotiated settlement is the best way forward, without question. We don't presume what that settlement is going to be, but I for one am supportive of the negotiations

and the discussion you are having, because ultimately, our goal is to reduce our footprint in Afghanistan, reduce the risk, you know.

Men and women in our Armed Forces lives are at risk in Afghanistan every day right now. To the extent that we can shift that responsibility to people in the region, I am all for it. It is not going to be easy. It is a very, very difficult part of the world, as you know far, far better than I do, but it is the direction we have to go if we are going to get to the outcome that we want.

So I appreciate those efforts, and we will certainly stay in touch with you on the details. And then with that, take a brief break, and we will reconvene upstairs in a few minutes.

[Whereupon, at 12:18 p.m., the committee proceeded in closed session.]

A P P E N D I X

MARCH 7, 2019

PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

MARCH 7, 2019

Statement by

Kathryn Wheelbarger

Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

Office of the Secretary of Defense

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Introduction

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

As this is my first appearance before this Committee, I would also like to recognize and thank you for the strong collaboration and bipartisan support you provide the Department. I also appreciate the vital contribution this committee can make to our national dialogue on defense issues. I spent nearly 8 years serving as a senior staff member with national security committees in Congress—both in the House and the Senate. And although I did not have the privilege of serving on this particular committee, my time with HPSCI and SASC instilled in me a deep respect for leadership provided by this committee, and the invaluable connection you provide to the American people. Students of military history spend a great deal of attention on the relationship between military commanders and statesmen; or another way to say it, on the proper level of civilian oversight of military activity and operations.

An equally important component of military history is understanding national will—the will to see threats clearly, approach them with sound policy, and remain committed to a country's defense—even when the costs seem high. And in the American system, the U.S. Congress is a fulcrum point where those two vital components—thoughtful oversight and sustained national will—come together. I believe, to maintain our security, we must do all we can to sustain both. It is a noble and sometimes difficult challenge, and we at the Department of Defense appreciate your unique role in ensuring that our military has the resources, authorities, and legitimacy necessary to

deter and, if necessary, defeat any foe. It is a privilege for me to be here today with two very devoted commanders to explain our national policy toward the Middle East and Africa.

Our approach to Middle East and Africa policy is nested within the guidance from the 2017 National Security Strategy and the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS). The overall goals of the National Security Strategy are to protect the American people, defend the Homeland, and to promote prosperity and peace from a position of strength. The National Defense Strategy supports our National Security Strategy by focusing on three key aspects of U.S. power: our lethality, our partners and allies, and our institutions. The NDS also gives clear guidance and priorities to the Department: while we must continue to address terrorism threats, long-term competition with other states is our top national security priority. We face a complex, volatile, and dangerous security environment—marked by competition and aggressive behavior from China and Russia and ongoing threats from North Korea, Iran, and terrorist groups. To compete effectively in this environment and defend future generations of Americans against rising near-peer competitors, our forces must remain dominant by increasing modernization, technological adaptation, and readiness; we must also ensure increased lethality and reforms maximize taxpayers' contributions; and, we must strengthen our partnerships and alliances around the globe. The need to address near-peer competitors now and in the future requires us to make certain adjustments to our posture and avoid unnecessarily prioritizing urgent problems at the expense of building readiness and capacity for potential high-end conflict in the future. And, as we do so, we must deter and confront adversaries, while avoiding miscalculation or escalation that would distract and ultimately undermine our national security interests.

In the Middle East and Africa, our policy objective is to increase regional stability and secure U.S. interests by working by, with, and through a network of international partners. By enhancing the capabilities and capacity of our partners to provide for their own defense and

contribute to regional problems, we reduce the risk to our Homeland while increasing the internal security and stability of potentially vulnerable states. We often consciously play a supporting role to other government agencies and our partners in these regions. We seek to address shared security threats with partners and allies, while maintaining the ability to act unilaterally, if and when necessary.

Middle East

The Middle East remains vitally important to our national security for four fundamental reasons. First, we are involved in active operations at the request of, and in support to, our partners in countering extremists that threaten the region and the Homeland. Second, the Middle East is the cross roads of global competition with Russia and China. Third, we face an aggressive Iran whose actions destabilize the region, particularly through the transfer of advanced conventional weapons to militants and terrorists. Finally, our national security and national economy depend on open commerce through the Middle East maritime domain, a free flow of natural resources, a reduction in factors of instability, and the disruption of violent extremist organizations. We must remain postured and engaged throughout the Middle East, adjusting our responses and investing in our partners.

To that end, the Department's policy objectives are to ensure continued success in our campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qa'ida (AQ), while also preparing to compete with China, Russia, and Iran for regional and global influence, and investing in sustainable partnerships to reduce the vulnerabilities of weak states as part of a whole of government effort to address instability. These policy objectives inform our decisions on the risks and benefits of actions, but in a deliberate manner. We understand the importance and trust emplaced upon the Department as good stewards of security for every American. This is our

commitment to our national security and prosperity.

Operation INHERENT RESOLVE and Yemen

In Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, our sustained support to partner counter-terrorism operations is bringing success. In Iraq and Syria, we have driven ISIS out of territory it once held. As we turn to consolidating those gains and ensuring the lasting defeat of ISIS, we will continue to work with our coalition and interagency partners to build local security forces and governance in Syria and continue our work supporting the Iraqi Security Forces, including the Counter Terrorism Service. Now that ISIS has been denied its territory, we must remain flexible and adaptive to any changing tactics by the enemy. The Global Defeat-ISIS Coalition was developed to defeat a global enemy—but we must not lose focus on securing our gains in Iraq and Syria.

Specifically in Syria, our stated U.S. policy priorities are to defeat ISIS, support a negotiated end to the conflict through a United Nations (UN) brokered deal, and to see the withdrawal of all foreign forces in the country, particularly those of and backed by Iran. The U.S. military mission in Syria, however, remains limited to the D-ISIS campaign. We are working with our partners and allies to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS. We are also working with the Department of State to enable local security forces and prevent the resurgence of ISIS networks in territory liberated from the group. Our drawdown represents a new phase in a continuing mission as we transition from liberating territory to enabling local security and stability alongside our partners in the Global D-ISIS Coalition. The President decided that the United States will continue to have a residual force in Syria even after the territorial defeat of ISIS to support and enable our partners on the ground to ensure the lasting defeat of ISIS. That drawdown will proceed based on the conditions on the ground, although the requirements of that residual force are still be developed by our military planners. As such, we do not have a timeline to share today, because these are not

time-based decisions.

In Iraq, our policy remains to provide support to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) at the invitation of the Government of Iraq to support its ongoing fight against ISIS. We seek a sovereign, secure Iraq that protects our shared security interests. We have forged a strong partnership with the Government of Iraq and its security forces during the long, arduous process of liberating approximately one-third of Iraq's territory from ISIS. In the years following the 2014 fall of Mosul to ISIS, the United States has mobilized the most powerful nations in the world to support the defense and security of Iraq's sovereignty, and they played a leading role in rebuilding the ISF into a professional, efficient, and capable fighting force. Iraq's security forces have made substantial gains, but require continued support to ensure ISIS cannot re-emerge to threaten Iraq's security. U.S. security assistance strengthens Iraqi sovereignty by building Iraqi capacity and developing capable security institutions to increase Iraq's resilience.

In Yemen, DoD's military actions and partner support are intended to help end the war and avoid a regional conflict, counter the threat from AQAP and ISIS-Yemen, mitigate the humanitarian crisis, and help our partners defend their territory. The United States' seeks a peaceful resolution to the conflict that will bring much-needed stability to Yemenis and the region. Together with the Department of State, we are working to bring all parties to the negotiating table by showing that we take the Coalition's security interests seriously. The Department has two lines of effort in Yemen. First is our fight against terrorist organizations that threaten U.S. national security interests. Terrorists from Yemen are responsible for attacks against the U.S. and our allies, including the 2000 USS Cole bombing, the 2009 Christmas day airline plot, and the attacks in Paris in 2015. Along with our partners, we have significantly degraded al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula's external plot capability and ISIS-Yemen's presence. Our second line of effort is to provide limited, non-combat support to the

Coalition, which is defending the recognized Government of Yemen. This support began in 2015 under President Obama after Iran-backed rebels attempted to overthrow the Yemeni government and began cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia. That support continues under President Trump, based upon a 2017 that coupled continued support with ways to further limit civilian casualties. DoD's support to the Coalition has been a key factor in influencing Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to back the UN process. Supported by Iran, the Houthis are using increasingly sophisticated ballistic missiles and explosive unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) attacks against our partners—including civilian facilities and airports where American citizens are present. Houthis also target military and commercial vessels in the Red Sea, which threatens a major global maritime chokepoint.

Today, fewer than 60 DoD military advisors, deployed to Saudi Arabia, enable the Coalition to address these threats. These advisors are not engaged in offensive military operations against the Houthis. Rather, they help the Coalition defend itself from these external attacks. I want to emphasize that Yemen is at a key juncture and the United States plays a critical role. We must remember that the conflict in Yemen is rooted in a Yemeni civil war that broke out when the Houthis overran Sana'a. If the Houthis continue to refuse to negotiate meaningfully with the legitimate Yemeni government, we will see a failed state on the Arabian Peninsula. A change in our approach would work *against* our efforts to encourage negotiations and develop a legitimate, inclusive government, and could actually accelerate that path to a failed state. Withdrawing U.S. support would embolden the Houthi rebels, revitalize their combat operations, and undermine the negotiations at a vital point in the talks.

Partnerships: Levant and Gulf

Our successes in these immediate conflicts highlight the unwavering commitment of our

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

Saudi Arabia remains a central pillar of our regional counterterrorism efforts and is a key stakeholder in the Yemen conflict with whom we must work to achieve a peaceful solution. Despite recent challenges we must address, Riyadh's influence extends through the Muslim world to Central Asia and East Africa; leveraging it serves as a force multiplier for U.S. interests. As the Arab military with the most developed expeditionary capabilities, the UAE is helping us take the fight to al-Qa'ida and its affiliates in Yemen and Somalia and also supports NATO operations in Afghanistan. Oman serves as a critical waypoint for DoD operations in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility and is a consistent voice for moderation in regional affairs. Kuwait remains a key partner for force-flow and logistic support to U.S. forces throughout the entire region. Qatar, as the second largest customer of Foreign Military Sales and a critical host for U.S. forces, is taking steps to increase its interoperability with U.S. and NATO forces. Bahrain helps to shape the Gulf's security architecture as a key U.S. partner in regional coalitions and U.S.-led defense initiatives, including the international D-ISIS Coalition. Bahrain also hosts the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, reinforcing a strong and enduring security partnership.

Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA)

The Department of Defense is working closely with the Department of State and our regional allies to advance the establishment of the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA). MESA is designed to advance the regional stability, security, and prosperity over time through enhanced multilateral cooperation in the political, economic, energy, and security spheres. Prospective members include the Gulf Cooperation Council, Egypt, and Jordan. The alliance will be predicated on the principles of sovereignty, equality, multilateralism, and non-hostility. MESA will not degrade the United States' existing bilateral relationship with participating countries, nor replace existing organizations like the Gulf Cooperation Council. Instead, it will build upon these existing relationships and structures to enhance multilateral cooperation and obtain greater benefits for all nations. MESA will enable the United States to rebalance its resources to meet global priorities, while continuing to secure its interests and honor its security commitments in the Middle East. MESA will employ a conditions-based approach that fosters confidence, cohesion, and multilateral cooperation among participants over time through achievement of clearly defined milestones and confidence-building measures.

Great Power Competition in the Middle East

Even as we see combat success, we must recognize the importance of our posture for near-peer competition, regional challenges from Iran, and the residual terrorist threat to our Homeland. Russia and China seek to expand their influence in the Middle East using similar tools, but otherwise unconstrained by respect for international rules and norms. We see Russian and Chinese defense sales increasingly seeking to drive a wedge between us and our long-time partners. We see Russian military action in Syria influencing how partners balance their security interests. We see Chinese economic activity—along with a corresponding

expansion of its military footprint—finding new homes across the region. These actions put our own influence—both military and economic—at risk. In response, we must continue to invest in our regional partnerships.

Iran

The United States' partnership in the Middle East are invaluable as we pursue opportunities and face other regional challenges. For example, Iran will continue to challenge the United States and our partners in the region for influence. DoD stands in full support of the U.S. Government efforts to counter Iran's destabilizing influence and support our partners in the face of growing Iranian military threats.

While we do not seek conflict with Iran, we cannot ignore either Iran's destabilizing behavior across an already complex region or its investments in advanced military capabilities. DoD is addressing the Iran threat through a combination of our force posture, which deters Iranian aggression and limits its freedom of maneuver, and building the capabilities and capacity of our partners to address the Iranian threat in their own region. Although Iran does not possess the same conventional military capabilities as Russia or China, it has continued to invest in strengthening its conventional and unconventional capabilities. We increasingly face an Iran that proliferates advanced conventional weapons with the purpose of building influence in vulnerable states. To that end, the United States policy is to address these threats through an array of diplomatic, economic, intelligence, and military tools. For the Department of Defense, this means working by, with, and through partners on the ground to reduce Iran's influence and building the capacity of vulnerable states to ensure their own defense. As we seek to balance our global responsibilities, our dynamic forces remain poised to address any Iranian provocation.

It is important to highlight that the Department takes the Iran threat seriously. We will take

actions to degrade and impose costs on Iran's destabilizing behaviors, ever cognizant of the risk of unneeded escalation into war.

Afghanistan

Assistant Secretary Shriver is responsible for defense policy on Afghanistan and Pakistan, and therefore, I will not speak in detail about our South Asia Strategy. I am, however, responsible for our NATO policy, and thus work closely with ASD Shriver, USCENTCOM, USEUCOM, and the Department of State to ensure that our NATO allies, who have since 2001 stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the United States in Afghanistan, have a current understanding of the status of negotiations and the vision for the future. Acting Secretary Shanahan recently committed to the NATO alliance during the Defense Ministerial in Brussels that no decision had been made about future force posture and any future discussion would be in concert with our allies.

Africa

Vast, diverse, and dynamic, Africa is a continent of opportunities and challenges that have the potential to surge in either direction depending on how they are met. Home to more than a billion people, Africa's population is expected to double by 2050; this growth will strain resources and services, likely lead to increased migration, and could exacerbate security threats by increasing the risk of political instability, communal conflict, transregional terrorism and illicit trafficking. At the same time, Africa includes multiple burgeoning economies with long-term opportunities for U.S. trade and business partnerships and is a critical source of global commodities as well as farmland and inexpensive labor. Further, sub-Saharan African countries are the most unified and influential regional group at the UN General Assembly, and have the potential to influence key decisions. It is imperative that DoD remains engaged to help partners foster positive trends and

arrest the negative ones.

As outlined in the 2018 DoD Africa Strategy, the Department will continue to pursue African-led security solutions while maintaining the ability to act unilaterally to protect U.S. citizens and interests. As such, DoD will: (1) support the U.S. whole-of-government effort to address African security challenges; (2) leverage international partnership to support security objectives; (3) maintain strategic access and influence; and (4) seek low-cost, resource-sustainable, innovative security solutions.

Employing our “by, with, and through” approach, we use a variety of tools to work closely with African and other international partners to achieve several policy goals, including capacity building programs, security assistance, military equipment sales, education and exercises. First, we seek to advance U.S. interests and influence in the region and maintain strategic access, which is especially important in an era of increasing near-peer competition on the continent. Second, we seek to deny safe havens to terrorists and disrupt their ability to direct or support external operations against the United States, our interests, or our partners. Third, we seek to support our Department of State and interagency colleagues by securing U.S. diplomatic posts and providing crisis response capabilities. Fourth, we strive to grow current partners and develop new partnerships to advance U.S. interests. Fifth, we work to assure DoD access to the continent and adapt DoD posture to meet evolving needs. And finally, we seek to enhance African partners’ capabilities by supporting the strengthening African security forces and development of institutions at both the national and regional levels so to help achieve shared objectives into the future.

External Actors

Governments from across the globe are increasingly engaged in Africa. In the era of near-peer competition, DoD remains vigilant against Chinese and Russian influence in Africa that may

threaten U.S. interests in the region and elsewhere. China's first overseas base – in Djibouti – operationalizes its military and commercial expansion. Many Africa partners employ Russian and Chinese hardware and increasing training opportunities with Moscow and Beijing are helping to shape the next generation of military leaders. And Chinese and Russian security assistance, which often does not prioritize building long-term African security capacity, can undermine transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights in Africa. U.S. efforts to strengthen African security forces and develop institutions at both the national and regional levels focus on enabling Africans to take the lead in dealing with African security challenges. Additionally, we will prioritize our efforts to bolster our relationships, advance U.S. influence, and maintain strategic access.

Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs)

Africa is home to a growing number of transregional and localized terrorist groups. Instability in multiple countries and regions in Africa provides opportunities for terrorism to proliferate. Government failures in maintaining security, delivering essential services, and providing economic opportunities in these regions create conditions that allow terrorists to expand their reach and influence. Further empowering these terrorist groups are illicit networks that move drugs, weapons, and persons across the continent. In addition to profiting from instability, terrorist networks in Africa benefit from the expansive and porous state borders.

As DoD recalibrates to address the eroding U.S. military advantage against China and Russia, we will not neglect the enduring challenge of terrorism. Counterterrorism resource adjustments based on progress of programs and alignment with NDS objectives will result in a 10 percent reduction of the overall DoD effort in Africa over the next several years. The Department will preserve the majority of our counter-VEO activities in Somalia, Djibouti, and Libya and focus our assistance in West Africa on enhancing partner efforts. The majority of our security

cooperation efforts to build partner capacity remains relatively unaffected.

African Sub-Regions

DoD efforts are primarily concentrated on four sub-regions, including the Horn of Africa, Maghreb, Sahel, and Lake Chad Region, while attention is also given to central and southern Africa.

On the Horn of Africa, a secure, stable, and prosperous Somalia is important to protect U.S. interests, maintain regional stability, and ensure freedom of navigation through the Red Sea corridor. The threats from al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia, along with poor governance, corruption, and drought, have created a continually complex challenge. The Department of Defense is working to help the Somali National Army assume security responsibilities and address security threats themselves. Our focus on the development of the Danab (“Lightning”) Advanced Infantry Brigade is seeing progress—with over 1,000 trained soldiers placed in formed companies and battalions. Additionally, the Department’s kinetic activities are impacting al-Shabaab and ISIS leadership and operations. For the first time in 30 years, Somalia contributed to a security event outside its borders by participating in the U.S.-sponsored multinational naval exercise Cutlass Express 2018. However, progress is gradual. The January 2019 al-Shabaab attack in Nairobi, which killed one American, is a stark reminder of the grave threat and continued need for security sector improvements to help address challenges emanating from the fragile Somali state. Thus, we continue to help build partner capacity of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) Troop Contributing Countries (TCC) through our bilateral assistance programs and work in concert with them and other countries in Somalia. We support AMISOM’s intended transition of security responsibilities to Somali security forces by 2021 and recognize the need for the Federal Government of Somalia to demonstrate sustained progress in the interim. Within efforts to develop

AMISOM TCC capacity, we continue to promote defense institution building through mechanisms like the Security Governance Initiative with Kenya. The Department is also employing an array of cooperative activities to support Prime Minister Abiy's transformative efforts in Ethiopia. Djibouti, as host to Camp Lemonnier and its 27 tenant commands composed of members of all four services and DoD civilians, is a critical U.S. partner. With China's naval base juxtaposed just a few miles from our enduring U.S. location, we will manage our strategic interests while navigating potential coordination and safety challenges resulting from its proximity. .

In the Maghreb, the United States has a strategic interest in a secure and stable Libya and greater Maghreb. In support of that objective, DoD continues counterterrorism activities to degrade terrorist groups, such as ISIS-Libya and al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and supports diplomatic efforts to advance the political reconciliation process. Specifically, DoD works closely with the Department of State to ensure cohesive policy making, consistent messaging, and episodic diplomatic missions to Tripoli, and also engages international military partners to leverage assistance where necessary. Across the Maghreb, DoD employs security cooperation tools, including training, exercises, and equipment sales, to achieve shared security objectives. These efforts include enabling Tunisian, Moroccan, and Libyan support of the D-ISIS campaign, while also helping Tunisia transform its forces and secure its borders, bolstering Morocco's role as a security exporter, and enhancing our defense relationship with Algeria as it fights extremists.

Across the Sahel, DoD is focused on supporting partner efforts to contain terrorist organization activity and prevent such threats from migrating across a larger swath of bordering states. Mali continues to face growing insecurity and persistent attacks from terrorist groups, such as Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (IS-GS). A rise in attacks have taken a toll on tri-border states, Burkina Faso and Niger; and states to the south, such as the Ivory Coast, Benin, Togo, and Ghana, are increasingly concerned. In order to

help stabilize Mali and manage the broader threat, DoD continues to support the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the development of the G5 Sahel Joint Force and capacity building for its members, and French counterterrorism operations. An African-led solution to the transregional issue, the G5 Sahel Force is an encouraging initiative that is slowly advancing toward full operational capacity. Given the size and scope of the counterterrorism operations within the ungoverned spaces of the Sahel, persistent pressure in support of our partners is required to arrest the increasingly lethal terrorist activity and help enable diplomatic and development efforts in these fragile states.

In the Lake Chad Region, where Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA) operate, there has been a measurable decrease in violent Boko Haram activity from 2017 to 2018. However, ISIS-WA, has significantly increased its number of high-profile attacks in the same timeframe, placing tremendous pressure on regional militaries and contributing to a growing humanitarian crisis in Nigeria. Through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), composed of forces from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, and the institutional development of the partner militaries in the region, we lend critical support to partner counterterrorism efforts and enhancing partner capability to counter this growing terrorist organization threat. Niger, which is facing threats on multiple fronts (e.g., Sahel and Lake Chad Basin), is an increasingly capable partner that will host a contingency support location in Agadez. Cameroon, which is also contributing to numerous security missions, has proven itself an effective partner, yet gross human rights violations are a concern. Nigeria, Africa's largest economy with an exploding population that is expected to double by 2050, is at the fulcrum with ISIS-WA and Boko Haram primarily resident in its Borno State. DoD is working with Nigeria through intelligence support, defense institution building, and other security cooperation efforts to boost its capability while also devoting the array of security cooperation resources to support the rest of the MNJTF partners.

Gulf of Guinea, Central and Southern Africa

The countries that compose these regions struggle with many of the trends that afflict the aforementioned nations, manage a variety of challenges, and offer numerous opportunities. From maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, Ebola in Democratic Republic of Congo, peacekeeping contributions from southern Africa, to near-peer competition and strategic minerals, continued engagement and cooperation with countries of these sub-regions is important.

Trafficking and Other Criminal Activity

Illicit trafficking undermines legitimate local economies, exacerbates systemic corruption, fuels conflict with local law enforcement, and provides a funding mechanism for rebel groups and terrorist networks that threaten U.S. interests. West and East Africa, for example, remain top transit points for the illicit global narcotics trade due to insufficient law enforcement and high rates of corruption. Southeast Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique) is a major transshipment hub for heroin from Afghanistan, promoting regional corruption and distorting financial markets. Well-armed, equipped, and organized networks exploit porous borders and weak institutions to profit from trading in poached wildlife thereby threatening the existence of precious creatures, damaging economic potential, and corroding systems.

DoD's collaborative security approach in Africa protects U.S. national interests, improves operational readiness and flexibility within the Joint Force, and maintains our strategic access and influence in this competitive region. As part of a whole-of-government approach, DoD will prioritize engagement where the most significant U.S. defense interests are at stake, partners manifest the political will to address security challenges, and targeted efforts are most likely to have a positive impact.

Conclusion

Under the guiding framework of the NDS, the Department is well-positioned to address the range of dynamic issues facing the United States in the Middle East and Africa. This balanced approach helps ensure the Department can meet a variety of present and future threats while enhancing the strength and agility of our forces. With your support, we will continue our strategically predictable, yet operationally unpredictable, approach and demonstrating commitment and resolve, while keeping our adversaries off-balance. Thank for the opportunity to share my views relating to USCENTCOM and USAFRICOM posture.

Kathryn Wheelbarger
Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

Kathryn Wheelbarger is the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. She performed the duties of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs from July 2017 to November 2017. She oversees policy issues related to the nations and international organizations of Europe (including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization), Russia, the Middle East, Africa, and the Western Hemisphere.

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

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

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

STATEMENT OF
GENERAL JOSEPH L. VOTEL
COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND
BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
THE POSTURE OF U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND
GREAT POWER COMPETITION: THE CURRENT AND FUTURE
CHALLENGES IN THE MIDDLE EAST
7 MARCH 2019

Introduction

As 2018 came to a close, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) was engaged in critical events and catalysts for change across its area of responsibility (AOR). In the final two weeks of December, CENTCOM supported the U.N. Special Envoy in the establishment of a fragile cease-fire in Yemen, and enabled the efforts of the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation through military pressure on the Taliban. We began planning for the safe, professional withdrawal under pressure of U.S. forces from Syria, while maintaining our Defeat-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (D-ISIS) efforts and accounting for the formation of a new governmental cabinet in Iraq. We monitored and mitigated the unprofessional acts of Iranian naval forces in international waters that threaten the global commons; which stood in stark contrast to the professional, mature actions of the U.S.-advised Lebanese Armed Forces as it de-escalated tensions along the border with Israel. While these events appear unconnected, they represent the swirling dynamics of the AOR – each event marking a pivotal point with the potential to impact the stability of the entire region.

Since 2001, in the aftermath of 9/11, CENTCOM has been charged with the responsibility of commanding multiple, often simultaneous combat missions in the Central Region. During that time, confronting terrorism and defeating violent extremist groups was the primary objective of U.S. national military power. Seventeen years later, CENTCOM is still the only geographic combatant command conducting multiple, active combat operations, but the strategic imperatives of a changing world have compelled us to rethink our priorities and assess our readiness for new challenges.

The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) rightly recognized a return to competition between the great powers that now poses a greater long-term challenge to our nation than the violence of terrorism. We also noted that the National Security Strategy (NSS) directs that “The United States seeks a Middle East that is not a safe haven or breeding ground for jihadist terrorists, not dominated by any power

hostile to the United States, and that contributes to a stable global energy market,” and that “We will retain the necessary American military presence in the region to protect the United States and our allies from terrorist attacks and preserve a favorable regional balance of power.” We at CENTCOM understand how global disorder has created a security environment more complex and volatile than we have faced in our nation’s history. This assessment demands a clear-eyed appraisal of the threats, an acknowledgement of the changing character of warfare, and an understanding that challenges to our national interests will largely be transregional versus regional.

We approach our evolving role at CENTCOM with both humility and agility, acknowledging the priorities outlined in the NSS and NDS, and the fact that we will not be the main effort of our nation’s scarce resources in perpetuity. We must, therefore, posture ourselves as both the supported and supporting effort toward securing our national interests – many of which are still heavily impacted by activities in the CENTCOM AOR. While CENTCOM has been the primary focus of military assets for nearly two decades, we recognize maintaining an agile posture in the Central Region doesn’t necessarily require large concentrations of military personnel and equipment. Our strategic strength has never rested solely on the volume of materiel we bring to the fight, but rather on the partnerships, alliances and whole-of-government efforts no other country in the world could recreate.

Looking forward, our challenge will be to secure our hard-fought gains, and those of our allies and partners, while posturing for continuing change in the Central Region. We must be ready to compete with China, Russia, and Iran as they challenge us for regional influence and threaten our vital national interests. We must continue disrupting violent extremist organizations and preventing the acquisition or proliferation of weapons of mass destruction so they cannot be used against the U.S. or our allies. Regardless of the challenge or level of resources, CENTCOM is committed to defending the national interests of the U.S., and those of its partners and allies.

Operating Environment

Resolute Support (RS). Our current military efforts in Afghanistan in support of the South Asia Strategy are conditions-based and focused on two well-defined and complementary missions. First, through Operation Freedom's Sentinel, U.S. forces conduct counter-terror missions against al-Qaida, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria-Khorasan (ISIS-K), and associated groups to prevent their resurgence and ability to plan and execute external attacks. Second, in partnership with NATO allies and operational partner nations in the Resolute Support Mission, U.S. forces advise and assist the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) in their fight against the Taliban. The ANDSF have demonstrated exceptional resilience through a difficult and sustained fight.

The conditions-based South Asia Strategy is working. We continue to use military ways and means to achieve our end state of reconciliation, recognizing this conflict will not be resolved solely by military force. Our military and enabling missions in Afghanistan are designed to set conditions that will convince the Taliban to negotiate for a lasting peace, and allow Afghans to own the political and diplomatic solutions that will eventually bring an end to the conflict. Consistent, offensive military pressure helped bring about the first cease fires – local and national – between the Taliban and Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) in 17 years, illustrating the Afghan people's weariness of war, and representing our first real opportunity for peace and reconciliation since the war began. While the Taliban continue to demonstrate the capability to mount spectacular attacks and inflict significant casualties on the ANDSF, the 2018 fighting season confirmed that the Taliban cannot win militarily. We recognize it will take a combination of sustained military pressure and diplomacy to bring an end to the hostilities. Our military pressure serves as an enabler to a whole-of-government process, and supports diplomatic efforts led by U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation (SRAR), Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad.

Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). The unrelenting work of the 74-nation D-ISIS Coalition, determination and bravery of our Iraqi Security Force (ISF) and Syrian Democratic Force (SDF) partners, and support of multiple international governmental organizations has pushed the physical caliphate of ISIS to the verge of collapse. As a result, we are adjusting our military posture in Syria, planning and executing a deliberate, safe, and professional withdrawal of personnel and equipment while preserving sufficient power in the region to ensure that we can continue to destroy remnants of ISIS fighters and ensure it does not return. In Iraq, we work with the ISF to consolidate their gains, improve their security capability and help them evolve into the professional and representative force that the Iraqi people deserve.

We are grateful for the partnership of the SDF throughout our D-ISIS mission. A reliable partner since 2014, the SDF suffered tens of thousands of killed and wounded, and its leadership, sacrifice, and determination to drive ISIS from SDF homelands was instrumental in the liberation of the vast majority of ISIS' so-called physical caliphate. Of paramount importance now, the Coalition's hard-won battlefield gains must be secured by continued interagency efforts and mobilizing the international community to prevent a return of the conditions that allowed ISIS to arise.

Yemen. Conflict between the Iranian-backed Houthis and Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG) forces, supported by the Saudi-led Coalition (SLC), led to deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Yemen. The U.N. noted in August 2018 that the Houthis – trained, funded and armed in part by Iran – exacerbated the crisis by restricting food and aid access to civilian populations by controlling or threatening transportation and logistical routes to the city of Ta'izz, and the Ports of Aden and Hudaydah. The impact of conflict on the country and its people is catastrophic, despite best efforts by our own U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and other U.N. agencies and international aid organizations to mitigate humanitarian suffering. U.N.-brokered consultations in

Sweden in December 2018, and the resulting agreement on a prisoner exchange, ceasefire and redeployment of forces in the city and port of Hudaydah, and humanitarian access to Taiz demonstrated promising steps and a willingness on both sides to seek a negotiated settlement. Toward this end, CENTCOM supports the international diplomatic efforts and the work of U.N. Special Envoy (UNSE) Martin Griffiths to facilitate an end to the conflict, providing knowledge, advice, and serving as an interlocutor through our trusted relationships in the region to help ensure transparency, cohesion, and positive momentum. We will continue to support our regional partners developing processes and procedures to counter ballistic missiles (CBM) and counter unmanned armed aerial systems (C-UAS) to help mitigate threats to civilian populations and critical infrastructure.

Iran exerts its malign influence throughout the region, through its increased – often unprofessional – activities in the Arabian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, engaging in proxy warfare through its sponsorship of violent extremist organizations (VEOs), and proliferating advanced conventional weapons, including theater ballistic missiles and weaponized unmanned aerial and maritime systems. Operating in the gray zone of competition below open conflict, Iran conducts unfettered information and cyber campaigns against its adversaries and actively attempts to influence or obstruct the mechanisms of effective governance and domestic policies of several of its sovereign regional neighbors.

Prolonged conflicts in Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Afghanistan have produced instability and large-scale humanitarian crises within and beyond the CENTCOM AOR, creating millions of displaced persons, stressing fragile economies, opening space for the spread of extremism among disenfranchised peoples, and providing opportunities for adversaries to cultivate influence. Countering instability requires an alliance-based and whole-of-government approach that CENTCOM is uniquely positioned to support. The Department of State, USAID and CENTCOM are partnering to counter the influence of competitors and malign actors by addressing the drivers of instability and creating the economic,

political, and security conditions required to reverse these trends. To alleviate suffering, CENTCOM, in partnership with USAID, provides targeted foreign humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons using our Overseas Disaster, Humanitarian, and Civic Aid appropriated funds. Stabilization and humanitarian assistance activities provide a significant tool to reduce human suffering, promote stability, sustain fragile governmental institutions, and provide critical support countering our competitors' gray zone activities.

While we maintain a strong, cooperative presence with our regional partners in the traditional warfighting domains, there is room for improvement in cooperative ventures with our regional partners in the information and cyber domains. Our competitors do not play by the same rules as the U.S. They have developed and employed asymmetric strategies to use in the information and cyber environment to weaken the U.S. to achieve their strategic objectives. The unconstrained and unregulated nature of their capabilities puts the U.S. at a disadvantage, while great power competitors like China and Russia, as well as adversarial regimes like Iran, operationalize these strategies – including information theft, media manipulation, and cyber-attack – to strike vulnerable U.S. assets, disrupt our information systems and those of our allies, and undermine the image of the U.S. in the region and around the world.

Our CENTCOM Partner Network, a secure coalition computer network, improves our capability to exchange crucial cyberspace threat intelligence and operational data with coalition and regional partners. We will pursue more opportunities to enable real-time exchanges of classified information to meet critical coalition collaboration and mission needs. The ability to dynamically share information with mission partners at the speed of relevance provides us a greater advantage against our adversaries.

Across the interagency, CENTCOM pursues whole-of-government solutions to address transregional threats. CENTCOM places increased command emphasis on an organizational approach to ensure interagency integration is a high priority in all planning. For example, CENTCOM supports

National Security Council-convened threat finance fusion cells to counter ISIS and Iran. We also provide personnel to support interagency efforts in our Regional Narcotics Interagency Fusion Cell.

The Defense Threat Reduction Agency's (DTRA) Joint Improvised Threat Defeat Organization (JIDO) provides a best-in-class example of a successful, nimble, and responsive capability in support of the warfighter. CENTCOM relies heavily on the critical, life-saving training, technology, and expertise JIDO provides to safeguard U.S. and allied forces from many of the most dangerous, emerging threats on the battlefield, including improvised explosive devices; unmanned, armed aerial and maritime vehicles; and other improvised threats. JIDO's functions are not replicated in any of the Services, demonstrate enormous value, and are worthy of continued resourcing through DTRA.

Strategic Importance

The CENTCOM AOR is one of the most complex, diverse regions in the world. Composed of nearly 600 million people dispersed among 20 countries, it is home to three of the world's five major religions, is the most energy-rich region in the world, and contains three strategic maritime choke points. The Suez Canal, the Bab al Mandeb, and the Strait of Hormuz are major transit points for energy and trade; the ability of commerce to transit these global commons freely being vital for the global economy.

Much like the rest of the world, almost 90 percent of businesses in the Central Region are small-to-medium-size enterprises. They are the key drivers of job creation, employ nearly 66 percent of the labor force, and help diversify their respective country's economies. Contrary to popular belief, not every country in the CENTCOM AOR is rich with oil and natural gas resources, and for those that are, their economies are highly susceptible to changes in the energy market. Strong economies, vibrant commerce, low unemployment rates, and decent standards of living are "must-haves" to promote and maintain stability. Military force cannot create strong economies. It can only help provide safe, secure conditions for them to develop.

There are multiple drivers of instability in the region, ranging from the toxic narrative of sectarianism, to brittle political and economic systems, to disenfranchised and disillusioned peoples. While drivers of instability can be addressed and mitigated through the application of elements of national power, many have roots spanning several generations. In our strategic approach, it is important to acknowledge with a degree of humility that there are some things that are beyond our power to change. Despite those challenges, we recognize the strategic importance of the Central Region to our national interests, and four key reasons why we must remain engaged here to preserve them.

First, we must not allow another attack on our homeland. The CENTCOM AOR is the world's epicenter for terrorism and VEOs. The 9/11 attacks were based from al-Qaeda's safe haven in Afghanistan and served as a wake-up call that terrorism could be exported from anywhere in the world.

Second, we cannot allow VEOs or rogue nations to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Our active presence in this region prevents VEOs from coming together toward that purpose and helps prevent the proliferation of WMD materials.

Third, instability is contagious. It does not respect national borders and grows and spreads if left unchecked. A stable Middle East underpins a stable world. In an already volatile region, our steady commitment to our allies and partners provides a force for stability. As the President's National Security Strategy states, we must also "work with partners to neutralize Iran's malign activities in the region."

The fourth is the reemergence of great power competition, the main challenge highlighted in the NDS. China and Russia seek to dominate and influence not just their own geographic regions, but the Central Region as well. Just as great power competitors looked to influence energy and trade in the Middle East following the first World War, China and Russia are working very hard today to reshuffle the balance of power in the CENTCOM AOR, trying to displace the U.S from its position of influence.

The President's National Security Strategy directs that the United States seeks a Middle East that is "not dominated by any power hostile to the United States."

This is the reality of our world, and of the regional and transregional challenges we have to address in CENTCOM. We recognize the U.S. is rightly shifting its resources toward Europe and East Asia to balance great power competition, but remain mindful that the CENTCOM AOR represents a geopolitical crossroads and a principal zone for that competition as well. Of the five major threats identified in the NDS, four – competition with China; competition with Russia; Iran's rogue, malign activities; and combatting VEOs – reside or are contested on a significant scale in the CENTCOM AOR every day.

Many observers, and many of our partners and allies as well, hold misperceptions of the focus on great power competition in the NDS. They view the prioritization and alignment of efforts for long-term competition with China and Russia as a wholesale shift in emphasis away from the Middle East and Central Asia regions. However, that view fails to account for the global context of the NDS and how great power competition is not isolated to Europe or Asia, but often takes place in other strategically important regions like the CENTCOM AOR.

Currently, CENTCOM is conducting or supporting military operations with Coalition partners in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and limited counter-terror operations in Yemen. We represent a U.S. presence with military basing and support in seven countries, have bilateral or multilateral military engagements with nearly a dozen countries, and security cooperation agreements with 16 countries. Across much of the AOR, however, where there is a U.S. presence, there is almost always an existing or developing presence by China, Russia, or both.

China uses its "One Belt – One Road" initiative as an economic lever to provide access and influence across the Central Region. China invested in Suez Canal development, the port of Haifa in Israel, and Jordan to provide access, relationships and leverage on the other side of the continent. In the

United Arab Emirates, it invested in the Free Trade Zone area and the Khalifa Port to create a regional hub in the Arabian Gulf. China built a naval support base in the country of Djibouti to expand its presence and access to the Red Sea, Suez Canal, and Bab al Mandeb. In Pakistan, China financed and gained access to the Gwadar Port enabling access to the Arabian Sea. In Oman, China is conducting port negotiations to obtain access to trade routes and energy transit corridors. For China, economic power is the primary tool, and while many “One Belt – One Road” projects do not pose direct threats to U.S. national interests, burgeoning Chinese economic power could support and mask longer-term military and political objectives.

Russia is focusing increasing attention to the Middle East, in part due to its geographical proximity, but also to reestablish its image as an influential global power. Russia invests in the Suez Canal development and is a co-member with China in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Russia has increased its engagement with and investment in Egypt, including construction of a 48 megawatt nuclear power plant in El Dabba, as well as development of a major trade and investment zone in east Port Said. Russia conducts bilateral and multilateral military exercises and provides economic and security support in more than half a dozen countries in the Central and South Asia (CASA) region, most of whom were part of the former Soviet Union and who remain reliant on Russia for their economic and security needs. Russia seeks to increase its own influence while limiting the influence of others, monopolize energy transit and pipeline routes, and provide a buffer zone against NATO enlargement. In Syria, Russia is establishing a permanent military and economic presence, with the goal of dominating infrastructure and energy commerce there in the coming years.

We also note the important role that nuclear deterrence plays within U.S. strategy, as the number one priority mission of the Department of Defense. It backstops all U.S. military operations and

diplomacy across the globe. A robust and modern U.S. nuclear deterrent helps ensure competition with Russia and China, regardless of where it originates, does not escalate to large-scale war.

The U.S. is able to exercise a great deal of control over its own economy because we exercise a great deal of political, military, and economic power around the world. Where we lose that power and influence, our competitors gain – and we will be more vulnerable at home because of it. Less than 100 years ago the Middle East puzzle came together with the U.S. influencing key pieces. Today, the puzzle is being remade and China and Russia are seeking new strategic pieces. We must recognize our old pieces may no longer fit, and stay engaged and agile enough to maintain our position as the dominant influence once this new puzzle comes together. In the CASA region, for example, our partner nations lie in close proximity to or share borders with Russia or China. We must realistically acknowledge this tyranny of distance, but continue to engage and compete in innovative ways that help build partnerships, grow our influence, and serve as a balance to the other great powers. The bottom line is simple: If left unchecked, the expanding global reach of China's economic and military initiatives, as well as Russia's objective to weaken or subvert Western security structures in the CENTCOM AOR will pose a significant challenge to U.S. prosperity, security, and regional stability.

As long as terrorism is exportable, as long as the Central Region remains a global supplier of energy, as long as we have allies and partners to whom we are committed, the U.S. cannot afford to cede our role as the dominant regional power. Without a continued strong presence and consistent engagement in the region, we risk our ability to secure the global commons, weaken our network of allies and partners necessary to eliminate potential safe havens for jihadist terrorists, and diminish our ability to maintain a stable global energy market.

Strategic Approach

CENTCOM's mission is to direct and enable military operations and activities with allies and partners to increase regional security and stability in support of enduring U.S. interests. Our strategic approach is founded in three principles: Prepare, Pursue, and Prevail. This approach drives our thinking, gives direction and intent to every level in the command, provides capabilities to our commanders, and creates decision space for military and civilian leadership. Each aspect of our approach enables the next, and collectively contributes to the successful achievement of our goals and objectives. CENTCOM uses these aspects as the cornerstone to advance our operational approach of "by, with, and through."

We prepare by forming enduring coalitions, cultivating relationships with partners and allies, and maintaining security, basing, and overflight agreements, or paving the way for those agreements to be established. It means we deepen our interoperability and expand our regional consultative mechanisms and collaborative planning with our partners, so we can increase their capabilities and our collective capabilities to operate more effectively in a joint and combined environment. We communicate the winning narrative of a free and open international order, national sovereignty, individual freedom and dignity, and the rule of law. We foster meaningful, sustainable, two-way relationships with people who share common interests and common values instead of engaging in the transactional relationships and predatory economic practices of our great power competitors. The alliances and partnerships we forge, rooted in mutual respect, reduce the price we pay for our position of leadership, and provide significant asymmetrical advantages over our geopolitical rivals. These aspects of preparation are crucial, and perhaps even more important than maintaining a large military footprint in the region. While personnel and equipment can be surged in a time of crisis, one cannot surge partnerships, trust, understanding, agreements, and commitment.

Pursuing opportunities means we are proactive, always alert for chances to seize the initiative and dictate events on favorable terms. Regardless of whether we are investigating a new partnership or considering a different operational approach, pursuing those openings requires empowerment at the lowest levels, transparency, flat communications, understanding and trust. Surrounding circumstances and shortened decision cycles for action may induce greater risk, which we must underwrite and manage through strong feedback loops between all levels of leadership, including our interagency partners and allies. Not every opportunity pans out, but an opportunity not explored is a potential advantage lost.

Prevailing takes on a meaning different than raising a banner or marching in a victory parade. It entails consolidating our gains, securing and stabilizing what we and our partners have fought for. We recognize there are no easy victories to be had in the CENTCOM AOR as ours is a region of historical, protracted struggle. In CENTCOM, prevailing means retaining flexibility and decision space for our leaders, preserving our national interests and those of our allies and partners, and maintaining a favorable balance of power for the U.S.

We operationalize this principle using a “by, with, and through” approach. We conduct operations primarily by indigenous partner forces, with enabling support from the U.S. and our coalition partners, working through U.S. and international authorities and partner agreements. While not yet a doctrine, a strategy, or a formal military program, it is a proven, successful, operational approach that pursues culturally acceptable and durable solutions. It is a way of conducting military activities and operations with reduced direct combat employment of U.S. forces, while developing and supporting partner capacity and participation. While indigenous forces may not conduct operations according to U.S. pace and doctrine, they take ownership of the fight. Their wins are not only theirs, but ours as well; and fighting for those wins builds legitimacy and resiliency. Currently, CENTCOM successfully applies the “by, with and through” operational approach in Operation Inherent Resolve, assisting our partners to

defeat ISIS; in Yemen, using a multilayered Arab/U.S. approach to counter VEOs; and with Operation Freedom's Sentinel and the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission to defeat VEOs and pressure the Taliban in Afghanistan. This approach is not limited to combat operations, however, as CENTCOM fulfills many peacetime objectives working "by, with, and through" other partner nations.

Employing a "by, with, and through" operational strategy supports the objectives and intent of the NSS and NDS – promoting regional stability and security, defeating terrorist threats to the U.S., and ensuring that common domains remain free and open – while addressing these challenges through a resource-sustainable approach, including strengthening the indigenous capacities of, and improving interoperability with, our regional partners and allies.

While this approach provides CENTCOM the ability to do "more with less," our ability to act decisively in the region becomes more contingent upon the full commitment of regional partners. We must therefore ensure transparent and contextual communication across our own government, and among our allies and partners. If we mistakenly or inadvertently signal we are "pulling back" or "refocusing" priorities to address great power competition elsewhere in the world, we risk undermining our trust and credibility with long-standing partners here.

Regional Overview – Central and South Asia

Afghanistan remains home to numerous terrorist organizations that threaten our interests. ISIS-K, in particular, maintains both the intent and the capability to inspire, direct, and conduct external operations, and if left unchecked, will continue to grow as a threat to our homeland. In support of the South Asia Strategy, Afghanistan became CENTCOM's main effort. U.S. support for the mission in Afghanistan evolved into a "by, with and through" operational approach as recognition of the need for domestic legitimacy and ownership increased. This ultimately strengthens the GIROA's negotiating position toward reconciliation and reintegration.

Key Challenges: Years of conflict in Afghanistan have caused large-scale humanitarian crises exacerbated by porous national borders, and provided Iran, Russia, and China opportunities to expand their influence in the region. Russia has attempted to challenge U.S. influence in Afghanistan under the false pretense of supporting the Taliban's fight against ISIS-K, while Iran continues to use the Taliban to secure its own interests and to counter the ANDSF's attempts to improve security conditions across the country. Militants operating out of Pakistan and Afghanistan continue to threaten Afghan stability as well as stoke tensions between Pakistan and India. We look to regional actors such as Pakistan to cease behavior undermining regional stability and play constructive roles in achieving peace in Afghanistan as well as the whole of South Asia. Kabul's uncertain political situation remains the greatest risk to stability as the GiRoA prepares for the 2019 presidential elections, and continues to suffer from weak institutions and a political environment marked by a lack of unity on core issues.

Key Opportunities: The potential for a political settlement in Afghanistan is promising. In June, following GiRoA's call for a national ceasefire over Eid al Fitr, the Taliban responded with their own ceasefire, giving Afghans a glimpse of a future without conflict. October's parliamentary elections were the first run entirely by Afghans, with only limited logistical and security support from the Coalition. Despite Taliban and ISIS-K threats against voters and polling centers, the ANDSF oversaw a significant reduction in violence compared to previous election periods, with over 4 million Afghans participating in the parliamentary elections. Applying lessons learned will be critical to enabling successful presidential elections in 2019.

The Afghan Security Forces Fund appropriation has enabled us to increase the combat capabilities in the Afghan Air Force (AAF). Our security cooperation funds are used for procuring aircraft, training aircrews and maintainers as the AAF transitions from dated Russian platforms to modern U.S. aircraft. We are assisting the ANDSF in doubling the size of the Afghan Army's Special Operations Force,

currently the most effective combat element against the Taliban and terrorist organizations. In an effort to promote responsible development, we closely monitor ANDSF capability growth to ensure it is necessary, affordable, and sustainable. We continue to pursue opportunities to develop bilateral relationships with CASA nations to promote regional stability and encourage them, and our NATO allies, to contribute financial and advisory support to the GIROA.

2019 Prognosis: The South Asia Strategy is working. While the Taliban continue to demonstrate resilience and the capability to inflict significant casualties on the ANDSF, the Coalition's sustained military, diplomatic, and social pressure will be instrumental in convincing the Taliban that reconciliation is the only path forward.

Pakistan presents the U.S. with challenges and opportunities in the execution of our South Asia Strategy. As a state possessing nuclear weapons that sits at the nexus of Russian, Chinese, Indian, Iranian, and U.S. geopolitical interests, Pakistan will always be a country of importance to the U.S. However, Pakistan's actions are often a source of frustration to U.S. regional efforts in Afghanistan. Our posture with Pakistan involves supporting our colleagues at the Department of State as they pursue a diplomatic solution with Islamabad to end the conflict in Afghanistan while ensuring that Pakistan's equities are acknowledged and addressed in any future agreement.

Key Challenges: Pakistan has not taken concrete actions against the safe havens of VEOs inside its borders. Similarly, VEOs located in Afghanistan conduct attacks inside Pakistan. This cross-border instability and violence generates tension along both sides of the border. The suspension of U.S. security assistance funds to Pakistan remains in place. Meanwhile, some U.S. Pakistan military cooperation activities have continued, demonstrating the importance of military cooperation, despite challenges in the bilateral relationship.

Key Opportunities: Pakistan has taken positive steps to assist SRAR Ambassador Khalilzad in support of Afghanistan reconciliation by facilitating talks with the Taliban but has avoided taking any concrete or irreversible steps such as arresting or expelling Taliban leaders who do not cooperate with reconciliation efforts. With our strategic focus on reconciliation and regional security, Pakistan has a unique opportunity to make good on its promises of support to U.S. efforts focused on finding a negotiated settlement to the Afghanistan conflict. If Pakistan plays a positive role in achieving a settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan, the U.S. will have opportunity and motive to help Pakistan fulfill that role, as peace in the region is the most important mutual priority for the U.S. and Pakistan.

2019 Prognosis: A peaceful resolution in Afghanistan and improved cross-border security between Afghanistan and Pakistan would strengthen the opportunity for mutual trade and increased economic flows not only between them, but also potentially with India and the Central Asian states. China is already partnering with Pakistan for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor as a central piece of China's "One Belt – One Road" initiative. Central and South Asia cooperation between the U.S. and China offers opportunities for peaceful dialogue and a chance for the U.S. to balance China's economic rise and reinforce its commitment to global norms for the benefit all.

Uzbekistan and U.S. partnerships continue to improve, and we are increasingly optimistic that the government of Uzbekistan is promoting a constructive foreign policy, improving relations with its neighbors and becoming more involved in multilateral exchanges and exercises. Uzbekistan is fully supportive of our South Asia Strategy and a constructive partner in the Afghanistan peace process. Given its large population, strong security forces, central location, and a shared border with Afghanistan, Uzbekistan's willingness to partner with us and its neighbors can help promote stability in the region.

Key Challenges: Russia remains the dominant power in Central Asia, and Uzbekistan must balance cooperation with the U.S. carefully to avoid actions Moscow deems provocative. As we strengthen our partnership with Uzbekistan we must respect this balance, mindful of Uzbekistan's absorptive capacity.

Key Opportunities: Uzbekistan is hosting the Central and South Asian armed forces Chief of Staff conference in February, demonstrating its growing role as a regional leader. Our mil-to-mil efforts are focused on improving border security capacity, enhancing counter-narcotic and counter-terrorism capabilities, and assisting the Uzbeks with the potential return of domestic terrorist fighters returning from Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. The Uzbeks expressed interest in diversifying their military equipment and provided lists of U.S. systems and equipment they are interested in purchasing. This interest represents a unique opportunity to off-ramp Uzbekistan from Russian equipment and deepen our relationship as we negotiate increased air and land access through the Northern Access corridor.

2019 Prognosis: Uzbekistan will continue efforts to increase its capacity, using U.S. security assistance to maintain a balance between Russian and Chinese influences and to boost its professionalism in the areas of border security, counter-narcotics, counter-terrorism and defense institution building. U.S. security assistance will help maintain and potentially enhance access in support of U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan.

Tajikistan remains a target of both Russian and Chinese overtures. We continue to build our military relationship with Tajikistan, even as Moscow deepens its influence and increases its military posture at its base outside the capital. China's increased security cooperation, focused on border security, is coupled with an aggressive economic lending program. China seeks to minimize instability along their shared border, in its eastern provinces, and protect its economic investment in Tajikistan.

Key Challenges: The Government of Tajikistan is concerned with stability in northern Afghanistan and security along the mountainous, 800-mile Afghan border. The inability to secure their border

encourages smuggling and has a destabilizing effect on both Tajikistan and Afghanistan. These border concerns provide a strong nexus of mutual interests and we support development of Tajik counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, and border security capabilities. We are also assisting Tajikistan to counter trans-national threats that impact both Tajikistan and the broader Central Asia region.

Key Opportunities: Tajikistan is eager for U.S. assistance and its modest funding for security services presents an opportunity for CENTCOM to help Tajikistan develop its capabilities and relationships to balance Russian influence. Exercise REGIONAL COOPERATION, a multilateral exercise Tajikistan expressed interest hosting in August 2019, will address border security and counter terror issues. Moving forward, CENTCOM will assist Tajikistan's efforts to counter violent extremism and emphasize the need for building stronger defense institutions.

2019 Prognosis: Economic investment and border security will continue to characterize China's relationship with Tajikistan. It is likely that both Russia and China will continue to exaggerate the terrorist threat to further entrench and justify their respective security relationships with Tajikistan. Russia will seek to continue to safeguard what it considers its "sphere of influence" in the region and China will continue to take actions it deems necessary to secure its border. U.S. security assistance for Tajikistan can provide a counter to this great power competition by enabling the Tajiks to maintain their border integrity with Afghanistan while supporting regional stability.

Kazakhstan and U.S. relations continue to be the most mature and forward-thinking in Central Asia, although Russia's proximity influences Kazakhstan's posture. Kazakhstan remains the most significant Central Asian contributor to Afghan stability, engaging in trade, providing electrical power, donating money to the ANDSF fund, providing educational opportunities, supporting programs for Afghan women, and offering technical support and services to the Afghans.

Key Challenges: Kazakhstan, like most CASA nations, must carefully balance cooperation with the U.S. to avoid actions Russia interprets as threatening. As we strengthen our partnership with Kazakhstan, we must respect this balance. The U.S. should continue assisting the Kazakhstan Ministry of Defense as it focuses on the necessary institutional reforms of its non-commissioned officer corps, training management, human resources administration, and its professional military education system. As we look to off-ramp Central Asian countries from Russian defense equipment, the higher price of U.S. systems will remain a challenge for nations like Kazakhstan.

Key Opportunities: Kazakhstan has expressed interest in working with the U.S. to improve its logistical, medical, and engineering branches. We will also continue our engagement with the Kazakhstani Peace Keeping Operations (PKO) training center to improve Kazakhstani PKO capabilities and foster regional integration by opening the center to Kazakhstan's neighbors. Exercise STEPPE EAGLE, an annual trilateral peacekeeping exercise sponsored by the U.S., United Kingdom and Kazakhstan, has expanded to include Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In November 2018, with U.S. assistance, Kazakhstan deployed a company-level unit to Lebanon on a U.N. peacekeeping operations mission – a first for any CASA nation.

2019 Prognosis: Kazakhstan will continue to use U.S. security assistance to balance Russian and Chinese influences. U.S. security assistance enables access for sustainment of U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan. Maintaining mil-to-mil programs, with a focus on defense institution building and professional military education, will position us to maintain our comparative advantage with a country situated on the doorsteps of Russia and China.

The Kyrgyz Republic and U.S.'s strained bilateral relations impede security cooperation that would otherwise further military our objectives in Central Asia.

Key Challenges: The lack of a status of forces agreement with the Kyrgyz Republic severely limits CENTCOM's level of engagement. Until steps are taken to extend diplomatic protections for U.S. military operating in the Kyrgyz Republic, mil-mil exchanges and training are suspended.

Key Opportunities: The Office of Military Cooperation in Bishkek and the Montana National Guard through the National Guard State Partnership Program remain postured to renew programs aimed at developing military capabilities specifically in the areas of Field Medicine and Disaster Response, and Humanitarian Assistance as soon as political conditions permit.

2019 Prognosis: Any U.S. security assistance for the Kyrgyz Republic will help the Kyrgyz to maintain their national sovereignty in the face of Russian and Chinese jockeying for influence.

Turkmenistan has a U.N.-recognized policy of "positive neutrality" by which the government balances the demands of the regional powers by not taking sides in international conflict and not entering into alliances or economic organizations, necessitating a subtle and agile approach to Security Cooperation to be successful.

Key Challenges: A struggling economy, a rigid political system, and the Turkmen policy of positive neutrality largely limits international cooperation and Turkmenistan's security services.

Key Opportunities: We have focused our efforts on English language training, medical engagements and the development of Special Forces with Turkmenistan Ministry of Defense (MOD). We are encouraged by MOD's increased participation in our exchanges and conferences. Turkmenistan has expressed interest in enhancing its disaster response capability and border security, providing additional opportunities for CENTCOM.

2019 Prognosis: Turkmenistan remains concerned with the instability in Afghanistan and the potential for the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, therefore assistance will focus on enhancing border

security. Maintaining a small, consistent security cooperation portfolio in Turkmenistan has outsized impact and will help counter Russian and Chinese influence.

Regional Overview – Greater Levant

Iraq's mil-to-mil relationship with the U.S. is as strong as it has ever been, and Iraq has both the potential and desire to become a formidable ally in combatting terrorism. The Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I) is conducting programs to enhance professionalization of the ISF, coupled with prudent implementation and oversight of FMF and Foreign Military Sales (FMS). Transforming OSC-I into a permanent Title 22 Security Cooperation Office is key. Our authority for OSC-I to conduct training activities with ISF is more important than ever in the evolution of an ISF that is effective, inclusive, sustainable, affordable, and cements our long-term bilateral partnership.

Key Challenges: Reform of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to achieve the goal of "One ISF" remains a challenge. Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) are officially part of the ISF, however, the forces are comprised of disparate groups, some of which are not totally responsive to the direction of the Government of Iraq (GoI), the worst of which are affiliated with Shia militia groups directed by Iran. Iraq's Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs (MoPA) is largely treated as a less-than-equal organization by the government. While some tensions between the Kurdish Regional Government and Baghdad have eased, challenges with revenue sharing, disputed territory and control of oil resources remain problematic. It is critical the ISF consolidate its gains against ISIS and evolve from a war footing to a steady state, which must be effective, affordable, and protect Iraqi people and their infrastructure from terrorism.

As ISIS continues to build a clandestine insurgency, the GoI must form an effective cabinet and government entities to manage the country and improve economic resilience and quality of life for its people. This includes meeting the needs of Iraq's youthful population who demand better economic opportunities, access to essential services, and an end to endemic corruption in the GoI. Failure by the

newly formed government to address the basic needs of Iraqi citizens may facilitate the reemergence of ISIS or other VEOs, which capitalize on public dissatisfaction to increase their support. Iran's meddling in the selection of Iraqi cabinet members, notably the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Interior, has prevented the GoI from addressing pressing national security issues

Key Opportunities: CENTCOM, through OSC-I, is working with our Iraqi partners to re-integrate the GoI with its Arab neighbors. These efforts have paid dividends in reinitiating cooperation between Iraq and countries such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Turkey, and Qatar; illustrated by the reopening of shared borders. OSC-I can leverage its authorities to support the ISF's evolution into an effective, sustainable, and affordable force through mil-to-mil relations, security sector reform, security cooperation, while coordinating broad-based reform with regional partners. Key objectives include the further professionalization of the ISF, rebalancing the ISF's force structure to meet future threats, and reforming the ISF's human resources and professional military education systems with increased emphasis on force design, force management, and policy development.

2019 Prognosis: Iraq's May 2018 elections resulted in the formation of a new, generally representative government. Newly elected Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi vowed to improve public services and prioritize reconstruction of areas devastated by the conflict with ISIS. It is likely that Iraq will retool its budget to focus on Government goals however, Iraq must also rebuild its security forces, which are exhausted by four years of operations against ISIS.

Syria's President Bashar al Assad remains in power with the military support of Russia, Iran, and Lebanese Hezbollah (LH). Despite significant advances, the Syrian regime has insufficient forces to adequately secure recaptured territory. The U.S. withdrawal from Syria represents the most dynamic shift in the environment since ISIS lost its ability to govern major population centers and fight as a conventional force and could trigger a renewed race for influence, control, and for some, survival.

Turkey's strong national security concerns in Syria and standing as a NATO ally further complicates the battlespace. Israel's legitimate concerns about Iran's increasingly provocative actions in Syria, particularly the transshipment of advanced weapons systems into and through Syria, are driving increasingly forward leaning Israeli military actions. If the major actors and their proxies become embroiled in a competition for influence in Syria, this may create space for ISIS remnants or other terrorist groups to reform or reconstitute. Because the regime was incapable or unwilling to fight ISIS, the responsibility for D-ISIS fighting has been borne by the Coalition and our partnered force, the SDF, whose bravery and determination have been crucial to rolling back ISIS. The intervention of the Coalition in the Syrian conflict blocked Assad's ability to recapture all of northern Syria. As the U.S. executes a safe, professional withdrawal, we seek to help negotiate a secure future for the people of northeast Syria liberated from ISIS and our partners in the D-ISIS fight.

The international humanitarian community has achieved some success, but the Syrian regime's resistance to allow aid deliveries is largely driven by Assad's use of starvation as a weapon of war. As a result, there are more than 13 million Syrians who require humanitarian assistance, including 5.7 million internally displaced persons and 5.7 million refugees in neighboring countries. While U.S. humanitarian assistance reaches four million people throughout Syria monthly, security concerns and access constraints limit the reach of aid in some locations. Vulnerable populations in Syria will continue to require humanitarian aid until parties to the conflict reach a political solution.

Key Challenges: The civil war, combined with ISIS occupation and the subsequent fight to displace and destroy ISIS has led to vast destruction of infrastructure, degradation of government, lack of basic services, and other humanitarian challenges. Assad's reluctance to negotiate directly with the Syrian opposition, and Moscow's reluctance to force him to do so, indicates significant challenges ahead in forging a political resolution to the conflict and ending this humanitarian crisis. A political resolution is

key to the lasting defeat of ISIS, because unless fundamental drivers of domestic instability are addressed, conditions will remain for a resurgence of ISIS, or ISIS-like VEOs.

While CENTCOM's "by, with, and through" partnership with the SDF has been critical to the defeat of ISIS, it has created friction with Turkey, which views the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) elements within the SDF as a terrorist group. Our assistance to the SDF focuses on defeating ISIS, as we have simultaneously sought to include measures to reassure our Turkish allies. In October 2018 the U.S. and Turkey began conducting combined joint patrols in key locations. CENTCOM will continue to assist the Turkish military in countering VEOs that threaten their border, maintaining our emphasis on the D-ISIS campaign.

The repatriation of ISIS foreign fighters to their home countries to face justice remains a challenge. Both SDF and Iraqi forces are holding hundreds of foreign fighters in prisons or temporary detention facilities, with no single process for prosecution or repatriation. This requires a concerted international effort involving law enforcement, intelligence sharing, and diplomacy.

Key Opportunities: The conflict in Syria has led to an increased demand from our regional allies and partners for improved border security as well as improved domestic counter-terrorism capabilities. CENTCOM is able to manage the development of these capabilities which supports our objectives of promoting stability and countering VEOs in the region. The U.S. withdrawal provides an opportunity to reset our relationship with our Turkish allies as well as an opportunity for us to focus on reinforcing Iraq's consolidation of its gains against ISIS. A strong, enduring partnership with Iraq will serve as stabilizing factor, helping mitigate concerns about long-term U.S. intentions in the region.

Jordan is one of our most committed partners in the Middle East and one of the most critical voices of moderate Islam in the region. We must be careful to not to take their partnership for granted. Jordan's civilian and military leadership exemplifies professionalism and modernization within a region in crisis.

Jordan is the only country in the Levant to provide a platform for operations, in addition to unhindered access and overflight essential to U.S. interests. The Jordan Armed Forces (JAF) are a key contributor to the D-ISIS Coalition and OIR and is a major contributor to efforts to stabilize the region. Continued support to the Government of Jordan (GOJ) and the JAF is critical to ongoing D-ISIS efforts, and preventing the spread of instability in the region.

Key Challenges: Jordan currently hosts over 750,000 registered refugees from Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere, straining government resources, services, and infrastructure. The GOJ and the JAF have effectively balanced legitimate security concerns with the humanitarian imperative to care for these refugees, despite the strain on Jordan's resources. Simultaneously, regional turmoil, falling remittances, and declining tourism have led to rising unemployment and high national debt creating a volatile environment that threatens political stability.

Key Opportunities: CENTCOM, in conjunction with interagency partners, uses Section 333 and other Title 10 funds provided by Congress to build partner capacity and capability in Jordan. These funds and activities are in addition to the total assistance budget of \$1.275 billion annually from the State Department, as agreed upon with the Government of Jordan, that includes at least \$750 million dollars in Economic Support Funds and \$350 million dollars in FMF. In August 2019, Jordan will host nearly two dozen countries, including regional and NATO partners, for exercise EAGER LION, focusing on counter-terror, border security and humanitarian assistance missions.

2019 Prognosis: Jordan will face domestic pressure to move towards normalized relations and trade with Syria, but also seeks to avoid the risk of triggering the extensive U.S. sanctions on Syria. Russia will likely seek to capitalize on its role as a Syrian intermediary to increase its influence in Jordan and the region. Both domestic and external VEOs will remain a security threat, but continued funding from

Title 10 programs, in addition to FMF and economic support, will enable Jordan to develop critical capabilities and remain a key contributor to coalition efforts.

Egypt lies on the western edge of the CENTCOM area of responsibility, an anchor state for the region. The country is an important strategic partner whose location, size, enduring peace treaty with Israel, control of the Suez Canal, and moderate religious and cultural Pan-Arab influences are significant elements that support regional stability. Egypt is geographically positioned to counter the flow of foreign fighters, materiel, and financial support to extremists transiting from Libya through Egypt into the Central Region. The U.S.-Egypt security relationship is resilient and growing, exemplified by Egypt's formal request to participate in the National Guard State Partnership Program. Egypt supports our overflight requests, provides Suez Canal access affording short notice transits, and trains and deploys peacekeeping troops worldwide. In the spirit of our strong mil-to-mil partnership, in September 2018 we held a joint Defense Resourcing Conference to increase the orientation of U.S. security assistance to Egypt toward a counter-terrorism and sustainment focus.

Key Challenges: ISIS-Sinai continues to conduct attacks against the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF) to bolster its influence over the local populace through intimidation. The EAF has contained most of the violence in the northeastern Sinai Peninsula and has begun to address societal and economic reforms to defeat ISIS-Sinai and prevent its spread to the Nile Valley.

Key Opportunities: Through our collaborative approach with the EAF we continue to see improvement in the security of their maritime and land borders. The EAF have improved their efforts to stem the flow of fighters and illicit material transiting from Libya through Egypt into Israel and the Central Region. Mindful of the complex environment of the Sinai, we continue our support to the Multinational Force and Observers in order to ensure the safety of these forces, allowing this crucial mission in support of the 1979 peace treaty to continue. We see the beginnings of improved

interoperability between the EAF, U.S., and other partner nations, exemplified in more Egyptian participation in multi-lateral exercises and strategic forums including exercise BRIGHT STAR 2018, the second joint military exercise held since 2009. Egypt has expressed plans to broaden its participation in coalition operations and has signed the Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement, allowing Egypt improved access to interoperability enabling acquisitions. We look to strengthen our security cooperation partnership through continued engagement and FMS programs.

2019 Prognosis: Our military assistance ensures that the U.S. remains a military partner of choice and counters Russia's efforts to expand its influence in the region. U.S. government aid and support to Egypt is crucial to our strategic partnership. CENTCOM will continue to support the EAF's efforts in the Sinai, and assist them with implementing a whole of government strategy that addresses the underlying political, economic, and social conditions that give rise to extremist elements.

Lebanon is a multi-confessional democracy that occupies a pivotal geostrategic position in terms of U.S. national security interests. Wedged between a key ally in the region, Israel, and a corridor of Iranian influence running from Tehran through Iraq and Syria, Lebanon has managed to remain relatively stable. Nevertheless, Hezbollah's manipulation of the Lebanese political process thwarts needed reforms while exacerbating sectarian tensions inside Lebanon.

Key Challenges: Lebanon faces a confluence of problems. The stagnant economy is worsened by regional conflict and exacerbated by the fact that nearly a quarter of the total population are refugees. Additionally, both Russia and China are increasing their efforts to gain access and influence in the country because of its key location on the Mediterranean and proximity to Syria. Hezbollah holds political clout which gives it a de-facto veto on Lebanese policy decisions, fields an armed militia that does not act on the behest of an elected government and builds popular support by acting as a social service provider – all undermining the role of the legitimate Lebanese government and armed forces.

Hezbollah has also engaged in provocative actions with Israel, risking unpredictable escalatory actions that threaten Israeli security and could undermine Lebanon's stability. Through its Hezbollah proxy, Iran continues to meddle in Lebanon's internal affairs. While the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) were able to drive ISIS from all Lebanese territory in 2017, the threat from remnants of ISIS and other extremists crossing into Lebanon from Syria remains present.

Key Opportunities: Our efforts to strengthen the LAF are a critical aspect of our policy to promote Lebanese sovereignty and security. The U.S. is the LAF's top security assistance partner. Our modest, consistent, long-term commitment and investments has led to the LAF becoming a successfully modernized, legitimate fighting force. The LAF is innovative, professional, and have proven their capabilities to protect the Lebanese people from internal and external threats through successful counter-VEO operations. It established itself as the most trusted and respected institution in the country, undercutting Hezbollah's claim that its armed militia is necessary to protect Lebanon, while providing a mature, apolitical, stabilizing influence. The even-handed, professional response of the LAF, assisted by the professional mediation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, was key in de-escalating the Israeli counter-tunnel operation in December 2018.

2019 Prognosis: Successful, consistent partnership with the LAF forms the backbone of U.S. influence in Lebanon, providing a bulwark against growing Russian and Chinese interest in the country, a reliable partner capable of fighting and defeating remnants of ISIS and other extremist groups attempting to regroup in Lebanon. The LAF has the potential to eventually form a deterrent to increased Iranian activity, and a vital counterbalance to Hezbollah influence. While Lebanese security and sovereignty is enhanced every day through our robust relationship with the LAF, Hezbollah continues to risk the stability and security of Lebanon by maintaining an armed militia and advanced weapons outside the authority of the State.

Regional Overview – Central Gulf

Iran's unpredictable and reckless behavior remains a threat to our partners, global commerce, and U.S. vital interests in the Middle East. While supporting the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Iran foments instability and chaos in the region through the proliferation of advanced weapon technology and a destabilizing ideology. To conceal its culpability, the Iranian regime masks its malign activities through proxies and surrogates enabled by the Iran Threat Network (ITN) in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. Iran is also attempting to build ground lines of communication through Iraq and Syria into Lebanon to support its proxy Hezbollah. Iran has gained influence within Iraq's armed forces with the formalization of the Popular Mobilization Forces, and also exerted influence in Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen, oftentimes affecting established sovereign governance.

Key Challenges: Iran's military is composed of approximately 700,000 personnel, the largest in the region. Both of its military arms, the Islamic Republic of Iran Armed Forces, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), are improving their abilities to quickly mobilize and deploy in response to internal and external threats. Iran postures its forces and supports proxies to threaten – or be able to threaten - strategic locations like the Bab al Mandeb and the Strait of Hormuz. With little warning, Iran could impede commercial traffic in these key maritime chokepoints. Iran seeks to gain hegemonic influence through the resulting chaos of its proxies and the threat of force. Iranian surface to air missiles pose a significant threat to U.S. intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets operating in international airspace. Iran also has the region's largest ballistic missile force, which continues to increase in capability, range, and lethality. In November 2018, Iran demonstrated its ballistic missile capability, striking ISIS targets in Syria and Kurdish militant targets in Iraq.

Key Opportunities: Since the U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the subsequent re-imposition of pre-JCPOA nuclear-related sanctions, Iran has sought to

demonstrate its resolve and counter U.S. pressure while trying to mitigate the impact of sanctions. However, longstanding vulnerabilities in Tehran's fiscal policy are reducing its ability to alleviate the impact of U.S. sanctions and Iran's already fragile domestic economy will likely further decline. While Iran's strategy is to sow chaos through its malign activities, CENTCOM will continue to develop means of maintaining order to combat Iran's chaos. Our mil-to-mil relationships help build local credibility in many partner nations, while bi- and multilateral efforts – such as maritime exercises and developing integrated ballistic defense – with our regional partners helps create baffles to stifle Iranian ambitions.

2019 Prognosis: Iran will continue to seek to expand its political influence and military presence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, and to threaten international trade and regional stability throughout the Central Region. Leaders in the IRGC–Qods Force will continue to use surrogates, businesses, and logistics entities to execute direct action, intelligence, influence building, terrorism, and cyber operations against the U.S. and our partner nations. Iran intends to expand its regional influence, counter Saudi Arabia, threaten Israel, and maintain a capability to threaten strategic maritime transit routes. Iran will continue to acquire and develop increasingly lethal weapons to raise the cost of direct military conflict, and seek to pursue policies that threaten U.S. strategic interests and goals throughout the region.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) suffered challenges to its international reputation over the past year but remains a key strategic partner. The ambitious reform agenda set forth by Mohammed bin Salman is meant to modernize and diversify the Saudi economy and encourage foreign direct investment. To date, however, these reforms have met with mixed success.

Key Challenges: The conflicts in Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Libya have challenged Saudi Arabia's partners in the region, beset by malign influence driven by experienced and well-funded Iranian proxies. The Gulf Rift, pitting KSA, UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain against Qatar, complicates unified deterrence to Iranian malign activity. The ballistic missile threat and armed UASs emanating from Yemeni territory

continue to pose a significant risk, as the Houthis consider civil infrastructure as legitimate military targets. High-profile civilian casualty incidents on behalf of the Coalition in Yemen and international backlash resulting from the murder of Saudi dissident Jamal Kashoggi have damaged Saudi Arabia's international standing.

Key Opportunities: The Yemen conflict provided lessons learned on military operations and tactics, adding greater urgency to institutional defense transformation efforts. We continue to share our own experiences and processes in an effort to improve Saudi Arabia's operational performance and reduce civilian casualties. CENTCOM's security cooperation with Saudi Arabia remains a critical link in our efforts to strengthen partners in the region and meet current and future challenges. The work of U.S. advisors is essential to the success of our mission, and Saudi Arabia underwrites the lion's share of their presence. Helping build Saudi Arabia's security forces reflects our commitment to increase partner capacity, sustain effective defense institutions, increase professionalism, interoperability, and capability in order to deter aggression in the region and protect critical infrastructure.

2019 Prognosis: Saudi Arabia plays an important role ensuring regional stability. Despite recent strains, the U.S. – Saudi Arabia security relationship is resilient and this strategic partnership with the Kingdom is a foundational point of CENTCOM's ability to execute our national defense strategy. Our ongoing relationship with the Kingdom regarding regional basing and access, interoperability, freedom of movement – exemplified by Saudi support for CENTCOM's expansion of the Trans-Arabian Network as a primary distribution route across the Arabian Peninsula - remains critical, and our defense institution-building endeavors represents the operationalization of our “by, with, and through” approach.

Yemen is beset by strife and riven with internal fractures. The civil war continues unabated and the humanitarian crisis worsened in the last year. Saudi Arabia and the UAE continue to lead the coalition supporting the Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG). While some elements of the ROYG are

reestablished in Aden, a portion of the ROYG, including President Hadi, remains in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The Houthis retain control over Yemen's capital, Sana'a, and other key territory, and the civil war has severely affected Yemen's population, with nearly three quarters percent requiring urgent humanitarian assistance. Similarly, Yemen's economy has been devastated by rising food and fuel prices, lack of a regular salary, the depreciation of the Yemeni Rial. Neither the Houthis nor the ROYG are able to effectively govern within the areas they control.

Key Challenges: Terrorist groups like AQAP and ISIS-Yemen continue to maintain a presence in Yemen and focus on attacks against ROYG, SLC, and Houthi targets. The conflict in Yemen opened opportunities for Iran, which continues to provide support to the Houthis aimed at building a proxy force designed to pressure the SLC and expand Iranian regional influence. This support enables Houthis to launch missiles at its neighbors and target ships in the Bab al Mandeb and Red Sea; threatening Americans and our partners and raising the risk of broader regional conflict. The prolonged conflict deepened the humanitarian crisis, and much of the population faces severe food shortages, a cholera epidemic and other outbreaks of disease.

Key Opportunities: Following years of fighting, security sector reconstitution will be a priority, and any peace agreement will require functioning, unified Yemeni security forces in which both the ROYG and Houthis work together to maintain Yemen's stability. Leveraging existing mil-to-mil ties with the ROYG and a supportive relationship with the UNSE, CENTCOM is positioning itself to provide the necessary assistance to conduct security cooperation in Yemen while continuing not to engage in hostilities between the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthis. The Yemeni Coast Guard resumed control of six ports from the SLC in late 2018, with training provided through the Department of State's Export Controls and Related Border Security program. Implementing the existing 505 agreement with Yemen will allow CENTCOM to significantly deepen and broaden assistance and training opportunities.

2019 Prognosis: The U.S. and ROYG will continue to maintain a nascent but increasingly productive mil-to-mil relationship with the goal of enabling Yemeni security forces to secure national borders, defeat VEOs, and respond to existing and emerging threats in order to provide an environment that facilitates the reconstruction of a stable economy and reconstitution of Yemen's government institutions and civil functions.

Kuwait is a key strategic partner for regional security, indispensable facilitator of the D-ISIS campaign, multinational partner on U.N. Security Council, and linchpin of the region in humanitarian, diplomatic, and economic stability. The Government of Kuwait provides tremendous support for U.S. and Coalition operations. Kuwait hosts the fourth largest presence of U.S. troops overseas – including CENTCOM's army component, U.S. Army Central. The U.S. military presence is viewed as essential to the defense of Kuwait, and Kuwait reimburses the U.S. for its presence.

Key Challenges: Given the large military U.S. presence in Kuwait, the implementation of the NDS, the evolution of missions in Syria and Afghanistan, and the unknown of potential missions to come, we must ensure we maintain flexibility and clear communications with our strategic Kuwaiti partner.

Key Opportunities: Vigilant to numerous regional threats, Kuwait sought resolution to the Gulf Rift dispute, while promoting a regional response to the crises emanating from Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Kuwait continues to play an important role for Iraq's future. Kuwait hosted the International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq last February, raising \$30 billion toward Iraq's reconstruction – including \$2 billion dollars in Kuwaiti loans and investments.

2019 Prognosis: Kuwait remains a key partner, combat support and logistical hub, and enabler for CENTCOM. Our strong mil-mil relationships with the Kuwaiti military underscores our commitment to the defense of Kuwait. This will also allow U.S. access to Kuwait ranges and training facilities and

enable the U.S. to realign to the NDS, while simultaneously providing flexibility to surge forces into Kuwait as needed to preserve regional stability and U.S. interests.

Bahrain is a strong security partner and a major non-NATO ally. The Government of Bahrain (GOB) has welcomed the broader effort to confront Iran's destabilization activities in the region. Bahrain is a strong partner in countering threat financing, especially helping curtail Iran's efforts to circumvent financial sanctions. Bahrain has also been part of the GCC-wide effort to rebuild ties with Iraq and provide a counterweight to Iran's influence. Bahrain's strong partnership with the U.S. is most evident by its hosting of the U.S. Fifth Fleet, the only operating U.S. naval base in the Central Region, and multiple U.S. command and control facilities located at the Naval Support Activity in Bahrain.

Key Challenges: Changes in oil prices have posed a formidable challenge to Bahrain's economy, as over 75 percent of government revenue comes from hydrocarbon sales. Despite the GOB's attempts to shore up its fiscal position by cutting public spending and increasing non-oil revenues, the country continues to confront significant annual fiscal deficits and will consequently continue to rely on its neighbors to provide financial lifelines.

Key Opportunities: Bahrain's access, basing, and overflight support to U.S. and Coalition forces in the region are essential to our force posture. Its contribution to regional security, maritime patrols, intelligence sharing, counter-mine, and counter-piracy efforts are an integral part of the region's overall security. Bahrain continues to pursue military modernization initiatives that will result in a Bahrain Defense Force more able to contribute to and lead regional coalition military operations. Bahraini Land Force, SOF, and Air Force support to the SLC campaign in Yemen is providing Bahraini forces with experience in expeditionary operations, while ongoing efforts to improve the BDF's capabilities will enable Bahrain to play a more critical role in regional security.

2019 Prognosis: The mil-to-mil relationship between Bahrain and the U.S. remains strong.

Qatar is a critical partner in the Arabian Peninsula, providing CENTCOM with invaluable regional access, and hosting approximately 10,000 U.S. service members and aircraft, and is home to the Combined Air Operations Center, U.S. Special Operations Command Central Forward Headquarters, and the CENTCOM Forward Headquarters. The access, basing, and overflight that Qatar provides would be costly to replicate anywhere else in the region. The Gulf Rift has a detrimental effect on joint training and interoperability between the U.S. and its Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) partners. Qatar's recent withdrawal from OPEC and lower-level attendance at the December 2018 GCC Summit indicate Qatar is pursuing economic and political policies more independent of Saudi Arabia.

Key Challenges: While the Gulf Rift had little direct impact on CENTCOM operations, it has imposed significant restrictions on Qatar's freedom of movement through the closure of land borders and air space. It impacted Qatar's participation in GCC-hosted multilateral exercises, eroded coalition building efforts, and increased Qatari reliance on Iran to overcome the economic and commercial shipping constraints – specifically, Qatar relies heavily on Iranian land, sea, and airspace for transshipment of foodstuffs.

Key Opportunities: The Gulf Rift reaffirmed Qatar's commitment to make the U.S. its primary defense partner. While Qatar has one of the smallest militaries in the region, it is also, per capita, the richest country in the world. Despite its relatively small size, Qatar has been a major contributor to coalition operations throughout the region and against ISIS, and seeks to expand its participation in other regional coalitions. Qatar is the second largest FMS customer in the world with \$26 billion dollars in new cases and is on track to surpass \$40 billion dollars in the next five years with additional FMS purchases. This investment demonstrates a clear desire to partner exclusively with U.S. and NATO allies and become a reliable contributor to coalition operations.

2019 Prognosis: Qatar's efforts to expand their military both in size and capacity will result in increased bilateral military engagements between CENTCOM and the Qatari Armed Forces. This will give the U.S. an opportunity to make a positive impact on the military development of a key partner in a turbulent region. Qatar will continue to play a vital and necessary role in the region and has spent nearly \$9 billion dollars on U.S.-led Coalition basing infrastructure.

United Arab Emirates (UAE) is one of the U.S.' staunchest partners and non-NATO allies in the Central Region. The UAE's strategic location, vast natural resources, willingness to engage VEOs, proven expeditionary capabilities of its military, and drive to be at the forefront of military innovations makes them an ideal partner. The UAE has repeatedly supported U.S. objectives in both Syria and Afghanistan and has taken a leading role in the fight against terrorism – being among the first countries to join the D-ISIS coalition. It remains active in pursuing many of the coalition's lines of effort, including D-ISIS messaging, stabilization, and assisting in stemming the flow of foreign fighters.

Key Challenges: Yemen is the UAE's top near-term security concern. The UAE sees the Huthis as Iranian proxies, paving the way for a new and unwelcome Iranian role in southern Arabia and in the seas surrounding the peninsula. The UAE is a key partner in the SLC in Yemen, conducting offensive operations in cooperation with Yemeni forces around Hudaydah since May 2018.

Key Opportunities: The U.S. and UAE cooperate under a strong bilateral framework to prevent and respond to conflicts and crises, and the UAE has clearly indicated a desire to forge even stronger military relationships with the U.S. The UAE is active in an operational partnership to disrupt terrorist networks and reduce terrorist attacks and is the only member of the Saudi-led Coalition in Yemen to expand its military objectives to include counter-terrorism alongside the U.S. Robust training and exercise programs with the UAE increase the level and quality of cooperation between our nations. The

UAE also provides substantial access and is willing to burden-share the costs of basing and infrastructure.

2019 Prognosis: The UAE expressed a desire to strengthen our relationship through a nine-point Defense Cooperation Roadmap, which supports our NDS through increased burden sharing in its own defense. A continued robust exercise and engagement program will strengthen our military-to-military relationships, and UAE's purchase of U.S. produced weapon systems will help secure interoperability with U.S. units. We expect the UAE to continue their partnership to U.S. efforts in Syria, Yemen, and Afghanistan, in addition to supporting freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.

Oman is a bastion of stability in the Central Region. The long-standing relationship between the U.S. and Oman, based on shared security and stability interests, remains strong – each service chief of the Sultan of Oman's Armed Forces a graduate of U.S. military schools via our International Military Education and Training program. Oman serves as an interlocutor with other GCC members, factions in Yemen, and Iran. Oman faces some political and economic uncertainty due to the eventual leadership transition from Sultan Qaboos, and the continued budgetary dependence on limited hydrocarbon revenues to fuel Omani development and employment.

Key Challenges: Oman's economy continues to experience recurring fiscal deficits, growing unemployment, and stagnant growth. Economic diversification is increasingly seen as a national security priority for Oman, as reliance on the hydrocarbon sector and a growing population result in rising unemployment, growing debt, and a diminishing capacity to pay for the costly security apparatus that keeps Oman safe and secure. Progress toward achieving the goal of diversification has been slow. This economic insecurity combined with an untested succession plan to follow Sultan Qaboos' decades of stable rule represent significant challenges.

Key Opportunities: Oman's strategic location, outside of the maritime chokepoints of the Bab el Mandeb and Straits of Hormuz, provides CENTCOM with key logistical, operational, and contingency capabilities. The U.S. and Oman have shared interests in allowing increased United States access to Oman's military and commercial ports and bases as the country looks to modernize its infrastructure and diversify from an oil-based economy.

2019 Prognosis: A stronger economy in the Sultanate of Oman will ensure a politically stable country with adequate employment opportunities for its citizens. The U.S. and Oman will continue to maintain a strong mil-to-mil relationship and Oman will provide crucial access in the form of thousands of aircraft overflights, landings, and dozens of port-calls in Oman. Negotiations for enhanced access to Duqm port offer the prospect of deeper military cooperation. Oman will participate in numerous bilateral exercises and training events with U.S. Forces. Oman will continue to develop an FMS portfolio that already includes over \$2.7B in open FMS cases, though Omani budgetary constraints may significantly slow new acquisitions in coming years.

Conclusion

Maintaining our competitive advantage in the Central Region relies on more than simply overmatching those who would challenge us with a higher volume of forces and equipment. CENTCOM's strategic approach has never relied on physical overmatch, but on our people, our strategic partnerships, and the ability to creatively leverage our combined capabilities to achieve our mission. As we operate more and more in the gray zone of competition short of combat, our people and partnerships – based on foundations of respect, trust, and shared values – will continue to be our source of strategic strength and key to maintaining our edge in the region.

The CENTCOM team – our component commands, our combined and joint task forces, our country teams, and all of our interagency partners – more than 90,000 uniformed military and civilian strong, is

the engine that drives everything we do toward securing our national interests. They represent America's greatest treasure. In an era of austerity and change when we consistently ask our people to do more with less, the service and sacrifice of these men and women and their families in support of their nation is both humbling and inspirational. For nearly 18 years of sustained conflict across the CENTCOM AOR, our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and Civilians have answered the call with an unwavering commitment and devotion matched only by the families who support them. We could not accomplish what we do without all of them and they deserve the very best capabilities and support we can provide them, from weapons and communications systems, to healthcare and housing. As CENTCOM continues to fulfill its current missions and evolves to face new challenges, we appreciate the efforts of our civilian leadership at the Department of Defense, the interagency, and especially members of Congress and their staffs, who work tirelessly to provide our people everything they need to accomplish their vital missions and lead healthy, fulfilling lives in continued service to our nation.

CENTCOM Commander, General Joseph L. Votel

General Joseph L. Votel attended the United States Military Academy and was commissioned in 1980 as an Infantry Officer. His initial assignments were to the 3d Infantry Division in Germany where he served as a Rifle Platoon Leader, Executive Officer, Battalion Adjutant and Rifle Company Commander.

Following this he served as a Small Group Tactics Instructor at the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia before being assigned to the 75th Ranger Regiment as a Plans / Liaison Officer where he participated in Operation JUST CAUSE.

He was next posted to the 1st Ranger Battalion where he served as the Battalion Liaison Officer, Operations Officer and Executive Officer.

Following this he was assigned to HQs, Allied Forces Southern Europe, Naples, Italy and the NATO Peace Implementation Force (IFOR) in Sarajevo. He commanded the 2d Battalion, 22d Infantry (Light) at Fort Drum, New York and was subsequently selected to command the 1st Ranger Battalion at Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia.

Following attendance at the Army War College GEN Votel commanded the 75th Ranger Regiment and participated in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan and Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, Iraq.

As a general officer he served in the Pentagon as the Director of the Army and Joint IED Defeat Task Force and subsequently as the Deputy Director of the Joint IED Defeat Organization established under the Deputy Secretary of Defense. He served as the Deputy Commanding General (Operations), 82d Airborne Division / CJTF-82, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan and was subsequently assigned as the Deputy Commanding General then Commanding General of the Joint Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

He most recently served as the Commanding General of U.S. Special Operations Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida.

GEN Votel is a graduate of the Infantry Officer Basic and Advanced Courses, United States Army Command and General Staff College, and the United States Army War College. Current As 30 Mar 2016.

STATEMENT OF
GENERAL THOMAS D. WALDHAUSER, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
COMMANDER
UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND
BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

7 MARCH 2019

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

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, and distinguished members of the committee, I am honored to represent the men and women of U.S. Africa Command and share with you their accomplishments over the past year. Since I last updated the committee, the new National Security, Defense, and Military Strategies, the U.S. Strategy Toward Africa, the National Strategy for Counterterrorism, the Department of Defense Strategy for Africa, and a new U.S. Africa Command Strategy and Campaign Plan have shaped our efforts on the continent. Each of these foundational documents acknowledges and underscores the strategic importance of Africa and the command's mission: *U.S. Africa Command, with partners, strengthens security forces, counters transnational threats, and conducts crisis response in order to advance U.S. national interests and promote security, stability, and prosperity.*

Africa is an enduring interest for the United States, and security is a pre-requisite for economic growth and development. As a partner-based command, U.S. Africa Command assists African nations in building capable and professional militaries subordinate to elected civilian authority and respectful of human rights, the laws of armed conflict, and international humanitarian law. By making deliberate investments in defense institutions, the U.S. can assist African partners in meeting the basic conditions needed for good governance, economic development, and stability.

During 2018, U.S. Africa Command commemorated its tenth year as a geographic combatant command, reaffirming Africa's importance to the U.S. global strategy for defending and ensuring the economic well-being of the U.S. homeland. Our network continues to focus on shared goals of a secure, stable, and prosperous Africa, which benefits not only our African partners and the U.S., but also the international community.

Headquarters U.S. Africa Command employs a team of military, civilian, interagency, and contract professionals to fulfill the mission. Moreover, U.S. Africa Command is supported by families who bring with them the spirit of community and teamwork, without which the command could not succeed. U.S. Africa Command has partnerships with the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and other interagency organizations who all work towards providing stability and prosperity on the continent. Globally, we collaborate with our European allies, the United Nations, the African Union and regional mechanisms, the European Union, non-governmental organizations, and other groups to pursue stability and security in Africa.

By employing a partner-centric approach, U.S. Africa Command complies with the specific direction in the National Defense Strategy to “support relationships to address significant terrorist threats in Africa.” To address this directive, U.S. Africa Command builds on two strategic principles. First, very few, if any, of Africa’s challenges can be resolved using only military force. Consequently, U.S. Africa Command emphasizes military support to diplomacy and development efforts. Our activities directly complement Department of State and USAID efforts to reduce the spread of harmful ideologies, strengthen governments who protect their citizens and foster security and economic successes.

Second, persistent pressure on terrorist networks—whether it be operational, financial, or political—is necessary to prevent the destabilization of our African partner nations. Our principal means for applying pressure is working through our African and with our international partners, increasing their security capabilities and, only when necessary, using kinetic force. Ultimately, our use of military force in Africa, for example in Libya and Somalia, supports the

host government's effort to provide the security and economic growth required for long-term stability and prosperity.

By design, U.S. Africa Command military assistance and activities occur in partnership with the host government and within overlapping regional and global mandates. In Somalia, the command supports the Federal Government of Somalia, while operating in support of African Union and United Nations mandates. In the fight against Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa (WA), we operate with partners in the African Union-endorsed Multinational Joint Task Force, which was established under the auspices of the Lake Chad Basin Commission. In the Sahel, we partner with five national governments and within the overlapping mandates of the G-5 Sahel and the United Nations. In Libya, our activities support the UN-led political reconciliation process and the UN-recognized Government of National Accord. Even when we operate unilaterally, those actions are firmly embedded in international law and international legitimacy.

U.S. Africa Command also plays a significant role in advancing the priorities outlined in the National Security and Defense Strategies, which emphasize the rise of China and Russia as key competitors. U.S. Africa Command has also observed increased engagement of non-traditional security actors, such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates, as both challenges and opportunities to our mission. U.S. Africa Command strives to ensure the U.S. remains the partner of choice, in Africa, by maintaining our high standards of professionalism, demonstrating commitment to addressing their security needs, and providing high-quality equipment.

Targeted investments in innovative, cost-effective, and sustainable approaches are common practices within Africa, and U.S. Africa Command endeavors to maximize the returns on our investments. For example, our strategy in Somalia features a distinct set of Advise,

Assist, and Accompany authorities in support of the Federal Government of Somalia and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to provide the opportunity for the Somali National Security Forces to successfully assume security responsibilities. This carefully tailored level of operational support reduces risk to U.S. personnel and is a cost-effective way to further advance U.S. security interests.

Each day, we have approximately 7,000 personnel conducting their assigned tasks on the African continent. These include U.S. uniformed personnel, Department of Defense civilians, and contractors of all Services, career fields, and specialties working to address global security challenges and maintain strategic access and influence. These personnel perform duties in countries such as Cameroon, Djibouti, Kenya, Niger, and Somalia. Over the course of 2018, the command and our component commands conducted numerous engagements, exercises, security cooperation events, and operations across the continent. These activities strengthen mutually beneficial networks between the U.S. and partners and enhance the capability of partner nation defense forces to provide effective and legitimate security.

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

For scale, Africa is over three times larger than the U.S. The U.S. Africa Command Area of Responsibility encompasses 53 countries with a population of 1.3 billion. By 2050, this figure is forecasted to almost double to over 2.54 billion, with one out of every four people on the planet living on the African continent. Additionally, the continent faces a large and growing youth population as Africa is home to 21 of the 22 countries in the world with the youngest average populations. Forty-one percent of Africans are under the age of 15, while 60 percent of the total population is under the age of 24. Economic development, leading to employment, is

necessary in order to assist in preventing conflict, as Africa needs to add approximately 20 million jobs each year to keep pace with the growing population.

The lack of economic and educational opportunities, a large, disenfranchised youth population, and inadequate natural resources are potential drivers of extremism, which, when coupled with authoritarian, corrupt, or ineffective governments, contribute to persistent instability. According to the Fund For Peace's 2018 Fragility State Index, 33 of the 50 countries most at risk of becoming unstable are in Africa. This includes seven of the top ten most fragile states. According to the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index, 32 African countries are listed in the "Low Human Development" categories of health, education, security, and employment.

U.S. Africa Command employs the broad-reaching Diplomacy, Development, and Defense approach to foster interagency efforts and help negate the drivers of conflict and extremism. With the Department of State and USAID, U.S. Africa Command supports programs and initiatives fostering political reconciliation and elections in countries such as Libya. Our diplomatic and development partners work with African partners to provide jobs, food, clean water, and education, such as in Ethiopia and Nigeria, helping to counter incentives offered by violent extremists organizations (VEOs) or criminal networks.

In Africa, VEOs remain a serious threat to the shared interests of our partners, allies, and the U.S. These VEOs and criminal networks prey upon disenfranchised populations, creating a cycle of recruitment and allowing extremist ideology to fester. Extremist networks also exploit criminal networks for the illicit transport of narcotics, weapons, and persons. VEOs cultivate and encourage an environment of distrust, despair, and hopelessness to undermine governments, allowing for the expansion of their radical ideology.

Over the next decade, Africa will be shaped by the increased presence of external actors and the effects of environmental change. The U.S. welcomes those partners pursuing helpful and constructive interests in Africa to develop its economic, infrastructure, humanitarian, and security sectors. However, with emerging markets and a growing consumer class, external actors often employ exploitative tactics and “debt trap” diplomacy to garner undue influence.

Over the past decade, China has injected considerable amounts of financing into the continent, including offering key loans to strategically-located countries, like Djibouti, Senegal, and Angola. Chinese interests include gaining greater access to Africa’s mineral and other natural resources, opening markets, and accessing naval ports. In the short term, the complete financial packages can make China appear to be an attractive partner for African nations. For example, African nations who become signatories to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (the BRI) receive promises of development, defense, and cultural investments in their countries, further enhancing China’s influence while challenging our own partnerships in Africa.

African leaders are growing increasingly wary of their business ventures with China. For example, the Nairobi-Mombasa Railway in Kenya has met with criticism for its high price and the relatively low number of African workers in dispatcher and locomotive driver positions, relative to Chinese workers. While Chinese officials say their business agreements come with no strings attached, construction work on the continent is often carried out by Chinese companies and Chinese workers failing to boost local employment. African countries, which can access financing through China’s state-owned banks, often commit to contracts that can lead to debt-equity swap arrangements when debt obligations are unfulfilled. For Kenya, which financed 90% of the total \$3.6 billion railway project from China in 2014, loan repayment rates are scheduled to triple in 2019 per the conditions of the loan agreement risking this scenario.

Russia is also a growing challenge and has taken a more militaristic approach in Africa. By employing oligarch-funded, quasi-mercenary military advisors, particularly in countries where leaders seek unchallenged autocratic rule, Russian interests gain access to natural resources on favorable terms. Some African leaders readily embrace this type of support and use it to consolidate their power and authority. This is occurring in the Central African Republic where elected leaders mortgage mineral rights—for a fraction of their worth—to secure Russian weapons. Russia also garners additional support at the United Nations and gains more customers for its military arms sales.

Russia is more deliberate in Libya as they invoke Qaddafi-era relationships and debts to obtain economic and military contracts. These agreements are aimed at accessing Libya's vast oil market, reviving arms sales, and gaining access to coastal territories on the Mediterranean Sea, providing Russia closer access to Europe's southern border.

Consequently, the cross-border and global nature of Chinese and Russian actions and influence in Africa necessitates collaboration between U.S. Africa Command, U.S. European Command, U.S. Central Command, and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, amplifying the global complexity of this issue.

The second emergent challenge in Africa is the effect of environmental change on African security. A large number of Africans make their living on the land, whether they grow crops or raise livestock, and many live at a subsistence level. Settled farmers and nomadic herdsman are increasingly engaged in land-use disputes, which are emerging as major driver of conflict in central Mali, through the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria, in South Sudan, and into the Central African Republic. More people are competing for less arable land, while both modern state institutions and customary institutions are failing or have failed to regulate this competition.

Poor land-use policies, changing weather patterns, rising temperatures, and dramatic shifts in rainfall contribute to drought, famine, migration, and resource competition. In the greater Sahel region, the Sahara Desert has expanded southward by over 10 percent since the 1920s, reducing the amount of productive land. Due to changes in weather patterns aggravated by poor resource management, Lake Chad has contracted 90 percent since the 1960s, significantly decreasing the region's largest source of fresh water. The reduction in arable land for crops and grazing land for livestock has created strong competition between the region's farmers and herders who migrate across borders searching for usable land. As each group seeks land for its own purposes, violent conflict can ensue. Armed groups and criminal networks exploit this situation, leading to human trafficking, slavery, and more violence.

Environmental degradation and the overuse of natural resources exacerbate weak or ineffective governments who are unable to respond and cope with their already serious, on-going political, economic, and social challenges. U.S. Africa Command and our partners are investing to build the capability and capacity of governance, infrastructure, and defense institutions, so African governments can mitigate the effects of environmental degradation. This can be accomplished with, for example, sustainable electric grids, viable water treatment facilities, environmentally-sound agricultural developments, and professional security forces.

Despite the challenges on the continent, Africans are eager and receptive to work with the U.S. to advance common strategic interests. Africa's future depends on urgent action to address the needs of growing populations, mitigate the influence of harmful activities, and combat the effects of environmental change. U.S. Africa Command's role within the Diplomacy, Development, and Defense construct supports partner efforts to enable economic growth and prosperity by providing a stable security environment.

U.S. AFRICA COMMAND STRATEGIC APPROACH

The successful advancement of U.S. interests in Africa is best achieved with stable nations on the continent. Accountable governments, well-trained and disciplined militaries with a respect for the rule of law and human rights, and growing economies are cornerstones to this stability. Over the past year, consistent with the updated national strategies, U.S. Africa Command revised our strategic approach to effectively strengthen our African partners by evolving our security cooperation from a focus on crisis response to capability and capacity building against our new strategic priorities: state fragility, increased involvement of China and Russia, VEO expansion, and threats to U.S. access and influence.

The U.S. Africa Command strategy prioritizes five objectives: 1) African Partners contribute to regional security, 2) threats from VEOs and transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) are reduced to a level manageable by internal security forces, 3) U.S. access and influence are ensured, 4) U.S. Africa Command sets the theater by aligning forces, authorities, capabilities, footprints, and agreements, and 5) U.S. personnel and facilities are protected. These objectives nest within the foundational strategies and provide the framework for the revised five-year focus in the U.S. Africa Command Campaign Plan and the U.S. Africa Command Theater Posture Plan.

FOUNDATIONAL STRATEGIES

For U.S. Africa Command, the 2018 National Defense Strategy underscore the importance of our African Partners, European, and international alliances to build partner capabilities and capacity in order to create a more secure, stable, and prosperous continent. Furthermore, the strategies emphasize the protection of the American people, homeland, and the American way of life.

The National Defense Strategy focuses on Great Power Competition and expanding the use of lethality, partnering, and process reform. Additionally, the National Defense Strategy continues to emphasize the threat posed by VEOs to the U.S. homeland, our allies, and our African Partners. Much like the National Defense Strategy, U.S. Africa Command links VEOs to instability in Africa. Hence, the importance of alliances and partnerships is amplified in the command's strategy and campaign plan and in the command's response to regional crises, whether humanitarian or security related.

Two other key foundational documents provide the policy guidance to synchronize U.S. Africa Command efforts with that of the whole of the U.S. Government. First, the Department of Defense Strategy for Africa mandates U.S. Africa Command strengthen African security forces and develop institutions at the national and regional levels. U.S. Africa Command's focus on security cooperation is a key component in the U.S. whole-of-government approach. Moreover, by seeking low-cost and resource-sustainable security solutions, the Department of Defense Strategy for Africa framework sets the conditions for U.S. Africa Command to adapt to current and emergent challenges in Africa.

Next, the National Strategy for Counterterrorism emphasizes the use of all instruments of American power, with a focus on non-military capabilities. The strategy's framework encourages working with a wide-range of partners in both the public and private sectors (e.g., technology, financial institutions) and allied governments to encourage counterterrorism burden-sharing. Information sharing, counter-finance, reintegration of returning foreign fighters, and counter-messaging promote positive narratives to increase partner awareness and strengthen partner capability to address the broader counterterrorism challenges within Africa. These foundational strategies are synchronized with the U.S. Africa Command Strategy and Campaign

Plan, promoting a consistent approach, over time, to strengthen relationships and enhance the capability of our African partners.

In December 2018, the President signed the U.S. Strategy Toward Africa, which focuses on economic partnerships to build self-reliance among our African partners in the era of great power competition with external actors, such as China and Russia. This strategy aims to advance trade and commercial ties with key African states to increase U.S. and African prosperity. Doing so helps to protect the U.S. from cross-border health and security threats, and supports African states' progress toward stability and citizen-responsive governance. The strategy also prioritizes foreign assistance to help our African partners achieve sustained economic growth and self-reliance to combat transnational threats. Ultimately, the U.S. Africa Command Strategy seeks to strengthen partnerships to increase U.S. influence, protect U.S. personnel and facilities, and ensure access, as specifically directed in the U.S. Strategy Toward Africa.

U.S. AFRICA COMMAND CAMPAIGN PLAN

Based on the National Security and Defense Strategies, and as indicated in our mission statement, the revised U.S. Africa Command Campaign Plan provides the command, and our component commands, strategic direction to advance our strategic goals on the continent. It does so in a burden-sharing and balanced approach, accounting for the increased presence of external actors, namely China and Russia, and the continued threat posed by VEOs.

To achieve the U.S. Africa Command Campaign Plan objectives, the command emphasizes six approaches: 1) Strengthen Partner Networks; 2) Enhance Partner Capability; 3) Develop Security in Somalia; 4) Contain Instability in Libya; 5) Support Partners in Sahel and the Lake Chad Region; and 6) Set the Theater to facilitate U.S. Africa Command day-to-day activities, crisis response, and contingency operations.

Strengthen Partner Networks

U.S. Africa Command strives to further U.S., allied, and partner interests and access to mitigate destabilizing influences on the continent. The Strengthen Partner Network approach is the primary effort in which the command seeks to establish new partnerships with countries and organizations, strengthen existing relationships through enhanced communication and synchronization, and counter the activities of external actors such as China and Russia. This approach focuses on maintaining the U.S. as the preferred security partner in Africa.

For example, in April 2018, U.S. Naval Forces Africa conducted Exercise Lightning Handshake with the Royal Moroccan Navy and Air Force. This was the most sophisticated bilateral exercise the U.S. conducted with an African partner. It included a U.S. Carrier Strike Group executing close air support and naval surface fire support missions at the Tan Tan live fire range in Morocco.

Enhance Partner Capability

This approach is applied continent-wide and includes building African partner capability focused on defense institution building, countering illicit trafficking, maritime security, counter-improvised explosive devices (IED) efforts, humanitarian assistance, infectious disease control, and counter-VEO efforts. Engagements and exercises, managed by U.S. Africa Command and its component commands, strengthen key partnerships and improve partner capabilities. Since challenges in Africa intersect the activities of a multitude of U.S. Government agencies and international organizations, U.S. Africa Command maintains a broad group of federal, allied, and partner command liaisons to coordinate our capability-building efforts. One of those mechanisms is our Multilateral Planning Group, tri-chaired by the U.S., France, and the United Kingdom, where we are able to discuss and synchronize our efforts on the continent.

Develop Security in Somalia

This approach supports not only AMISOM and Somali Security Forces, but also the United Nations, European Union, African Union, and other allies and partners contributing to the international effort to counter al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia. Anchored by the AMISOM Troop Contributing Countries of Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, this approach allows for creating the opportunity to build the capability, capacity, and willingness of the Somali Security Forces. The approach centers on security cooperation, engagements, and exercises, as well as Advise, Assist, and Accompany authorities, to strengthen the Somali Security Forces. Taken in concert with the Enhance Partner Capability approach, the effort also addresses the capacity-building needs of the Troop Contributing Countries. The cumulative effects of the two approaches aim to support Somalia and the Somali Security Forces as they work to achieve regional stability and to support the vision of the Federal Government of Somalia.

Contain Instability in Libya

This approach guides the command's efforts to contain instability brought on by the lack of a unifying government and the presence of VEOs in Libya, which include ISIS-Libya and al-Qaida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The approach is focused on using the military tool to advance diplomacy, conduct operations to degrade VEOs, improve the security architecture of the Libyan Government of National Accord, and, once a political reconciliation is achieved, strengthen the national security forces of a recognized Libyan government. U.S. Africa Command, working with the Libya External Office of the U.S. Embassy to Libya, conducts engagements with Libyan political and military leaders to bolster relationships and maintain progress toward reconciliation. U.S. Africa Command stands firmly with and supports

the efforts of the United Nations as it leads the political reconciliation process, the immediate next step for Libyan stability.

Support Partners in the Sahel and Lake Chad Regions

In West Africa, roughly the size of the continental United States, this approach provides capabilities and support to counter-VEO operations, primarily against Boko Haram, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), ISIS-Greater Sahara, and ISIS-West Africa. The command's efforts support the Multinational Joint Task Force countries of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, and the G5 Sahel Joint Force countries of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. To support the Multinational Joint Task Force, the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and their individual member states, the command conducts engagements, exercises, and limited operations, and provides appropriate security assistance to increase the partners' willingness and capabilities in counter-VEO efforts.

Set the Theater

The logistics challenges of supporting our engagements on the continent necessitate the command align with a whole-of-government approach to support national security interests. This whole-of-government approach ensures we have the authorities, capabilities, footprint, agreements, and understandings in place to maintain access and accomplish our missions. The U.S. Africa Command Theater Posture Plan details the command's footprint of forces and agreements on the continent. Posture initiatives focus on expanding strategic access to enable day-to-day activities, contingency operations, and crisis response. The backbone of access in Africa is our network of enduring contingency locations and agreements with key African partners, which provides freedom of action and status protection for U.S. personnel.

Ensuring strategic access requires complementary defense, diplomatic, and development efforts across the interagency and with our allied and African partners. An enduring mission of the command is to support the Department of State-led mission to protect U.S. personnel and facilities on the continent. We maintain defense cooperation agreements with several African nations allowing for forward staging locations to enable more efficient recovery and evacuation. As such, we maintain enduring locations and contingency locations throughout Africa, which provide a flexible and diverse posture for operational needs and the protection of U.S. personnel and facilities.

Our capable posture network also allows forward staging of forces to provide flexible and timely responses to crises involving U.S. personnel or interests. At Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, the only forward and enduring U.S. military installation in Africa, U.S. forces engaged in security cooperation activities, contingency operations, and logistics support to five combatant commands: U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command, U.S. Special Operations Command, and U.S. Transportation Command. Camp Lemonnier is our hub in East Africa and remains a vital link to build stability in this key region.

One of U.S. Africa Command's newest and most important posture initiatives is the development of the West Africa Logistics Network. The West Africa Logistics Network provides and positions right-sized aircraft throughout West and Central Africa to facilitate the distribution of supplies, personnel, and equipment to support locations.

IMPLEMENTING THE U.S. AFRICA COMMAND STRATEGIC APPROACH

ACHIEVING AND MAINTAINING INFLUENCE

U.S. Africa Command continues to advance U.S. strategic objectives through the execution of activities and the expenditure of resources to respond to both regional crises and instability,

while prioritizing Great Power Competition efforts across the continent. This approach requires the U.S. to continue with our authorities to counter transnational threats, including terrorism and infectious diseases, which threaten African governments and the U.S. and its interests in Africa. It also strives to enhance security cooperation with our African partners, so they may become more stable, well-governed, and self-reliant, thereby setting the conditions for economic growth and development.

U.S. Africa Command aspires to achieve and maintain influence with our allies and African partners through security cooperation, exercises, engagements, operations, and efforts to mature the theater. This requires the synchronization of emerging policy and guidance from the National Defense Strategy and other strategic documents to drive U.S. Government activities and engagements across Africa, reinforced by the importance of capturing a return on investment. As such, the command and its component commands have a firm understanding of the necessity to coordinate a whole-of-government approach toward strengthening relationships and building partner capability in support of national defense objectives.

Consistency in resources is the most effective method for implementing our strategic approach in Africa, as U.S. Africa Command does not have an abundance of dedicated assigned forces. These resources include the authorities, capabilities, funding, and allocated personnel to further our international and interagency relationships and provide appropriate military support and security cooperation to diplomatic and development efforts with our African partners. This consistency allows for the planned execution and delivery of senior leader engagements, security capabilities, and multinational exercises necessary to bring about a secure environment for the advancement of U.S. national interests and sustainment of military advantages.

Additionally, various programs and funding allow U.S. Africa Command to further its campaign objectives. At its headquarters, U.S. Africa Command imbeds fifteen military personnel from allied and partner nations in the Multinational Coordination Center fostering an enduring relationships and increasing interoperability with allies and partners. The foreign military personnel do not command U.S. Forces or make final determinations on plans or directives but do assist in coordinating military engagement efforts and exercises to further U.S. multinational partnerships. Additionally, U.S. Africa Command leads and participates in multilateral planning groups for East Africa, North Africa, and the Sahel region. Likewise, our component commands host senior leader staff talks with their respective component equivalents. The U.S. Army Regionally Aligned Force also assists with the U.S. Africa Command mission. Working within the security cooperation framework, the Regionally Aligned Force executes a significant share of the military-to-military activities in Africa. Sustained access to the Regionally Aligned Force is critical to mission success.

The U.S. National Guard's State Partnership Program is by far one of U.S. Africa Command's most valuable implementing programs. The State Partnership Program pairs 14 African nations with 11 U.S. states and the District of Columbia and creates enduring relationships with their African partners to build and improve peacekeeping capacity, disaster management competency, and overall partner readiness. U.S. Africa Command continues to see a great return on investment with the State Partnership Program, conducting 120 events this past year and engaging over 3,000 partner nation personnel at a cost of four million dollars. We look forward to expanding this outreach as several more African countries have requested partnerships, which are currently under consideration.

Other programs mitigating the lack of dedicated forces and, in turn, building partner capability include the Department of State Global Peace Operations Initiative, the African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership, and the Women, Peace, and Security Initiative. The Department of Defense also coordinates closely with the Department of State on programs in Africa including the Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism, Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, Africa Military Education Program, and Africa Maritime Security Initiative to support critical counterterrorism, maritime security and overall military professionalization efforts.

These programs continue to professionalize partner militaries and security forces through training and institution building, and their concepts are integrated into military-to-military engagements; training on human rights, rule of law, and prevention of gender-based violence; and exercises.

EAST AFRICA

In 1991, the United States closed the Embassy in Somalia as the country descended into rampant violence and insecurity. Al-Shabaab and al-Qaida eventually filled the security vacuum and, with Mogadishu firmly under their control, used this safe haven to plan and launch terror attacks not only inside Somalia, but also regionally throughout East Africa. Since al-Shabaab's first external attack in 2010, the group has killed hundreds through external operations, with the most lethal attacks occurring in Kenya and Uganda. Somali pirates have also disrupted commercial shipping lanes, reaching as far north as the Arabian Sea and as far south as Tanzania, while attacking and hijacking sea vessels for ransom.

By 2007, AMISOM was activated in Somalia, with Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda contributing troops and conducting military operations, which eventually led to the

return of the capital city to a newly formed Somali federal government. Today, a U.S. Ambassador is permanently located in Mogadishu and, along with the USAID Mission Director, is working with the Federal Government of Somalia to improve the security environment and promote stability. As such, U.S. military operations and activities are part of a whole-of-government approach working in support of diplomatic and development efforts.

Somalia remains key to the security environment of East Africa, and its long-term stability is important to advancing U.S. interests in the region. When assessing Somalia, it is important to understand incremental progress has been made over the last decade as the result of a truly international effort inside the country. The U.S. works closely with our international partners, which include the United Nations, European Union, African Union, AMISOM and the troop contributing countries, the United Kingdom, Turkey, and others, on security sector development efforts. Together, we remain committed to Somali-led progress on improving conditions for a well-trained Somali National Security Forces that can assume and sustain security within the country.

The U.S. also continues to target al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia. U.S. military activities in Somalia include remote or accompanied advise and assist missions, the building, training, and equipping of Somali combat units, and when necessary, kinetic action. The effects of our kinetic activities serve to disperse al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia leadership, disrupt how they communicate, and further decentralize how they conduct operations. Ultimately, our kinetic activities, encouraged and supported by the Federal Government of Somalia, create opportunities for governance to take hold.

Our actions are synchronized with AMISOM's mandate to reduce threats and support stabilization, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. We are supporting the AMISOM transition plan,

which envisions conditions for an effective, responsible, and gradual handover of security responsibilities from AMISOM by 2021. Recent efforts by Somali security forces, working with AMISOM, to stabilize the area in and around Merka, is a positive step. However, the Federal Government of Somalia must continue to demonstrate sustained progress in implementing the federated security model, within its national security architecture, and increase coordination and cooperation with the Federal Member States.

The U.S. brings leadership and influence to Somalia, led by the U.S. Ambassador, to synchronize and support the international community's ongoing security and stability efforts. While U.S. military training and operations alone cannot defeat al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia, alongside U.S. diplomatic and development efforts, they provide legitimacy to the Federal Government of Somalia and create opportunity for political and economic growth, and security and stability in the broader region.

U.S. Africa Command's security cooperation is closely linked with the U.S. Mission to Somalia's political and economic initiatives targeting the root cause of instability. The Department of State and USAID provide effective tools to build and reinforce stabilization, democratic institution building, education, and health development programs. Somalia has held a credible federal presidential selection process, and political leaders have formed four Federal Member States and selected regional presidents and parliaments. While Somalia remains a fragile state, the gross domestic product has moderately increased over the past two years and, combined with other positive economic indicators, has the potential to lead to debt relief and additional international financing and investments.

While there have been signs of improvement in Somalia, progress is not irreversible and sustained international engagement will be necessary to keep the country on a positive trajectory.

The U.S., by virtue of our capabilities, influence, and credibility, is uniquely postured to support Somali efforts, including to help coordinate other international partner engagement. As such, the Federal Government of Somalia must now take advantage of the opportunities before them, with a clear understanding future assistance will depend on demonstrated progress.

In Djibouti, the U.S. remains a steadfast partner. In May 2018, members of the Djiboutian Army's first ever Rapid Intervention Battalion graduated from training. The Texas National Guard, assigned to Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, provided the Rapid Intervention Battalion with comprehensive individual and collective training in support of the unit's mission as a multi-purpose reaction force responsible to the leadership of the Djiboutian Army.

However, Djibouti's increasing partnership with China across defense, trade, and financial sectors encroaches on and, at times, diminishes U.S. access and influence. In 2018, Djibouti nationalized the Doraleh Container Port. Despite the increased presence of China within the port complex, Djibouti has retained control of the container port, increasing shipping volume and through-put since removing Dubai Ports World. Our continued access and unimpeded usage to this facility is critical to our logistical efforts in East Africa.

Additionally, China's first overseas naval base in Djibouti, only a few miles from Camp Lemonnier, creates air space and coordination challenges for all international partners. U.S. Africa Command considers access to Djibouti and to critical global shipping lanes through the Bab-el-Mandeb strait an imperative to ensure U.S. strategic interests are not compromised. We work closely with the U.S. Ambassador to Djibouti and his initiative to coordinate with the host nation, the Chinese, and other countries based in Djibouti to de-conflict operations, ensure the safety of forces, and maintain appropriate access for our military activities.

In Ethiopia last April, Abiy Ahmed Ali became Prime Minister, and his commitment to political reform, human rights, and unity has been a positive contribution to peace and stability in the region. By June, Abiy's government made significant progress implementing the 2000 Algiers Accord to end the war with its neighbor, Eritrea. Since then, both countries have taken numerous positive actions to conclude Africa's longest running border conflict. Commercial flights between the capitals of Addis Ababa and Asmara now occur daily, Ethiopian commercial vessels operate through Eritrean ports, communication channels are open between the populations reuniting families and friends, and military forces are withdrawing from contested territory.

Prime Minister Abiy's reform agenda represents an unprecedented attempt to comprehensively reset Ethiopian governance. The Government of Ethiopia is working with various ethnic factions inside the country to address root causes of conflict and expand the political discourse. Prime Minister Abiy restructured his cabinet, establishing a Ministry of Peace and appointed women to 50 percent of the positions, to include the Minister of Defense, a first for Ethiopia.

In partnership with the Government of Ethiopia and in support of our diplomatic mission, U.S. Africa Command is developing additional support options to improve security cooperation with this key partner. Ethiopia is already benefiting from security cooperation programs, including intelligence sharing initiatives, and we will identify avenues to enroll more personnel in U.S. military education and training programs. In July 2019, Ethiopia will host U.S. Africa Command Exercise Justified Accord in order to enhance AMISOM's Troop Contributing Countries' ability to conduct peace operations. Ethiopia is the largest contributor of United Nations peacekeeping forces and provides approximately 4,200 troops to AMISOM.

U.S. Africa Command will seek to expand our military-to-military relationship in support of Prime Minister Abiy's fast-paced internal reform efforts and regional outreach.

NORTH AFRICA

Since 2011, with the overthrow of Libyan dictator Muhammad Qaddafi and the rise of the Arab Spring, Libya has been in a constant state of turmoil. In 2014, Libyan militants began pledging allegiance to the Islamic State and its cause. By 2015, the Islamic State had infiltrated the coastal city of Sirte, shifted aspirations of the militia members there, and declared it a part of the caliphate. Soon militants from outside Libya joined the organization, now branded as ISIS-Libya, and their numbers swelled into the thousands.

In 2016, the Libyan Government of National Accord requested assistance from the U.S. and our European allies to rid the country of ISIS-Libya. Together, we assisted Libyan forces aligned to the Government of National Accord and conducted hundreds of kinetic strikes in support of its ground operations in Sirte. Within months, Sirte was liberated. Since then, the U.S. has remained engaged in the international efforts to stabilize Libya.

U.S. Africa Command focuses on three objectives for Libya. First, U.S. Africa Command assists in degrading terrorist groups, such as AQIM and ISIS-Libya, who pose threats to U.S. and Western interests and destabilize Libya and its neighbors. Second, every effort is made to prevent widespread civil conflict that would threaten security and stability. Finally, U.S. Africa Command supports the political reconciliation process by providing security to facilitate diplomatic engagements in Libya.

U.S. Africa Command continues to support the U.S. Libya External Office's diplomatic efforts to promote the United Nations-facilitated Libyan political reconciliation process. The recent return of a former Ambassador to Libya as the Chargé d'Affaires of the Libya External

Office offers a seasoned diplomat, who is familiar with the multi-layered problem set. The U.S. is now better positioned to manage the diplomatic and counterterrorism strategy. In 2018, U.S. Africa Command conducted kinetic strikes targeting the leadership and operational commanders of both ISIS-Libya and AQIM providing the opportunity for the Libyan Government of National Accord to continue its efforts to improve security and work towards political reconciliation.

Tunisia is one of our most capable and willing partners. In May 2018, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Africa conducted Exercise African Lion in Tunisia and Morocco. This annual, multinational exercise enabled U.S. forces and our African partners to increase interoperability and further refine tactics, techniques, and procedures for countering VEOs.

Furthermore, U.S. Africa Command-managed security cooperation programs work to develop Tunisian counterterrorism and border security capabilities. Through Fiscal Years 2017 to 2019, over \$165 million in Title 10 and Title 22 funding will be invested in developing maritime and rotary-wing capabilities to bolster Tunisian border control forces. Tunisia is also developing its counter-IED awareness program through training provided by U.S. Army Africa and sponsored by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. With this state-of-the-art training, Tunisian special operations forces will be better trained and equipped to counter IED attacks.

Tunisia is also capable of managing more advanced logistics training and maintaining increasingly complex intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance assets. For example, U.S. Air Forces Africa completed proof-of-principle flights with the Tunisian Air Force as part of an initiative to leverage their transport capability for rapid mobility requirements across the theater. Continued flights over time will serve as an opportunity to enhance the capability of the Tunisian Air Force, while reducing the stress on U.S. airlift assets and personnel. Tunisia remains a political and military leader in the region and a net exporter of security.

The Kingdom of Morocco remains a vital U.S. security partner and ranks in the top five of African countries providing peacekeepers to UN missions in Africa. Additionally, Morocco is a key exercise integrator serving as the permanent host of Exercise African Lion which focuses on counter-VEO, interoperability, and strengthening regional relationships. In 2019, Morocco will also host Exercise Phoenix Express, the premier U.S. Naval Forces Africa exercise emphasizing maritime security and counter-illicit trafficking.

Algeria is a capable partner in the fight against extremism. With the largest army in Africa, Algeria conducts frequent military-to-military engagements to build its border protection and counterterrorism forces. U.S. relations with Algeria continue to foster cooperation and further regional stability.

SAHEL AND LAKE CHAD REGIONS

Within the Sahel region of northern and western Africa, dangerous pockets of extremists control numerous under-governed spaces. The African-led, French-assisted, and U.S.-supported G5 Sahel Joint Force, comprised of forces from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, is a successful example of burden sharing. The U.S. is providing bilateral security assistance for the countries of the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and U.S. Africa Command contributes operational planning support to compliment the funding and operational assistance provided by our European allies to the G5 Sahel Joint Force. U.S. Africa Command remains committed to assisting the African-led operations to degrade VEOs and to build the defense capabilities within the G5 Sahel Joint Force and, in turn, build the capabilities of individual countries within the joint force.

Mali remains the epicenter of instability and a haven for many terror groups to stage and launch attacks across the region. The United Nations Mission in Mali continues to support the

stabilization of the country and implementation of the Algiers Accord for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Niger, Senegal, and Togo are the leading African nations contributing to United Nations Mission in Mali, which has more than 11,000 military personnel. Our European allies provide military education, advice, and training to the Malian Armed Forces through the European Training Mission-Mali. This mission has trained over 12,000 personnel in an effort to strengthen the Malian Armed Forces to defend its territory and protect its people.

U.S. Africa Command lends critical support to partner counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel. This primarily takes the form of providing key enabling capabilities to the French and members of the G5 Sahel Joint Force. Furthermore, we continue to build military operational and defense institutional capabilities through measured security cooperation coordinated with other U.S. government agencies' diplomacy and development efforts. Through these actions, we complement the international effort to maintain persistent pressure on terror networks and increase security and stability in Mali.

In Burkina Faso, U.S. Africa Command finds a willing and capable partner in West Africa. With almost \$40 million in U.S. Title 10 expenditures, the Burkinabe armed forces remain dependable exporters of security with trained security forces capable of contributing to the G5 Sahel Joint Force. Despite manpower and equipment challenges, the Burkinabe security forces continue to conduct counterterrorism operations in both the North and Eastern regions.

In Niger, serious governance and development issues are exacerbated by rapid population growth, environmental degradation, economic stagnation, and stressed infrastructure. Moreover, regional VEOs, such as ISIS-Greater Sahara, JNIM, Boko Haram, and ISIS-West Africa, overlap within Niger. As such, our policy goals aim to assist Niger's continued development as a stable

democracy with accountable governance, become an increasingly capable partner against regional threats, and achieve social and institutional development and broad-based economic growth, which will further strengthen the population against VEO recruitment efforts. In spite of these challenges, Niger is an increasingly capable regional partner.

Over a three year period, U.S. Africa Command-managed Title 10 support has increased Nigerien counter-IED capability, as well as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance asset sustainment, maintenance, and operations. This includes the Government of Niger-requested development of an expeditionary, contingency support location in Agadez, scheduled to be initially operationally capable in the summer of 2019.

In April 2018, Niger hosted Exercise Flintlock, the annual U.S. Special Operations Command-Africa exercise to develop capacity and interoperability among African, allied, and U.S. forces. Exercise Flintlock was entirely facilitated by the special operations force units of more than 20 African nations with the support of western nations. This successful multilateral event enhances coordination among partners and improves special operations force capabilities to combat violent extremist organizations.

Within the Lake Chad Region, the Multinational Joint Task Force comprises forces from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, and remains a strategically significant organization in the efforts to counter Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa. Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa attack military and civilian targets throughout Northeast Nigeria and the Lake Chad Border areas of Niger, Chad and Cameroon, thus dominating large swaths of territory and displacing millions from their homes, contributing to a multi-border displaced persons crisis. U.S. Africa Command and USAID work with the Multinational Joint Task Force to deliver humanitarian support and facilitate international relief efforts to bring basic health care, clean drinking water, adequate

sanitation, and food supplies to the hardest hit areas. However, the persistent violence and the growing number of displaced persons impact the ability for organizations to deliver the required assistance.

Nigeria has faced multiple setbacks in the volatile Northeast Borno State as ISIS-West Africa has seized military bases and materiel, including armored vehicles, weapons, and ammunition. This series of ISIS-West Africa high-profile attacks has placed tremendous strain on the Nigerian military's readiness and capabilities. The attacks also underscore the need for the contributing countries to the Multinational Joint Task Force to increase their commitments, resources, troop deployments, and regional operational coordination to counter ISIS-West Africa's momentum.

Nigeria also faces instability over the violent herder-farmer conflicts in the middle belt region, as these groups fight over the scarcity of resources and usable land required to feed the growing and, often due to conflict, displaced and transient population. By 2050, Nigeria will overtake the U.S. as the third most populous country in the world, further compounding the strain on natural resources and risking the disenfranchisement of a population increasingly dissatisfied by the lack of security and basic services.

U.S. Africa Command is working to assist the Nigerian military through a variety of security cooperation efforts. In April 2018, forty African senior military leaders represented their countries at the sixth annual African Land Forces Summit in Abuja, Nigeria. Co-hosted by the Nigerian Army and U.S. Army Africa, the African Land Forces Summit provided a forum to develop cooperative solutions for improved trans-regional security and stability.

Over the past year, we have expanded our intelligence support and are currently working with the Nigerian Air Force to increase their effectiveness in line with international standards. In the upcoming years, utilizing Title 10 and Title 22 funding, U.S. Africa Command will execute tailored programs to expand Nigerian intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; intelligence; counter-IED; and air-ground integration capabilities. U.S. Africa Command will continue to work with Nigeria and seek additional partnership opportunities following Nigeria's planned presidential election in early 2019.

Cameroon has been the focus of long-term U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Defense, and U.S. Africa Command security cooperation efforts to boost the country's capacity to counter Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa in the Lake Chad region. Cameroon has been an effective partner within the Multinational Joint Task Force. Cameroon also ensures security in the Gulf of Guinea and in neighboring Central African Republic, where it plays a valuable role in the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic.

The U.S. has urged the Cameroonian government to address human rights concerns, investigate allegations thoroughly, hold accountable perpetrators of abuse, and disclose the outcome of its investigations to the people of Cameroon. In accordance with the Leahy law, the U.S. government does not provide assistance to security force units or individuals against whom credible allegations of gross violations of human rights have been lodged.

The crisis and credible allegations of gross violations of human rights in the Anglophone Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon is a concern. The violence stem from a long-term sense of marginalization and political disenfranchisement among Anglophone Cameroonians, compounded by government suppression of moderates, and the government and separatists inability to enter into any constructive dialogue to resolve the conflict. The

Government of Cameroon has assured the U.S. no security assistance will be diverted from counter-Boko Haram and ISIS-WA efforts to the Anglophone regions.

GULF OF GUINEA AND CENTRAL AFRICA

In the Gulf of Guinea, maritime security remains crackdown a strategic priority due to its role in global oil markets, trade routes, and the residence of approximately 75,000 U.S. citizens. Piracy and other illicit maritime activities threaten development efforts, weaken state security, and rob states of precious resources required for greater economic growth and effective governance. In 2018, piracy incidents trended lower as cooperation increased among the Gulf of Guinea partners.

For example, last summer, U.S. Naval Forces Africa conducted Operation Junction Rain as part of the African Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership Program. Under this framework, U.S. Coast Guard law enforcement personnel partnered with Cabo Verdeans and Senegalese on board their naval vessels countering illicit trade and criminal activities. Capacity building remains paramount to continue the downward trend in piracy and address the growing threat of illicit trafficking of drugs, arms, and persons in the region.

In Central Africa, the most visible nontraditional threat this past year was an Ebola outbreak in an unstable region in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The outbreak, which began in August 2018, is presently the second most lethal in history. Furthermore, the medical response has been hampered by armed conflict in the region.

External actors in Central Africa, such as Russia, have also undermined security and countered U.S. interests. For example, in the Central African Republic, Russia has bolstered its influence with increased military cooperation including donations of arms, with which it has gained access to markets and mineral extraction rights. With minimal investment, Russia

leverages private military contractors, such as the Wagner Group, and in return receive political and economic influence beneficial to them.

Recently, the President of the Central African Republic installed a Russian civilian as his National Security Advisor. The President also promised the armed forces would be deployed nationwide to return peace to the country by forces likely trained, equipped, and in some cases, accompanied by Russian military contractors. Russia's ability to import harsh security practices, in a region already marred by threats to security, while systematically extracting minerals, is concerning. As Russia potentially looks to export their security model regionally, other African leaders facing similar instability and unrest could find the model attractive.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

In comparison to a large portion of Africa, many countries in Southern Africa have suffered fewer consequences from terrorism and violent conflict. However, it still struggles with economic, societal, governance, and environmental challenges, including poverty, crime, social inequality, corruption, and lack of water and is influenced by China's growing presence in the region. The majority of U.S. Africa Command's engagements with Southern Africa aim to strengthen partnerships and build partner capacity for peacekeeping and crisis response, including infectious disease outbreaks.

We work closely with our diplomatic and development partners to support and complement their efforts across Southern Africa. For example, the largest exporters of security in the region are Zambia, Malawi, and South Africa. Our primary investment in these countries is through Title 22, through such programs as the International Military Education and Training program and Global Peace Operations Initiative, which are designed to improve interoperability and develop long-term, sustainable peacekeeping capability and capacity.

Finally, in addition to our Title 22 commitments, the South Africa-New York State Partnership Program is the oldest on the continent and offers the most meaningful U.S. military-to-military engagements in South Africa. In 2018, South Africa hosted Africa's largest air show, the Aerospace and Defense Exposition, and the New York Air National Guard supported with two cargo airplanes, an unmanned aerial vehicle system, and 38 soldiers and airmen. Such engagements offer a low-cost solution to improve U.S. partnerships, particularly in a relatively accessible and neutral ground where our competitors seek influence in both the military and economic spheres.

ENSURING STRATEGIC ACCESS

Our efforts to ensure strategic access must also be viewed through the lens of competitor influence and coercive activities, which seek to gain advantages over the U.S. by moving faster in economic and security markets where we are constrained by our values and law. China is a strategic competitor which uses economic and security outreach to foster investment incentives, jobs, and infrastructure growth in return for access to Africa's strategic locations, natural resources, and markets. China has most successfully employed this model in Djibouti, holding 80 percent of the Government of Djibouti's debt, where access through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, the Red Sea, and the Suez Canal remains a U.S. strategic imperative.

Today, on the African side of the Red Sea and in the Bab-el-Mandeb strait, which encompasses Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Sudan, and Egypt, the Great Powers and the Gulf States both cooperate and compete for real estate and port facilities.

Along Somalia's northern coast, the semi-autonomous region of Somaliland is working with Dubai Ports World on developing its Gulf of Aden port city of Berbera. When development

is complete, Berbera's location, close to the entry and exit point of the Bab-el-Mandeb strait, will be strategically valuable for both Somaliland and with whomever they choose to partner.

Djibouti, a nation about the size of New Jersey, remains congested with a preponderance of foreign forces from the U.S., France, Germany, Japan, and China maintaining bases and competing for access and airspace. Currently, the Djiboutians operate the Doraleh Port facility, through which passes 90 percent of all logistics and materiel for U.S. operations in East Africa. Continued access to the Doraleh Port Facility remains a U.S. strategic imperative.

Just north of Djibouti, other geopolitical developments have had ramifications on the future of the Red Sea. With the normalization of relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the United Nations Security Council lifting sanctions on Eritrea, other nations will undoubtedly look to Eritrea to unlock its coastline for Red Sea port access.

Given its strategic location, coupled with its already developed infrastructure, Sudan is also looking to develop its Red Sea coast. In fact, Sudan recently entered into an agreement to allow Russia to explore natural gas fields off Port Sudan.

Along with U.S. Central Command, the strategic evolution of the Red Sea remains a command priority, as we consider how Red Sea access can be maintained and expanded on the continent. It is imperative for the U.S. to not only maintain our status as the preferred security partner of choice, but also look to diversify our strategic access to the Red Sea.

In 2018, U.S. Naval Forces Africa continued its annual exercise series, which consisted of Exercises Phoenix Express, Cutlass Express, and Obangame Express. These exercises aim to build the maritime capabilities of African partner nations, and Exercise Obangame Express this past year included participation from the Somali Maritime Police. Their participation marked the first time in nearly 30 years Somalia has participated in a security event outside its borders.

U.S. Africa Command seeks to build partner networks and assist in establishing the security environment required for economic opportunity and trade to flourish. Through a whole-of-government approach, enhanced security fosters development and investment with initiatives such as The Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development (BUILD) Act. The BUILD Act facilitates private-sector investments and institutional engagements with low and lower-middle income countries. It also opens the door for U.S. companies to compete overseas and respond to China's increased economic engagement in Africa, most notably the \$60 billion, largely in loans with some security and development funding, recently promised during the 2018 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation.

Additionally, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, established by the U.S. Congress in 2004 to apply a new philosophy toward foreign aid, works with partner nations to promote growth in agriculture and irrigation, power and energy, and transportation infrastructure. In November 2018, the Millennium Challenge Corporation provided a \$550 million investment into the Senegal Power Compact to increase electricity access and reliability for one of Africa's fastest growing economies.

The U.S. Institute for Peace (USIP) delivers skills training, education, grants, and research through local and international partnerships. USIP also serves as a conduit for various non-governmental organizations to interface with the broader diplomatic and development stakeholders in Africa. During 2019, USIP and U.S. Africa Command will host a symposium to discuss how non-governmental organizations can support and, when appropriate, integrate into the U.S. whole-of-government approach.

U.S. Africa Command's component commands engage every day on the continent to enhance partner capability, where an important aspect of maintaining relationships is continued

engagement between senior leaders. In 2018, senior leaders from U.S. Africa Command and its components conducted numerous key leader engagements, including visits to Cabo Verde, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Somalia, and Uganda.

U.S.-facilitated exercises and conferences offer the best return on investment for our security assistance efforts and provide our African partners with access to American values, expertise, and professionalism. In October 2018, senior military leaders from 28 African air forces and U.S. Air Forces Africa met in Morocco for the African Air Chiefs Symposium. This annual symposium provides a forum to discuss common defense issues, increase cooperation, and improve command and control of air operations.

Throughout 2018, U.S. Army Africa continued its annual exercise series, which included Exercise Unified Focus in Cameroon, Exercise Justified Accord in Uganda, Exercise United Accord in Ghana, and Exercise Shared Accord in Rwanda. These exercises provided integrated training opportunities, with a focus on respecting the rule of law and human rights, integrating women into peacekeeping operations, and responding to allegations of abuse.

Finally, in October 2018, led by the Command Senior Enlisted Leader, U.S. Africa Command hosted its second annual African Senior Enlisted Leader Conference with over 50 Africa enlisted leaders from 25 countries. African enlisted leaders engaged with senior US and NATO enlisted leaders on professional development, civilian control of the military, respect for human rights, and caring for Soldiers and their families. The conference advanced key professionalism concepts and training opportunities vital to sustaining African security and peacekeeping forces.

CONCLUSION

In summary, U.S. Africa Command remains poised to meet Africa's current and future challenges. The men and women of the command, our partners on the continent, and our collection of stakeholders understand how important Africa is to the global economy and security environments. The National Defense Strategy and its supporting foundational documents have outlined the importance of long-term Great Power Competition with China and Russia and the need to limit the harmful influence of non-African powers on the continent.

As the U.S. Africa Command Campaign Plan guides the command into the next decade, our partner-centric approach remains central to advancing U.S. interests in Africa. Much work remains, as U.S. Africa Command continues to contribute to the broad-reaching Diplomacy, Development, and Defense approach for further economic growth and prosperity in Africa.

Finally, it remains an honor to lead the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, civilians, contractors, and families of U.S. Africa Command. Together, their efforts have made the U.S. safer and kept Africa on the road towards prosperity.

**General Thomas D. Waldhauser, U.S. Marine Corps
Commander, U.S. Africa Command**

United States Marine Corps General Thomas D. Waldhauser is the fourth Commander of the United States Africa Command. In this capacity, General Waldhauser is responsible for building defense capabilities, responding to crises, deterring and defeating transnational threats in order to advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity, all in concert with interagency and international partners.

A native of South St. Paul, Minnesota, General Waldhauser graduated from Bemidji State University and was commissioned in 1976. He has served as an infantry officer at all levels in the U.S. Marine Corps, including command of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) during combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. His General Officer commands include the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, and Commander, Marine Corps Forces Central Command.

General Waldhauser's flag officer Joint assignments include Chief of Staff, U.S. Special Operations Command, Senior Military Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Joint Staff Director of Operations J3 (Acting), and Joint Staff Director for Joint Force Development J7.

General Waldhauser attended U.S. Army Ranger School, Jumpmaster School, Amphibious Warfare School, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, and the National War College where he earned a Master's Degree in National Security Strategies.

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

MARCH 7, 2019

RESPONSE TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MS. HOULAHAN

General WALDHAUSER. The DOD Leahy Law, 10 USC 362 (a)(1), provides that DOD appropriated funds may not be used for any training, equipment, or other assistance for the members of a unit of a foreign security force if the Secretary of Defense has credible information that the unit has committed a gross violation of human rights. Further, 10 USC 362 (b) permits an exception in cases where the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Security of State, determines that the government of such country “has taken all necessary corrective steps.” More specifically, this exception is known as remediation and is akin to a curative process.

Pursuant to Joint DOD and DOS Policy on Remediation and the Resumption of Assistance under the Leahy Laws, remediation measures will focus on the primary three components of investigation; judicial or administrative adjudication, as appropriate; and sentencing or comparable administrative actions, as appropriate. No specific remediation or curative timeline exists, but the DOD must provide notification to Congress not more than 15 days after the use of this exception.

During Fiscal Year 2018, U.S. Africa Command assisted Chiefs of U.S. Missions prepare remediation cases for units accused of gross violations of human rights. Though none of these specific cases were approved by the Department of State, we will continue to support remediation efforts when warranted. (U) The DOD Leahy Law, 10 USC 362 (a)(1), provides that DOD appropriated funds may not be used for any training, equipment, or other assistance for the members of a unit of a foreign security force if the Secretary of Defense has credible information that the unit has committed a gross violation of human rights. Further, 10 USC 362 (b) permits an exception in cases where the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Security of State, determines that the government of such country “has taken all necessary corrective steps.” More specifically, this exception is known as remediation and is akin to a curative process.

Pursuant to Joint DOD and DOS Policy on Remediation and the Resumption of Assistance under the Leahy Laws, remediation measures will focus on the primary three components of investigation; judicial or administrative adjudication, as appropriate; and sentencing or comparable administrative actions, as appropriate. No specific remediation or curative timeline exists, but the DOD must provide notification to Congress not more than 15 days after the use of this exception.

During Fiscal Year 2018, U.S. Africa Command assisted Chiefs of U.S. Missions prepare remediation cases for units accused of gross violations of human rights. Though none of these specific cases were approved by the Department of State, we will continue to support remediation efforts when warranted. [See page 39.]

RESPONSE TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MS. HAALAND

Ms. WHEELBARGER. The National Security Council has taken the U.S. Government lead on developing the U.S. National Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), as required by the 2017 WPS Act. DOD has provided input to the draft WPS strategy and is currently working with our interagency counterparts to finalize the document. Once the WPS Strategy is completed, the DOD is required to draft a WPS implementation plan for the Department within 120 days. In addition, we are developing a plan, using the \$4M of funding that we received in the FY19 Defense Appropriation Act, to place gender advisors within each geographic combatant command, U.S. Special Operations Command, the Joint Staff, and OSD Policy. [See page 18.]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING

MARCH 7, 2019

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. LANGEVIN

Mr. LANGEVIN. General Waldhauser testified that 150 special operations personnel and 150 conventional force personnel were removed from AFRICOM as a result of the optimization that has taken place over the past 18 months. What missions were scaled back, curtailed, rendered inactive, transitioned to episodic engagement, transitioned from special operations forces to conventional forces or transitioned in authority (i.e. 127e transitioned to 333) to accomplish the manpower optimization. Please note specifically where these manpower changes occurred, over what timeline, with what notice (if any) to the partner force and to what extent the Department of State played a role in the decision.

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

Mr. LANGEVIN. General Waldhauser testified that he has not been ordered to execute the second “tranche” of this plan by removing 300 more personnel from the AFRICOM area of responsibility. If the second “tranche” of this is ordered, what missions will be scaled back, curtailed, rendered inactive, transitioned to episodic engagement, transitioned from special operations forces to conventional forces or transitioned in authority (i.e. 127e transitioned to 333) to accomplish the manpower reduction requirement. Please note specifically where these manpower changes will occur, over what timeline, with what notice (if any) to the partner force and to what extent the Department of State will play a role in the decision to reduce forces.

General WALDHAUSER. [The information is for official use only and retained in the committee files.]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. SPEIER

Ms. SPEIER. What is the DOD doing to help Egypt secure and foster economic development in the Sinai?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. DOD supports the State Department to secure and foster economic development in the Sinai along three lines of effort: (1) training, equipping, and advising the Egyptian Armed Forces in counter-terrorism to foster the security necessary for economic development; (2) engaging within the military to military relationship to prioritize population security and Ministry of Defense support to economic development as one focus of their campaign; and (3) providing logistics and equipment support to economic development projects led by the State Department and USAID.

Ms. SPEIER. What is the DOD doing to help Egypt secure and foster economic development in the Sinai?

General VOTEL. I would defer to Department of State to answer this question.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. GALLEG0

Mr. GALLEG0. Despite repeated requests, the Armed Services Committee has not been provided access to execute orders (EXORDS) necessary for oversight purposes following the Niger ambush in 2017. Assistant Secretary West committed to Chairman Smith and Mr. Larsen at the counterterrorism hearing several weeks ago that DOD would resolve this issue. When and in what manner will DOD allow the committee access to EXORDS in question?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. In an effort to remain completely transparent regarding the investigation, Members of Congress and Professional Staff Members were granted access to a reading room which contained all applicable Execute Orders (EXORDS) associated with the Niger investigation report. These included the Joint Staff Counterterrorism EXORD, the Juniper Shield EXORD, the North West Africa EXORD, and the AQIM EXORD. The Secretary of Defense is currently considering policies and protocols to respond to the Committees’ request to view additional DOD EXORDs.

Mr. GALLEGO. How are allies and partners being included in decisions regarding force presence and posture in Syria following recent announcements that U.S. presence in the country would sunset?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. The DOD remains actively and continuously engaged with allies and partners on decisions regarding force presence and posture in Syria as we transition from liberating territory to addressing the threat from ISIS as a clandestine insurgency. Since January, the Acting Secretary of Defense, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have each held in-person multilateral meetings regarding these decisions with their Coalition counterparts—meetings that directly informed the Acting Secretary of Defense deliberations about a residual U.S. presence in Syria. Additionally, these and other senior Defense officials have conducted discussions and calls with a broad range of Coalition allies and partners directly involved with detailed military planning at U.S. Central Command focused on force presence and posture in Syria.

Mr. GALLEGO. In his announcement that he would declare a national emergency at the southern border to build a wall, President Trump said, quote: “We have certain funds being used at the discretion of generals” . . . “Some of them haven’t been allocated yet, and some of the generals think this is more important. I was speaking to a couple of them—they think this is far more important than what they were going to use it for. I said ‘What were you going to use it for?’ I won’t go into details, but it didn’t sound too important to me.”

General Votel, do you believe that unallocated funds designated for USCENTCOM are better spent at the southern border than in USCENTCOM?

General VOTEL. The Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have a responsibility to ensure the defense of the United States from threats wherever they may emanate from. That said, in a resource constrained environment and with the challenges we have historically faced in the CENTCOM AOR I would welcome more resources.

Mr. GALLEGO. How are allies and partners being included in decisions regarding force presence and posture in Syria following recent announcements that U.S. presence in the country would sunset?

General VOTEL. Our engagement with allies and partners supports diplomatic engagements by the President, the Secretary of State, the Acting Secretary of Defense, and other senior administration officials. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs has taken a prominent role in engaging with his uniformed counterparts from member nations from the Defeat-ISIS coalition as well as other non-coalition nations. My staff and I have held numerous engagements with military leaders and planners from interested countries ranging from one-on-one phone conversations to multi-nation conferences in order to convey the military situation including U.S. posture, threats, risks, and opportunities in northeast Syria. We recognize long term success will require working with our partners and to that end we coordinate as closely as possible.

Mr. GALLEGO. In his announcement that he would declare a national emergency at the southern border to build a wall, President Trump said, quote: “We have certain funds being used at the discretion of generals” . . . “Some of them haven’t been allocated yet, and some of the generals think this is more important. I was speaking to a couple of them—they think this is far more important than what they were going to use it for. I said ‘What were you going to use it for?’ I won’t go into details, but it didn’t sound too important to me.”

General Waldhauser, do you believe that unallocated funds designated for USAFRICOM are better spent at the southern border than in USAFRICOM?

General WALDHAUSER. I am unaware of the discussions between the President and other general officers and not in a position to fully understand the challenges and risks associated with conditions along the United States southern border. While reductions in funding could have repercussions to USAFRICOM’s mission, it would be difficult to weigh the competing requirements without further context on a national emergency declaration.

Mr. GALLEGO. Do you stand by the Niger Report issued last year as written, or are parts in need of review, correction, or retraction?

General WALDHAUSER. I stand by my approval of the findings and recommendations of the investigating officer, a two-star general officer, into the facts and circumstances surrounding the 4 October 2017 attack in Niger which killed four U.S. service members and four partner Nigeriens. The comprehensive Army 15–6 investigation, or Niger Report, took three months to assemble by the investigation team and was substantiated by testimonials from 143 witnesses, including 37 American and Nigerian survivors of the attack. The team analyzed thousands of pages of documents and reviewed hundreds of hours of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnais-

sance video. Critical to the thoroughness of the report was an investigative survey of the attack site in Tongo Tongo by the investigation team, accompanied by a Nigerien soldier who survived the attack and the Commander of the Nigerien Response Forces. During the survey, the team spoke to villagers and collected evidence for forensic analysis which reinforced the facts and circumstances of the attack. The investigation had 23 findings, 19 of which required action, covering issues of policy, procedures, resources, doctrine, training, judgement, and leadership. All of the material was forwarded to the Secretary of Defense through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Secretary concurred with all findings and recommendations.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. BROWN

Mr. BROWN. Africa is the intersection of the previous focus of our national security strategy, the fight against terrorism, and the new priority of our national security strategy, a renewal of great power competition with China and Russia. What diplomatic solutions do we need in addition to the military and economic initiatives such that we have a comprehensive strategy on the continent? How can we improve military partnerships with African countries so they view the U.S. as a trusted ally? How have we aligned our basing and force structure to address both the continuing threat of terrorism and the expanding influence of China?

Ms. WHEELBARGER. The U.S. Government strongly supports diplomatic solutions to complex international problems. The Department of Defense's (DOD) engagements in Africa are in support of the bilateral relationships managed by U.S. Embassy Chiefs of Mission. These diplomatic relationships play a critical role in strengthening our military-to-military relationships on a continent where we have limited forward presence. For example, in Somalia, Libya and the Sahel, diplomacy and development are critical to progress; military efforts alone will not resolve issues there.

As laid out in the U.S. Strategy for Africa, our primary lines of effort are promoting prosperity, strengthening security, and striving for stability. Thus the U.S. Government is focused on furthering trade and investment, fostering peace and security, and encouraging governance and self-reliance. These priorities could not be advanced without strong and enduring diplomatic efforts developed by the State Department.

Building trusted military partnerships with African countries is the cornerstone of DOD's "by, with, and through" approach on the continent. Partner forces almost exclusively execute security operations, with USAFRICOM acting in a supporting role. The extent to which we work with partner forces is based on their operational and institutional needs. With all of our African partners, we work to achieve shared strategic objectives through cooperative relationships. Continued engagement helps to build deep, enduring, and reliable military ties.

One program that highlights these ties is our State Partnership Program (SPP) administered by the National Guard Bureau. This program is guided by State Department foreign policy goals, and supports U.S. Chief of Missions' security cooperation objectives. Through the SPP, the National Guard conducts military-to-military engagements that leverage whole-of-society relationships and capabilities to facilitate broader engagements spanning military, government, economic, and social spheres. We currently have SPPs with 14 African countries and are seeking to develop more such programs with African countries. Partnering with a state allows for continued engagement and enduring, without the rotation of regular active duty units.

Finally, proper alignment of basing and force structure are very important to address the threat of terrorism and great power competition, as detailed in the National Defense Strategy. Any response to crises or conflicts in the region will require adequate access, basing, and overflight authorities. To address this, the Department has established a network of operating locations across the continent that enable required access while employing a light footprint. These locations also promote constructive security partnerships with key African countries that improve regional security and help keep pressure on priority violent extremist organizations. Our posture also provides our partners with assurance of our resolve and capacity to help secure our shared interests.

Mr. BROWN. DOD spends over \$10 billion each year on security sector assistance, much of which goes to counterterrorism (about \$5 billion is Afghanistan funding). In a 2018 report, the Center for Strategic and International Studies recommended that the U.S. "establish a baseline assessment of the security partnership before expending resources," and that those reports should include the partners ability to absorb assets, reform political institutions, and their compliance with human rights.

Does CENTCOM conduct such baseline assessments with the ANA? Do you have a timeline for achieving particular benchmarks and goals? More generally, for all of the forces in your AOR that you partner with, how does CENTCOM evaluate the effectiveness of counterterrorism partners capability and programs? What are the benchmarks you use to assess whether the investment is an appropriate and cost effective use of taxpayer funds?

General VOTEL. Yes, CENTCOM conducts baseline assessments that estimate the operating environment to include Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) (which includes the Afghan National Army) objective force capabilities to sustain progress along the Roadmap, Afghan Security Forces Fund stewardship and strategic and operational risks to NATO and Resolute Support objectives. The congressionally mandated, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan 1225 Report, is an in-depth Department of Defense assessment of costs associated with developing the Afghan security forces and government institutions. USCENTCOM supports this assessment through our U.S. Forces-Afghanistan component with cost and performance information. USCENTCOM also complements the 1225 report with an assessment of Operation Freedom's Sentinel. This assessment provides me with a measure of progress of achieving military objectives, while building partner capacity, with the ANDSF.

When President Trump announced the South Asia Strategy (SAS) in August 2017, this marked a change from a time-based approach telegraphing artificial timelines to a conditions-based approach, creating the conditions to bring about reconciliation on coalition terms. This conditions-based approach allows the United States to target realistic, attainable, and measurable strategic objectives. The SAS supports the Afghan Security Roadmap, the blueprint to develop professional and capable Afghan security forces. This roadmap is not anchored to a timeline and is tailored to meet Afghan's security capability threshold.

We assess our Theater Campaign Plan quarterly and annually. Our assessments include evaluations of Partner Nations' capabilities to address violent extremist organizations and terrorist threats in their countries. These assessments include evaluation of progress towards objectives detailed in our Security Cooperation Country Plans; every country in our AOR has a Security Cooperation Plan, with the exception of Iran and Syria. Many of our country plans include specific counterterrorism objectives for which we are working with our Partner Nations' to build capability and capacity. Additionally, we conduct operations assessments of our named operations in Afghanistan and to defeat the Islamic State in Syria (ISIS). These operations have specific objectives for our by-with-and-through approach to combatting terrorism with our partners so we routinely evaluate our progress in establishing specific desired conditions that we have for our partners' counterterrorism capabilities in these two conflicts.

We conduct a Theater Campaign Assessment on a quarterly basis, which measures progress toward objectives and end states. This assessment includes measuring the effectiveness of our operations, activities, and investments. One of our end states is: "USCENTCOM's influence with allies and partners is maintained and facilitates by-with-through operations and training that strengthens counterterrorism and conventional military capabilities." We assess the four objectives for this end state during our quarterly campaign assessment; each objective has evaluation metrics which include measures of "cost and return." Overall, our campaign assessment is one means by which I evaluate execution of our theater strategy to achieve U.S. national objectives established in the National Military Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and the National Security Strategy. Additionally, for Afghanistan, I recently endorsed the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) Plan of Record (APoR) report. The APoR analysis provides an estimate of the operating environment in Afghanistan, ANDSF objective force capabilities to sustain progress along the ANDSF Roadmap, and offers recommendations to better align the Roadmap to evolving conditions. An example of this continuous assessment process is the review that General Miller is conducting that allows us to evaluate the ANDSF from this perspective and make recommendations through various mechanisms, such as the 1225 Report and the semi-annual NATO Periodic Mission Review.

Mr. BROWN. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is the world's most water scarce region. MENA is home to 6 percent of the world's population, but only 1 percent of the world's freshwater resources, according to the World Bank. Seventeen countries in the region fall below the water poverty line set by the United Nations, and some experts believe that drought played a part in sparking Syria's civil war.

Do you agree that scarce resources can be a flashpoint for violence and conflict? Do you agree that the scarcity of water in the Lake Chad basin has increased over the last few decades? Do you agree that this situation increases the likelihood that

an increasing number of U.S. troops may be deployed, putting American lives at risk?

General WALDHAUSER. The scarcity of natural resources contributes to conflict throughout Africa. Lake Chad, which has historically been the main artery of commerce in the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) region, has progressively declined over the last five decades. To a degree the result of poor resource management, Lake Chad's decline has severely impacted agro-pastoral communities, who depend on it for food, water, and trade, resulting in the displacement of thousands of people from the region. This displacement, along with the competition over scarce resources, serves as one of many drivers of instability on the African continent. USAFRICOM continues to work with the international and interagency community to equip our African Partners with available resources and security mechanisms to support their efforts to prevent conflict and maintain stability.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. KEATING

Mr. KEATING. Earlier this year, the Lead Inspector General put out a report that gave a status update on Operation Inherent Resolve that report, U.S. Central Command provided the following quote: "If Sunni socio-economic, political, and sectarian grievances are not adequately addressed by the national and local governments of Iraq and Syria it is very likely that ISIS will have the opportunity to set conditions for future resurgence and territorial control." The report also goes on to say "Absent sustained counterterrorism pressure, ISIS could likely resurge in Syria within six to twelve months."

Are you confident Sunni grievances have been addressed or will be addressed so that conditions are not set for an ISIS resurgence?

In terms of ISIS reconstituting its forces, do you expect the bulk of ISIS' leadership, including those who head the group's various Shura's, to largely remain in Syria and/or Iraq? Or do you anticipate those members will flee to other provinces in North Africa or South Asia?

General VOTEL. [The information is for official use only and retained in the committee files.]

Mr. KEATING. General Waldhauser, in your written testimony you state that the second emergent challenge in Africa is "the effect of environmental change on African Security." You go on to highlight the large number of African farmers, the potential for land disputes, poor land-use policies, as well as changing weather patterns and rising temperatures.

Could you also speak to the challenges climate change poses to Nigeria in particular? John Campbell, former U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria, in 2015 and in 2017 stated that Nigeria is of great strategic importance to the United States. It has a rapidly growing population of 200 million, it has Africa's largest economy, is the largest producer of oil and gas in Africa, and has contributed to international peacekeeping missions in the region. Climate change however raises risks for Nigeria, from enhancing drought in the northeast and fueling the Boko Haram insurgency; to raising sea levels and displacing thousands in Lagos, Nigeria's coastal mega-city and economic powerhouse. How are you and your staff incorporating the impact that climate change may have on these risks and scenarios in Africa and Nigeria in particular?

General WALDHAUSER. Factors associated with the changing climate heighten Nigeria's existing humanitarian and security challenges. Nigeria's rapid population growth, and its reliance on subsistence agriculture, increases its vulnerability to climate-related hazards, including variable rainfall, drought, desertification, and flooding. About 70% of the Nigerian population is engaged in subsistence farming. Thus, an extreme climate event such as drought or flooding can have devastating effects, often leading to food shortages and the displacement of millions of people. These events have regional impacts as well. Nigeria is responsible for 70% of West Africa's overall agricultural output, with any significant reduction felt throughout the region. Greater competition for access to arable land also contributes to violence in Nigeria and more broadly, across Africa. In Nigeria, this has most prominently featured violence between herders and farmers in Nigeria's bread basket, the Middle Belt, where deaths in resource conflict have far-outpaced deaths to terrorism.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is the lead agency for development initiatives in Africa, and USAFRICOM works in support of these efforts. USAID supports agriculture and food security programs in Nigeria which take into account the changing climate and environmental conditions. USAID programs provide clean water and sanitation, increase access to energy, reduce obstacles to trade, and improve market access to strengthen the capacity of local groups to ad-

dress violence and mitigate conflict in their communities. Additionally, USAID programs target improved governance at the state and local levels to enhance the delivery of services (e.g., health, education, rule of law, etc.) to the public, thereby addressing many underlying grievances easily exploited by extremist or criminal networks.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. SHERRILL

Ms. SHERRILL. I understand that Picatinny Arsenal developed the only large-scale Howitzer capable of being lifted throughout the CENTCOM theatre, the M777A2 towed 155mm Howitzer. It has proven invaluable, firing hundreds of thousands of rounds in support of ground forces there. Because we never want our troops to have a fair fight, and we must hit the enemy before they even see us coming, the Army is looking at even greater range Long Range Precision Fires.

Across the vast area of operations in the CENTCOM AOR, there is a clear requirement for both greater range and lethality for our ground forces. Please share with the committee what you see as critical lethality requirements when it comes to the range of our weapons and munitions against our adversaries.

General VOTEL. [The information is for official use only and retained in the committee files.]

Ms. SHERRILL. I have deep reservations that the damage this administration has done to our critical alliances, particularly NATO, will have consequences that impact our security interests well outside of Europe. The premise of our efforts to train and equip local forces to combat terrorism is that they will be step up as we step back. This requires both regional partnership and continued support from our NATO allies in these vital missions.

Please describe how our NATO allies are contributing to counterterrorism efforts in the CENTCOM area of responsibility, and what more can we ask of them in places such as Syria, as we are looking to scale down.

General VOTEL. Our NATO allies continue to capably support Coalition efforts in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility focusing on training local forces and supporting counterterrorism efforts against ISIS and other terrorist threats in Afghanistan using a "by, with, and through" approach which emphasizes giving local forces the capability to plan and execute their own operations. Under Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve and NATO Mission Iraq, as well the Resolute Support Mission, our NATO allies currently contribute well over 3,000 troops to the Defeat-ISIS mission and 7000 troops to the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. Additionally, our NATO allies are working with us to develop enduring training plans that will continue to sustain the development, professionalism and expertise of the Afghani and Iraqi military forces so they can bring and sustain security and stability in their respective countries. As we look to reduce the U.S. footprint in Syria, we are identifying the critical mission sets, training requirements, forces required, and authorities necessary to ensure the safety and security of the local population.

Ms. SHERRILL. I come from an area of New Jersey that suffered greatly in the 9/11 attacks. While a significant reduction in the number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan may be in U.S. national security interests, it is critical that the reduction occur in a thoughtful way, with careful planning, and in coordination with our allies. We do not want Afghanistan to yet again provide safe-haven for terrorists who would attack our homeland.

As the primary U.S. objective for being in Afghanistan is to enable a political settlement that creates the conditions for another such attack to be much less likely, with the President's abrupt announcement to reduce our military presence by half, don't you agree that we are significantly damaging our ability to accomplish the mission?

General VOTEL. No. While USCENTCOM has not received an order to reduce U.S. forces in Afghanistan we are always evaluating the mission and the resourcing necessary to accomplish that mission. GEN Miller, in his capacity as Commander U.S. Forces Afghanistan, has determined the appropriate force level in order to execute his missions (U.S./NATO) based upon his assessment of the conditions on the ground. USCENTCOM will continue to play a vital role in supporting diplomatic efforts to find an Afghan led political settlement to the war in Afghanistan. We remain focused on doing all we can to support a political settlement.

Ms. SHERRILL. I have deep reservations that the damage this administration has done to our critical alliances, particularly NATO, will have consequences that impact our security interests well outside of Europe. The premise of our efforts to train and equip local forces to combat terrorism is that they will be step up as we step

back. This requires both regional partnership and continued support from our NATO allies in these vital missions.

Please describe how our NATO allies are contributing to counterterrorism efforts in the AFRICOM area of responsibility, and what more can we ask of them, particularly in places where we are looking to reduce the U.S. military footprint.

General WALDHAUSER. USAFRICOM works with NATO, the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), and other Partner Nations to advance U.S. national security interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity. Protection of the NATO southern flank is a key concern for the Alliance, and any expanded NATO presence on the continent is driven by its member nations. Currently, 22 of the 29 NATO Allies are in the EU, and the EU provides close to 3,000 security forces in Mali, Central African Republic, and Somalia. EU forces also conduct counter-piracy off the Horn of Africa and counter-trafficking and migration efforts in the Mediterranean through executive operations and training missions. NATO is pursuing CT-focused engagements with the AU, namely the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism. NATO held initial discussions with EU advisors to the G5 Sahel to identifying areas where NATO can contribute personnel and expertise.

More broadly, NATO is developing a comprehensive understanding of the situation in the Middle East-North Africa region through political engagement and consultation with individual partner countries, as well as with regional organizations. Under the Mediterranean Dialogue, established by the North Atlantic Council in 1994, which includes Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, NATO hosts thematic meetings, seminars, and workshops on issues of shared interest. Also, NATO is in the process of finalizing a Defense Capacity Building (DCB) package for Tunisia to provide support to the Tunisian authorities in seven priority areas of cooperation: development of special operations forces; force preparation; intelligence capability; chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) defense; cyber defense; counter-Improvised Explosive Devices; and integrity development.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. WALTZ

Mr. WALTZ. What is the status of the search for Jeffrey Woodke and what assets have been dedicated to looking for him?

General WALDHAUSER. USAFRICOM continues to coordinate with USAFRICOM Components, other U.S. Government Agencies and Partner Nations to determine the location of American Citizen, Jeffery R. Woodke. Mr. Woodke is an American humanitarian worker who was kidnapped in October of 2016 in Abalak, Niger. The U.S. Government is aware both terrorist and criminal elements operating in the Northern Sahel regions of Africa are currently holding several other Western Hostages, to include citizens of France, Colombia, Romania, Switzerland, and Australia. These terrorist and criminal groups are assessed to present a grave threat to both regional stability and to the physical safety of Americans and westerners transiting the region.

The Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell (HRFC) is coordinating interagency efforts to safely recover Mr. Woodke. Interagency intelligence analysts are vetting information and U.S. Government agencies are following up on all leads, while the HRFC continues to access diplomatic efforts in collaboration with foreign partners. These efforts represent a whole of government approach to recovering Mr. Woodke and mitigating the threat of future hostage takings to Americans in the region. Additionally, HRFC's Family Engagement Team is in routine communication with Mr. Woodke's family. As a caveat, Mr. Woodke's family has consistently indicated their desires to avoid discussing or highlighting our combined efforts in the public domain over concerns for his safety. Mr. Woodke's family has expressed appreciation when we have avoided discussing the ongoing recovery efforts in public testimony.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. HAALAND

Ms. HAALAND. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), in coordination with the Afghan Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior, developed an ombudsman program to enable external reporting, oversight, and victim support for MoD and MoI female employees. As of December of last year, The ombudsman program, although developed and planned, has yet to be funded and implemented. Is that still the case? What steps are being taken toward implementation? What is standing in the way of implementation?

General VOTEL. The program referenced is an internal GIRoA program that is not part of U.S. Central Command's Train, Advise, and Assist (TAA) efforts and it is not funded by Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF). The program is being worked by GIRoA MoD and MoI Gender Integration Offices, MoD Gender Director, MoI Director of Human Rights, Women's Affairs and Children. To date, they have implemented and hosted seminars discussing topics on gender integration to include female participation, employment, and career progression in the Afghan National Defense Security Force (ANDSF). There are steps being taken by GIRoA MoD and MoI Gender Integration Offices to develop policies and processes to prevent and report sexual harassment and assault as part of the United Nations General Assembly resolution 48/134. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission received approximately \$5.5M from donors in 2017. The United Kingdom alone provided \$124K specifically for the Ombudsman program.

