

**HEARING TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATIONS
OF GENERAL LLOYD J. AUSTIN III, USA,
FOR REAPPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE OF
GENERAL AND TO BE COMMANDER, U.S.
CENTRAL COMMAND; AND GENERAL DAVID
M. RODRIGUEZ, USA, FOR REAPPOINTMENT
TO THE GRADE OF GENERAL AND TO BE
COMMANDER, U.S. AFRICA COMMAND**

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2013

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:05 a.m. in room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator Carl Levin (chairman) presiding.

Members Present: Senators Levin, Reed, Nelson, Hagan, Blumenthal, Donnelly, Kaine, Inhofe, McCain, Chambliss, Ayotte, Fischer, and Graham.

Committee staff member present: Leah C. Brewer, nominations and hearings clerk.

Majority staff members present: Creighton Greene, professional staff member; Michael J. Kuiken, professional staff member; Gerald J. Leeling, counsel; Peter K. Levine, general counsel; William G.P. Monahan, counsel; Michael J. Noblet, professional staff member; and William K. Sutey, professional staff member.

Minority staff members present: John A. Bonsell, Minority Staff Director, Adam J. Barker, professional staff member; Steven M. Barney, Minority Counsel, Christian D. Brose, professional staff member; Thomas W. Goffus, professional staff member; and Anthony J. Lazarski, professional staff member.

Staff assistants present: Kathleen A. Kulenkampff, Mariah K. McNamara, and Lauren M. Gillis.

Committee members' assistants present: Carolyn Chuhta, assistant to Senator Reed; Jeff Fatora, assistant to Senator Nelson; Christopher Cannon, assistant to Senator Hagan; Marta McLellan Ross, assistant to Senator Donnelly; Karen Courington and Mary Naylor, assistants to Senator Kaine; Lenwood Landrum, assistant to Senator Sessions; Todd Harmer, assistant to Senator Chambliss; Brad Bowman, assistant to Senator Ayotte; Peter Schirtzinger, assistant to Senator Fischer; and Craig Abele and Matthew Rimkunas, assistants to Senator Graham.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CARL LEVIN, CHAIRMAN

Chairman LEVIN. Good morning, everybody, and welcome.

This morning, the committee considers the nominations of two very distinguished officers to two of the most active and challenging combatant commands: General Lloyd Austin, United States Army, nominated to be Commander, U.S. Central Command, and General David Rodriguez, U.S. Army, to be—nominated to be Commander of the U.S. Africa Command.

These two combatant commands, CENTCOM and AFRICOM, are the centers of gravity for our military's operations to counter the threat of terrorism. Both nominees have served the—served our country with distinction, and I want to thank each of you for your decades of military service and your willingness to serve, once again.

I understand that General Austin's wife, Charlene, and General Rodriguez's wife, Ginny, are with us this morning, and I want to acknowledge them. I want to thank them for their sacrifices, their support to our nominees throughout the years, which is so essential to the success of our nominees. And, as is the committee's tradition, our nominees are invited to introduce any family members or friends who may be with them this morning, with their opening remarks.

If confirmed, General Austin will assume command of CENTCOM during a critical transition period for our military operations in Afghanistan. In the coming months, Afghan forces will assume the lead responsibility for providing security throughout their country, with Coalition Forces stepping back to a support role. And on Tuesday, President Obama announced, during the State of the Union Address, plans for drawing down half of the 66,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan this year, a 34,000-troop reduction by February 2014.

The President continues to consider options for a significantly reduced U.S. military presence in Afghanistan after the end of 2014, which will depend on many things, but, in part, on negotiations with the Government of Afghanistan over legal protections for our troops. The President has made clear that the missions of any residual U.S. military presence in Afghanistan after 2014 will be limited to counterterrorism operations, and training and advising Afghan forces.

General Austin would bring exceptional experience to overseeing this transition, having commanded U.S. forces in Iraq during the reduction of U.S. forces and equipment from Iraq.

Just this past weekend, our forces in Afghanistan have had a change of command, with General Joseph Dunford replacing General John Allen as Commander of the International Security Assistance Forces and Commander U.S. Forces-Afghanistan.

I want to take this opportunity to thank General Allen for his thoughtful and devoted leadership in Afghanistan, for his forthrightness in his interactions with me and the rest of the members of this committee.

When Senator Reed and I visited Afghanistan in January, we saw real signs of progress, including the Afghan security forces increasingly taking the lead responsibility for protecting their country. Good-news stories about Afghanistan and the Afghan security

forces don't seem to get the coverage in the U.S. media that is given to negative stories. For example, it was widely reported that only—it was widely reported that only 1 of 23 Afghan brigades is rated by ISAF as independent. On the other hand, we heard, from our commanders in Afghanistan, that 87 percent of operations in Afghanistan's critical Regional Command East are carried out solely by Afghan security forces.

Another mainly success story is now the 18,000-strong Afghan Local Police Program. These community defense forces, when coordinated with district-level Afghan national police and Afghan army forces, are more and more effective in empowering Afghan communities to defend against Taliban intimidation and violence. Plans are being developed to increase the authorized size of the ALP program from 30,000 to 45,000.

The next CENTCOM commander will also play an important role in shaping our enduring partnership with Afghanistan after 2014, a partnership that I fully support. I am concerned, however, by plans to reduce the Afghan National Security Forces by a third, starting in 2015, from 352,000 to 230,000 by 2017. I believe that any future reductions in the size of the Afghan forces should be based on security conditions in Afghanistan at that time. And, as Afghan security forces make progress in providing for their country's security, we should reassure them that we will continue to support these efforts by deciding that, as we withdraw our forces, that there won't be a drawdown in Afghan forces.

Progress in Afghanistan remains fragile. Significant challenges to Afghanistan's long-term stability remain. Among the greatest threats to stability are the safe havens for Afghan insurgents across the Pakistan border, which the Government of Pakistan has failed to disrupt or eliminate. In addition, the major shortcomings of the Government of Afghanistan in delivering governance and fighting corruption creates political and economic instability that could exacerbate the challenges to the 2014 transition.

In addition to Afghanistan, CENTCOM must contend with one of the most significant issues in our current national security debate: the threat posed by Iran and its continued pursuit of its nuclear program. As the CENTCOM commander, General Austin will be at the tip of the spear with regard to preparing, militarily, for the potential of an armed conflict with Iran. I share the President's view that all options must remain on the table with respect to Iran.

Iran's hand can be seen throughout the region, including its relentless pursuit of instability and fomenting of violence through proxies, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, and through its own covert activities in the region. Already, destabilizing events in Syria, Yemen, Gaza, Egypt, Iraq, and Sudan are made worse by Iran's funding and supply of terrorist organizations seeking to undermine governments and to spark further conflict among sectarian and tribal groups. CENTCOM has a critical role to play in leading efforts across the region to counter Iran's malign influence. Events in Syria continue to deteriorate. The impact of the Assad regime's increasing dependence on support from Iran, and desperate actions to hold onto power, can be seen in the thousands of refugees that flow into the towns and villages of Syria's neighbors. While the United States is focused on providing humanitarian relief and non-

lethal assistance to the Syrian opposition, the CENTCOM commander will be asked to advise on the situation in Syria, including whether to provide lethal assistance to the opposition, whether the United States should conduct limited strikes against key Syrian military capabilities, and whether the United States should seek to build a coalition of nations to take more significant military action. These are extraordinarily complex issues that General Austin will be asked to share his views on today.

CENTCOM's area of responsibility remains the central location of many of the nonstate terrorist threats that our Nation faces. In addition to core al Qaeda in Pakistan and the reemergence of al Qaeda in Iraq, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula remains focused on attacking the United States and our interests. Our CENTCOM forces continue to assist our Yemeni security partners in preventing al Qaeda from taking advantage of areas in Yemen, where the government has limited control. The events in Benghazi were a poignant and powerful reminder of our need and public expectations for a capable—capability to respond quickly to crises around the world. This is one of the major evolving situations that General Rodriguez is going to have to address, and will consume a great deal of his time. But, it's far from limited to Benghazi and to Libya. We have struggled, in Africa, to find footholds to allow for responses to the type of events that occurred in Benghazi or to allow us to conduct day-to-day operations, like intelligence collection. AFRICOM has received less, in the way of resources and support, than other geographic commands, and this disparity, indeed, may grow in a resource-constrained environment. These challenges, combined with destabilizing impacts of terrorist and criminal networks, will make General Rodriguez's task at AFRICOM among the most complicated in the Department.

An additional matter in the AFRICOM AOR that this committee watches closely is the ongoing U.S. support operations in Central Africa to assist the multinational effort to remove Joseph Kony and his top lieutenants from the battlefield. This committee—and General Inhofe has been very, very active in this effort—has sought to ensure that this mission is adequately resourced, including additional intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities.

General Rodriguez, I know that you're familiar with this mission, and the committee looks forward to hearing from you about it, and to working with you on it and so many of the other challenges that you will be facing.

I'm going to turn the gavel over to Senator Kaine, who has agreed to take over, because I must go to the floor.

And I now call upon Senator Inhofe.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JAMES M. INHOFE

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I join you in welcoming our witnesses. I've had an opportunity to get to know them in the past, and visit with them personally, and I'm very anxious to move on with this.

And I thank Charlene and Ginny for being here. You're the guys who work harder than they do, so we appreciate all your sacrifices. When you're confirmed, or if confirmed, as we should say, General Austin, you're going to be in charge of overseeing, arguably, the

most volatile region of the world, and in the midst of a declining a Defense budget. Just last week, Secretary Panetta announced the indefinite delay of the Truman Carrier Strike Group deployment in the Middle East, a development that was undoubtedly welcomed by the regime in Tehran. In Egypt, despite the—all the best hopes of the Arab Spring, President Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood government have shown a troubling hostility towards the opposition groups, and the minorities, and have taken an increasing belligerent tone toward our ally, Israel. And these developments require us to think long and hard over what assets we're going to be sharing with them, the controversial F-16 transfers, and—and, frankly, I didn't agree with that. But, it's a tough area, and I think, if you look through that area—and, General Austin, you have Iran, we know, that maintains a—determined to acquire nuclear weapons capability. But, it's been going on for a long time. We've found that our intelligence has really been behind the curve on their capability of what they've developed so far. It's serious. It's a big step, over there.

In Iraq, our premature withdrawal has directly contributed to a deteriorating security situation, and allowed al Qaeda to reestablish a foothold in Syria. Assad's reign of brutality has now claimed the lives of over 60,000 Syrians, and risks spilling into neighboring countries.

Pakistan, we see a nuclear-armed government teetering on collapse, while militant groups, such as—well, all the military groups have—they've enjoyed that as a safe haven.

Afghanistan, you'll oversee our operation and manage the transition of combat responsibilities to the Afghan security forces. And, without doubt, we've got to make sure that the force structure matches the mission and is driven by the facts on the ground, and not arbitrary dates. We've talked about this in my office. General Rodriguez, you and I have spoken about the squeeze in the Middle East. And I've often said that it's kind of the neglected continent. I was somewhat instrumental when we had—when we established AFRICOM; and so, it was no longer in three different commands, but in one unified command. And it's a tough area. It's a tough area that has never had adequate resources to carry out—what I consider adequately carrying out the mission. Certainly, the Chairman mentioned the problem with the LRA, and with—and that is a problem, and it's one that is not just confined to a few people that started in northern Uganda; now has spread throughout eastern Congo and on up through the CAR. And south Sudan, I might add.

But, it's connected. It's all terrorism, and it's all connected together, and it's—it is a serious problem that we are going to have to deal with. It's the smallest of the DOD's regionally focused combatant commands, with less than 5,000 boots on the continent. And that's a huge continent. So, it's—your work is cut out for you; we've talked about that, you and I, in our office, in somewhat detail.

So, while the challenges you will both face are very daunting, I'm confident that the two of you are up to the task. But, it's going to be heavy lifting.

As I said to you, General Austin, in my office, Are you sure you want to do this? And you said yes.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Senator Kaine [presiding]: Thank you, Mr. Ranking Member.

General Austin, General Rodriguez, we're ready to hear your opening statements and testimony. Again, we appreciate you being here, and your service.

And we'll begin with General Austin, and General Rodriguez to follow.

STATEMENT OF GENERAL LLOYD J. AUSTIN III, USA, NOMINEE FOR REAPPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE OF GENERAL AND TO BE COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND

General AUSTIN. Good morning, sir, Senator McCain, Ranking Member Inhofe, distinguished members of the committee.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today. And I also want to thank you for the steadfast and strong support that you have shown, and continue to show, to our men and women in uniform, our Army civilians, and their families. It is remarkable, all that they have accomplished over the past nearly 12 years of war. And it was made possible, in no small part, through your personal efforts, and those of your colleagues. So, my thanks to all of you.

I'd like to take a moment to introduce my wife, Charlene. I've been incredibly fortunate to have her as my partner for more than 30 years. And she represents the many wonderful spouses, who are the true unsung heroes of these conflicts, as they've supported us back home, and, in doing so, enabled our success.

So, my thanks to you, Charlene, for your love and support, and for your many sacrifices. And Happy Valentine's Day. [Laughter.]

I'm glad, today, to be joined by my teammate, General David Rodriguez. And he, too, is accompanied by his bride, Ginny, who, like Charlene, has done a tremendous amount for our soldiers and families over the years.

Dave and I have served together on a number—a number of times over the years, to include in combat. He is a gifted leader and a decorated soldier, and I'm pleased that he's been nominated to command U.S. Africa Command.

Ladies and gentlemen, it has been a tremendous privilege for me to serve my country in uniform for nearly four decades, and I am grateful to be able to continue to serve. I am honored and humbled to have been nominated by the President to serve as a commander of U.S. Central Command. And, if confirmed, I pledge that I will apply all of my experiences and judgment, to the best of my abilities, to help preserve and advance our Nation's interests in that region of the world.

General Mattis has led Central Command masterfully over these past 2 and a half years. Our Nation owes him a debt of gratitude. And the impact of his leadership and the efforts of his team during this decisive period have been tremendous. And, if confirmed, I intend to sustain and continue this important work; for the reality is that, while much progress has been made in the CENTCOM area of responsibility, there is still a great deal more to be done. And our National interests, and those of our allies and friends, demand vigilance as well as our continued commitment to do do our part to help address the many challenges that exist, and to achieve and

maintain security and stability throughout the Middle East in South and Central Asia.

Of course, our foremost priority remains the ongoing mission in Afghanistan. And soon, we will be required to complete the transfer of responsibilities to the Afghans, and also transition our people and equipment out of that country, just as we did in 2010 and 2011, when I served there—just as we did in Iraq in 2010 and 2011, when I served there as the commander of U.S. Forces Iraq. This represents a herculean undertaking, and, if confirmed, I will do everything within my power to help set the broader conditions for our success in this most important endeavor.

Meanwhile, one must simply watch the evening news to understand that the world we live in remains complex and extremely volatile. And much of the instability and associated challenges reside in the CENTCOM area of responsibility. And, while we have to be pragmatic, we must always be prepared to respond to contingencies, whenever and wherever they occur around the world. And if we truly want to have an effective and lasting impact in the region, our friends and allies must be assured of our support, and our potential adversaries must understand that there will be consequences for their actions.

And, as this past decade of conflict has clearly demonstrated, success in our many endeavors will require effective application of the full continuum of our Nation's instruments of power and influence, military as well as economic and diplomatic. And having worked closely with senior military and civilian officials from the various U.S. agencies and organizations, and also having worked closely with leaders from other countries and partner nations while serving in Iraq as a commander of U.S. forces, I can personally attest to the effectiveness of these kind of collaborations. And, if confirmed, I will continue to cultivate my existing relationships while pursuing additional opportunities and partnerships that will surely prove beneficial to our efforts.

Senator McCain, Senator Inhofe, and members of the committee, these are historic times and difficult times. However, amidst the many challenges that exist reside opportunities, and certainly the shared desire of people to see peace and harmony and prosperity achieved, and even in those places that have never before experienced them. I fully appreciate that the work ahead will be great, and the road will not be easy, but, if confirmed, I pledge to give all that I have towards ensuring our success, and the success of our allies and friends around the world, in this most worthy endeavor.

Thank you again for this opportunity and for your steadfast support for our service men and women and their families. And I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Austin follows:]

Senator KAINE. Thank you, General Austin.

General Rodriguez.

STATEMENT OF GENERAL DAVID M. RODRIGUEZ, USA, NOMINEE FOR REAPPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE OF GENERAL AND TO BE COMMANDER, U.S. AFRICA COMMAND

General RODRIGUEZ. Senator Kaine, Senator Inhofe, distinguished members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I am honored the President has nominated me to serve as the next commander of U.S. Africa Command. And, if confirmed, I'll look forward to working closely with this committee, as well as all our joint and interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational partners, to address the challenges we face and the opportunities to increase stability on this strategically important continent. Strong partnerships are key to gaining and maintaining stability in the 54 nations of Africa.

I would also like to thank this committee for the sustained support it has provided to our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, coastguardsmen, and Department of Defense civilians, and their families, during this time of conflict. They all selflessly serve the Nation, at home and abroad, often in harm's way, but always ready to assume their share of the risk, and all are eternally grateful for the backing and support of the American people and Congress.

I want to acknowledge the tremendous effort of General Ham and his team at the United States Africa Command. His leadership helps sustain strong partnerships, providing the foundation for our continued engagement across the continent and globally. He has done a superb job, and I hope that, if confirmed, I can expand on the work he has done.

To General Lloyd Austin, exceptional soldier, leader, and a good friend, we have served together throughout peace and war in our careers, and have a significant number of deployments between us. And I'm honored to share this experience with both Lloyd and Charlene, and am certain that, if confirmed, Lloyd will continue his remarkable service to the Nation and our servicemembers.

I also want to thank my wife, Ginny, for her decades of service as an Army wife. Ginny has cared for, and looked after, soldiers and their families with energy, empathy, and understanding. She's also a wonderful mother to our children: Amy, a former Army officer and current student at the University of North Carolina; Melissa, a schoolteacher in North Carolina; David, who works with the Department of the Navy in Washington, DC; and Andrew, an infantry lieutenant in the Army.

I thank the committee again for allowing me to appear before you today, and I look forward to your questions.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of General Rodriguez follows:]

Senator KAINE. Thank you, General Rodriguez.

Here's the procedure we will follow. I have a set of standard questions, that we ask all witnesses, that I will ask both of you to respond to. We'll then proceed to rounds of questions, alternating between representatives of the two parties; and the rounds of questions will be 7 minutes long. And then, if there are additional questions, in the second round, that members want to ask, we'll proceed in that way.

Well, let me begin with the standard questions that we ask the witnesses. And these are to help us exercise legislative and oversight responsibilities.

Have you adhered to applicable laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest?

[Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

Senator KAINE. Do you agree, when asked, to give your personal views, even if those views differ from the administration in power?

[Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

Senator KAINE. Have you assumed any duties or undertaken any actions which would appear to presume the outcome of this confirmation process?

[Both witnesses answered in the negative.]

Senator KAINE. Will you ensure that your staff complies with deadlines established for requested communications, including questions for the record in hearings?

[Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

Senator KAINE. Will you cooperate in providing witnesses and briefers in response to congressional requests?

[Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

Senator KAINE. Will those witnesses be protected from reprisal from their testimony in any such briefing?

[Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

Senator KAINE. Do you agree, if confirmed, to appear and testify, upon request, before this committee?

[Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

Senator KAINE. Do you agree to provide documents, including copies of electronic communications, in a timely manner when requested by a duly-constituted committee, or to consult with committee regarding the basis for any good-faith delay or denial in providing such documents?

[Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

Senator KAINE. With that, we will move to the questions, and I will begin with Senator Donnelly.

Senator DONNELLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank you, General Austin, General Rodriguez, for your service to the Nation, and to your families, for everything you have done. And you may want to take them, for a Valentine's Day lunch, to the Senate Cafeteria. And then, you may not. [Laughter.]

General Austin, as we heard the President say, the other night, he is looking to withdraw 34,000 troops from Afghanistan. And my question is, Can that be done in a way that does not leave Afghanistan less stable?

General AUSTIN. Thank you, sir.

Whereas, I was not a part of the process that helped to generate the proposals for the numbers of troops to be drawn down, and the rate at which they should be drawn down, I can tell you that, from having been a part of that process before, the things that the types of—the types of things that commanders consider, going into those recommendations, really account for whether or not they can accomplish the assigned objectives and missions. And so, I would assume that General Allen and General Mattis, as they went through that process, provided their best military advice. And I would as-

sume that to be the case. But, having not been a part of that, I cannot speculate as to whether or not—

Senator DONNELLY. How quickly will you become a part of that, and taking a look at that and making that determination.

General AUSTIN. If confirmed, sir, I will get into that right away and confer with General Dunford and the Chairman, and make sure that, you know, I have full understanding of the objectives, the missions, and the resources that have been provided to accomplish those objectives.

Senator DONNELLY. And you will give us your unvarnished opinion as to the plan, how it works, and whether it will meet your strategic objectives as you look at the situation that we're in.

General AUSTIN. I will, sir, and the objectives that are outlined by the senior leadership, that have been provided to us.

Senator DONNELLY. Thank you.

General Rodriguez, as we look at your mission, one of the things that strikes me is—and, of course, in CENTCOM, too—but, how important it's going to be to build up our partners there so that they can be self-sustaining in protecting their own nation. How critical a focus is that going to be for you as you move into this position?

General RODRIGUEZ. Thank you, Senator. That's a critical focus, because, obviously, what—the objective is to have Africans provide security and stability for themselves. So, there are a wide range of tools that we have to do that, and that will be a main focus of—

Senator DONNELLY. It seems that's—that that could be the key to success, is being in a position where the training we provide enables them to stand up on their own. In—

General Austin, as we look at the region that you will be commanding, one of the—one of the challenges has always been Pakistan, and our working relationships with Pakistan. As we go through the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, both men and women and equipment, do we have—and again, you mentioned that you had not yet been fully involved on that plan—but, I would think one of the things we want to do is continue to work closely with Pakistan on that plan, but also have alternative options, if there are bumps in the road, as we proceed forward with orders and with other things. Are you going to be looking at that as part of what you look at when you take a look—when you get the plan in your hands?

General AUSTIN. Absolutely, sir. I think our relationship with Pakistan is critical. It's—it is a key country in the region. And my goal would be to immediately work to continue to build upon the existing relationship, which is on—on somewhat of a positive slope right now, a positive path. And I want to continue to build on that. They—again, they will be key throughout—going into the future, sir.

Senator DONNELLY. And, General Rodriguez, as we look at your region, we just saw an extraordinarily tragic situation in Benghazi. And when we look at the countries there, and we look at the challenges that those nations already have in protecting themselves—and we often depend on home-nation security for our own consulates and embassies, as well—as you look at that, will you be making, for want of a better way to put it, like, a time-and-distance

study—How fast can we get to our consulate? Where is the closest location we have to that consulate?—so that we have—that you have a plan that can make sure, if our consulates are in danger, we will be there to protect them?

General RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Senator, if confirmed, I'll do a thorough study of time, distance, as well as capabilities, spread throughout the region, who can respond in a timely manner and ensure that the Department of State is informed so, together, we can make good decisions on how to best support our Americans, worldwide, and especially in the African continent.

Senator DONNELLY. Thank you.

And, General Austin, as we transition from Afghanistan, the military gains in security that we have achieved—with all your experience in Iraq, with the transition there—I think one of the biggest challenges is, As the military leaves, how do we make sure that some of the gains in, not just military, but in state functions in Afghanistan, that we're able to hold onto them? And so, what experiences that you took away from Iraq can help with that in Afghanistan as we move forward.

General AUSTIN. Well, certainly, sir, I think our embassy will remain engaged and continue to work with the Afghan leadership, to help them build capacity and work with issues on their political system. But, I think having a competent security force builds the—helps to create the time and space for an immature political system to mature. And we would hope that, you know, we would have the opportunity for that to develop, the Afghans would make the right choices, going into the future. And certainly, having advisors around to help advise the military also helps to influence the rest of the environment, as well. So, I think the activity between the embassy staff and what our military is able to do, and keeping the Afghan security forces focused, I think that creates some time and space for the political system to mature a bit.

Senator DONNELLY. General Rodriguez, General Austin, thank you so much for your service. You and your family have dedicated your life to our country, and we're incredibly grateful to you.

Thank you.

General RODRIGUEZ. Thank you, Senator.

Senator KAINE. Ranking Member, Senator Inhofe.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Well, I agree with the remarks by the Senator, on your service and the time, and the fact that I've had the opportunity to be with you in the field and at various times. I remember—let's see, I guess, General Rodriguez, we spent some New Year's Eves together over there; and so, we got to know each other pretty well.

Anyway, as I said in my opening statement, you guys have some really serious problems that you're facing over there.

Let's start off on AFRICOM, because that's something I was perhaps a little more familiar with.

One of the problems is—and we all go through this, and you guys are not immune from it, like crew rest. And when you're trying to get to places, and you're in Stuttgart, and you have 54 countries and over 12 million square miles—to adequately support AFRICOM—I'm going to ask you a question, in a minute, about the resources—but, just, in terms of time and distance, have you

thought about how you're going to handle that and—as you get a crisis in sub-Sahara Africa, you're going to have a hard time getting there. What do you think about that location?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir. I think that's going to require a solid coordination between all the interagency partners so that we can best understand indicational warnings, prior to those happen, so we can best posture ourself to be able to respond appropriately. But, as you know, because of the time, the distance, and the basing challenges that we have, that's going to continue to be a challenge. So, we just—I will, if confirmed, look at that very carefully, put some requirements to the leadership, and then ensure that everybody understands the risk that's involved in what our Americans throughout the——

Senator INHOFE. Yes, it's something you have no control over. I mean, it's going to—that's where it is right now. Frankly, when we started AFRICOM, I was pushing very hard for Ethiopia, or someplace, for headquarters in Africa. As you know, the problem there is the reputation of our involvement in Africa, it being misinterpreted as a colonialism type of an approach. But, I have to say this, every President that I talk to, including Kikwete, in Tanzania, they all have said, "We recognize that would be easier, but there's no way that we can sell it to the people." So, that's going to be there.

The reason I bring this up—there is always a lot of people here in the United States, members, our good friends in the Senate, who would like to move that headquarters stateside. And I would just—I think that it's the best we can do right now, in Stuttgart, and I think you would have—you would agree that it would be very difficult to move that headquarters and operate.

What do you think about the—you know, talked about this—have you had time to look and see, in terms of resources—as I said in my opening statement, we have 5,000 boots on the ground; that's not much for an area like that—do you have any comments, going in, right now, as to how you're being resourced, particularly at a time that—with the drawdowns that we're talking about at the current time?

General RODRIGUEZ. You know, Senator, thank you. As you know, that—the challenges across the depth and breadth of Africa that we're facing, with the resource constraints that we're all living under will be a challenge. And again, I'd—we just have to make great assessments of where we're going to accept risk, to ensure everybody knows and understands that. And then, the coordination in—between the interagency partners will be critical as we move forward.

And we have—we all, as commanders, have to help our leadership assess the risk throughout the COCOMs. And I will—if confirmed, I'll execute that, to the best of my ability.

Senator INHOFE. Well, we have a lot of things that—the Chairman, in his opening remarks, talked about the LRA and Joseph Kony. People are now aware of that. There was a time when they weren't, when you first got involved over there. And my question is, if we're successful, in our operation, in helping them take out Joseph Kony, would you continue there, and recognize the Kony and the LRA as part of a terrorist group that go far beyond what—originally, it was just northern Uganda, then spread up to south

Sudan and down into eastern Congo—that it is widespread, and it is a serious problem? I'd like to get your commitment to stay involved in that, and recognize it for the problem that it is.

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir. If confirmed, I commit to you that I will continue to watch Kony and the LRA, and the entire negative impact it has on the—

Senator INHOFE. Yes, and—

General RODRIGUEZ.—region, as a whole.

Senator INHOFE.—and there are so many other areas that people are not really aware of right now, but with this—the—one of the things that I would like to—I wasn't going to dwell on this, this long, but—we made a good decision, back, right after September 11, when we decided, as a policy for this country, that we were going to recognize Africa as the place—as the squeeze takes place in the Middle East, and the terrorism goes down through Djibouti and the Horn of Africa—that we were—our idea was to put in five African brigades—to help them, not us—but, to help train the Africans, who are very receptive to the idea, so that when that happened down there, we wouldn't have to use ours. That—it's kind of been floundering. I'd like to ask you to make those five African brigades a top priority during the time that you—that you're spending down there.

General RODRIGUEZ. Will do, Senator.

Senator INHOFE. That's good.

General Austin, as I said a minute ago, and as I told you in my office, Are you sure you want this job? It's a tough area there. And I would just like to ask you, in just whatever time it takes, to kind of look at the sequestration and how that's going to affect you in that critical region that I outlined, area by area, in my opening statement.

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir. I believe that sequestration will have enormously negative effects on our—the services' ability to resource our efforts. And what will happen is that—you know, we're all committed to—all the Services are committed to supporting the current fight, and—which is what we should be doing. But—and, over time, the follow-on deployers will be—will be less ready. And so, our ability to respond to emerging contingencies in the region—we'll have less of an ability to do that. We'll have less flexibility and fewer options, because of some of the pressure—now, with pressure on the budget.

Senator INHOFE. You mentioned four areas, and you called them “four principal levers,” the last time you were here before this committee. They were mil-to-mil engagements, plans and operations, security cooperation programs, and posture and presence. Of those four, what are going to be impacted the most by sequestration, should it become a reality?

General AUSTIN. Well, certainly our presence and our posture in the region will be impacted. And we—we're seeing that, the leading edge of that, with the delay of the—the deployment of the carrier. And again, that begins to take away some of the flexibility and the options available.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you very much.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KAINE. Thank you.

As a schedule accommodation, I'm switching my time spot with Senator Nelson, and his questions will be next.

Senator Nelson.

Senator NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And the delay of the deployment of that carrier—which otherwise would go to the Persian Gulf region?

General AUSTIN. That would be a part of its responsibilities as it completes its tour. That—yes, sir.

Senator NELSON. Well, I asked that question because, of course, one of the continuing high-visibility questions is what's going to happen in Iran. And if Iran were to continue with the development of a nuclear weapon, we would need all the military assets that we could muster. And the General has just pointed out that a sequester is going to keep that carrier in port, which is not a good thing, because if we ever got into it in Iran, or if Iran ever started their own aggressive action by mining the Strait of Hormuz, we would need all of our Navy assets that we could bring to bear. That's a fair statement, isn't it, General?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir. And General Mattis has laid out what his requirements are. And so, those requirements have been vetted and approved. And again, if he doesn't get the full complement, then he'll have to do some things to mitigate that.

Senator NELSON. General, what do you see will be the remaining force when we are withdrawing, in 2014, from Afghanistan?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I believe that those decisions are still being made by the leadership, with the input of General Dunford and General Mattis. And I don't know what—I'm not a part of that process—I don't know what the objectives are that the leadership will want to accomplish. And that really drives what the force structure should look like, going forward.

So, having been a commander in the field, where, you know, I was working hard to—with the leadership, to define options, and I found it very unhelpful when somebody, who wasn't a part of the process, speculated on what the troop strength should be.

Senator NELSON. In your experience, where you have worked with the indigenous forces and the leadership of a country like Afghanistan, can you give us your observations of the progress of that society, over the course of the last few years, and their ability to—basically, what I'm getting at is, Have the Afghani people progressed to the point that it's going to be very hard for the Taliban to take over, once we leave, and take them back to that feudal society that they were? What's your observation?

General AUSTIN. Sir, my observations are—first of all, I think that two of the key elements that—or three key elements—that kind of go into this equation, as to whether or not things will remain on track or not, are, number one, Do we have a credible security force to help guard against the challenges that will no doubt come in the future? We've worked hard with the Afghans to build a security force of 352,000, in a relatively short period of time, and it's still growing—still evolving in capability.

The second thing is that I think the political processes have to mature. And I think, you know, the people have to have—begin to have faith in the—in their leadership, and the leadership has to—you know, has to be inclusive, has to reach out to the people, and

they've got to provide, you know, a good governing mechanism for the country. And that is critical.

I think the security forces can provide the space for that to develop. It's going to take some time.

And then, the third piece of this is the corruption that has—you know, we've seen in the country, over time—really have to get control over that and begin to move that in the right direction.

And I think, when those things happen—and certainly, they're capable of happening—then—or working together—then I think, you know, things will continue to move in the right direction.

Senator NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Senator.

Senator McCain.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, witnesses and their wonderful wives, for their service to our country. And we're very proud to have your serving in such positions of responsibility.

General Austin and General Rodriguez—General Rodriguez, you recently served in Afghanistan, as the commander of the International Joint Command within ISAF. I'll ask you both the same question.

The President has announced 34,000 troops, more than half our force currently serving in Afghanistan, will return home by the end of the year. Was this recommendation of the uniformed military via the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs? Was this a recommendation of the military?

General AUSTIN. Senator, I don't know what the specific recommendation was. As I understand it, the——

Senator MCCAIN. No one has told you or General Rodriguez what the recommendation of the military was.

General AUSTIN. No, sir, I was not a part of that process. I know they——

Senator MCCAIN. So, you are excluded from knowing what the recommendation of the military was.

General AUSTIN. I was not——

Senator MCCAIN. Especially given the new responsibilities you have.

General AUSTIN. No, sir, I was not included in that process.

Senator MCCAIN. Did either of you recommend this option?

General RODRIGUEZ. No, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. In your best professional military advice, is the withdrawal of 34,000 troops this year in line with the conditions on the ground, as you saw them?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I defer to the commander—the current commander——

Senator MCCAIN. So, you really have no opinion whatsoever about whether we should withdraw 34,000, half our force, by the end of the year. Is that correct?

General AUSTIN. That—having not been a part of the process, sir, I don't think that I should offer an opinion on this, because I don't know everything that went into their calculus.

Senator MCCAIN. General Rodriguez, you feel the same way.

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. Even though you recently served there.

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir. I've been gone for 18 months, and things have changed tremendously. I can tell you that it's—I was a part of the change in the strategy when we put the surge forward there, that the concept of what we were looking to do, strategically, is continuing. But, as far as the specific situation in the country that warrants the—those decisions, I am not current in that area, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. So, you wouldn't have any guess as to how many forces you believe are necessary to achieve our goals. You wouldn't have any. Whew.

General AUSTIN, you were our commander in Iraq when the President decided to end negotiations with Iraqis and withdraw all U.S. troops by the end of 2011. Do you think that Iraq is more stable today than it was a year ago?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I'm certainly troubled by some of the things that—

Senator MCCAIN. Do you believe Iraq, today, is more stable than it was a year ago?

General AUSTIN. I think it's—the stability has held, sir. I think it's being—it's fragile, and it's trending towards being more problematic, as we watch what's happening with the Kurd-Arab relationships, with the Sunni—recent Sunni protests. And I think a lot of that's brought on by a failure to—for the—failure to solve some political issues.

Senator MCCAIN. So, whether we had troops there—a residual force there, or not, wouldn't have mattered?

General AUSTIN. I think that, certainly—if we could have continued to advise and assist the Iraqis, I think, certainly, it would have made them—continued to make them better.

Senator MCCAIN. And you were present in the room when Senator Graham and I asked you, after Maliki asked us, what level of troops would we, the United States, want to remain there in order to maintain that stability. And do you remember your answer? You said, "We're still working on that." Do you remember that?

General AUSTIN. Sir.

Senator MCCAIN. How long did they work on that, General Austin?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I think we worked with the Iraqi leadership all the way up until the point in time when they decided that they weren't going to be able to give us the protections that we needed to keep our troops there.

Senator MCCAIN. Because, of course, it was down to 3,500. Isn't that correct?

General AUSTIN. There are—no decision had been made at that point in time, sir, because—

Senator MCCAIN. Wasn't our number back down to 3,500 troops left behind? Isn't that an accurate statement? It's written in Michael Gordon's book, and it's well—knowledge. Isn't that true? You were there.

General AUSTIN. I was, sir. And again, I presented a range of options—

Senator MCCAIN. But, don't you know that the administration position was back down to 3,500? They didn't tell you that?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I was aware of what the number was. I don't recall, specifically, what the final option was, being considered.

Senator MCCAIN. You really don't remember, specifically, an important issue like this, that it wasn't 3,500?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I have—in that range of options—again, since we never closed, I've never—

Senator MCCAIN. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff testified that the number was down to 3,500. I'm—General Dempsey did, before this committee. And you didn't know that? Even though—

General AUSTIN. Sir—sir—

Senator MCCAIN.—though you were there?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I did know what the number was. And—

Senator MCCAIN. And it was 3,500.

General AUSTIN. It was a small number, yes, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. Whew. Which is why—and it's been well documented—these—the Iraqis decided that to try to obtain immunity of over 3,500 troops wasn't worth the effort. So, you believe Iraq is headed in a positive or negative direction?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I think—again, some of the things that we're seeing in Iraq are very troubling, with the Arab-Kurd tensions, with the Sunni protests. On the other hand—

Senator MCCAIN. Iranian aircraft overflying Iraq with arms for Bashar Assad, for the total estrangement between Barzani and Maliki, continued violence in Kirkuk and other areas along the border, a—the vice president of Iraqi having to flee the country because there's murder charges brought against him. Does that indicate to you that Iraq is headed in the right direction?

General AUSTIN. It does not, sir. It certainly—there are some things that are very troubling. There are also some things that I think indicate that, if they make the right decisions, they have a chance to move in the right direction. They're pumping 3.3 million barrels of oil a day; they've been challenged, several times, with—in terms of security, but the security forces have really held, and they're still loyal to the civilian leadership. They haven't fractured. And so, there are a couple of things in there that do indicate that, if they begin to make the right decisions politically, then I think they can—they have a chance of moving in the right direction. But, at this point, they've not made those decisions, and it is troubling.

Senator MCCAIN. Well, General, I—your predecessor, General Mattis, had a well-deserved reputation of speaking truth to power, and in testifying before this committee in a frank and honest opinion. We have our responsibilities. And our responsibilities can only be carried out if we have frank and honest—as you were just asked if you would do, at the beginning of the hearing—opinions. And I'm disappointed by your testimony today, that I have to draw these facts out from you, that you and I both know are facts. So, I hope the next time you're before this committee, that you will be more forthcoming in your answers. We deserve it. We have our responsibilities, as well as those that you will assume.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Blumenthal.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I want to join in thanking both of you for your extraordinarily distinguished career, and your families for their service and sacrifice, as well, and to wish you well in your new commands, the next chapter of your military careers.

General Austin, we had a very informative and important discussion yesterday on the subject of sexual assault, with a number of my colleagues, and a number of yours, and I would like to ask you and General Rodriguez for your commitment that you will pursue, as vigorously and aggressively as possible, the predatory crime, the vicious criminal offense of sexual assault and rape, wherever it occurs under your commands.

General AUSTIN. Sir, you have my commitment, I will do so.

General RODRIGUEZ. I will, sir.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Let me ask, by the way, Have each of you seen the documentary movie "Invisible War"?

General AUSTIN. I have seen it, sir.

General RODRIGUEZ. I have seen it, sir.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And will you make it your policy and practice that that movie, among other training aids, is seen by all of the commanders, at whatever level, under your command?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir. And, as you may know, sir, in the Army, we have encouraged our leadership to use that as a training tool.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. General Rodriguez?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir, that's correct.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Well, I'd like to ask you for more than just, you know, encouragement, but actually make it a matter of your general order, or whatever, however you want to implement within your command, that it be used as a training device.

General AUSTIN. Sir.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir, it's a requirement.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Let me ask you about—General Austin—focusing on Afghanistan. I recently had the privilege of traveling to Afghanistan with a number of my colleagues, including Senator McCain, who led the trip, and Senator Graham, Senator Ayotte, and others. And I want to focus, for the moment, on contracting, there.

We understand, from the special investigator in Afghanistan, that 43 contractors, in effect, are doing business with the enemy, but they have not been processed by the Army for suspension and debarment, partly because of obstacles—legal obstacles and others—now in the law of the United States; Section 841, in particular.

I'd like your personal commitment, as CENTCOM commander, that you will personally review these cases and use the authority you have to stop U.S. taxpayers' money from being funneled to the Taliban, and that you will help us—Senator Ayotte and I, in particular, are working on this issue—help us to strengthen the law.

General AUSTIN. Sir, you have my commitment.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. Very aptly, your prepared testimony mentions the importance of "unity of effort"—that's your

phrase, and I think it's a good one—on the battlefield. And I think it's equally important that we have that unity of effort in stopping American taxpayer money from, in effect, aiding the enemy in Afghanistan, where corruption has been, unfortunately, so rampant.

One of the areas where I think 841 can be applied more effectively is in USAID and State Department aid. And I'd like your commitment that you will help us, in effect, improve the law in that regard.

Thank you. I understand you have made that—that it's part of your commitment, that you will help us do that.

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Let me ask you now, General Austin, about Syria. As part of that trip, we visited the refugee camp in northern Jordan, at Zaatari. And, I must say, very powerful and moving experience, to see the conditions of the camp, the numbers of children, the challenges in providing education, healthcare, basic sanitary conditions. And I'd like your commitment that you will do everything possible to provide a drastic and dramatic increase in humanitarian aid to the refugees in Syria and elsewhere, besides Zaatari, but also in Jordan, where there are those refugee camps.

General AUSTIN. Sir, I'll do everything within my power to work with all the elements—the appropriate elements of the interagency to ensure that we're doing everything we can to support the refugees.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. And I think a number of us also were impressed by the herculean efforts being made by the King of Jordan, and by the Jordanian people, to aid those refugees. Just an extraordinary humanitarian effort. But also their commitment to aid in military assistance, the freedom fighters in Syria.

Let me ask you, Don't you think the United States can provide more training and technical assistance, at the very least—in terms of communications equipment, logistical aid—to the opposition forces in Syria?

General AUSTIN. Sir, not being in the seat yet, you know, I—my vantage point is that of many people on the outside looking in on this. I don't know the specifics, as many specifics as I'd like to know, about the opposition, and what is in the realm of the possibility—what's in the realm of the possible.

What I'd like to do is, if confirmed, I'd like to have the ability to go in and assess, to see, you know, what's possible. And, if there are things that are possible, you know, what options do we have? And so, I don't feel as if I can give you a very concrete and informed recommendation, at this point.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Well, I hope that you will share the sense of urgency that many of us feel about this situation and about the very dire predicament of many of those courageous fighters who are opposing the murderous and barbaric regime that the Assad government, if it still is a government, has become. And so, I would invite you—in fact, I'd urge you—to present to this committee your recommendation, as soon as possible, because I think we feel that sense of urgency, and I hope that more can be done, militarily, to deprive Assad of his superiority, where he has it, in the air, and

his forces on the ground that he is using, very simply, to slaughter the citizens of his own country.

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And my time is expired, but, again, my thanks to each of you for your extraordinary service in the past and in the future, and again, to your families.

Thank you.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Senator.

Senator AYOTTE.

Senator AYOTTE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank General Austin and General Rodriguez, and their families, for, absolutely, your extraordinary service to our country, and very much appreciate your being here.

I wanted to follow up to what Senator Blumenthal discussed on Section 841. We—as you recall, Senator Brown and I had worked on this no-contracting, or the enemy provision, that has given some authority to DOD to cut off our enemy funds. And I just want to join what Senator Blumenthal has said, that I look forward to working with him, and look forward to your commitment to make sure that we can give you all the tools that you need, including extending those tools to the State Department to cut off funds that go to our enemies. So, I appreciate your commitment on that, and look forward to working with Senator Blumenthal and both of you to make sure that happens.

General Austin, I wanted to ask you—when Senator Donnelly had asked you about—you mentioned you had been through the process before, of deciding what a follow-on force should be. And that was in the context of commanding Iraq. Is that right?

General AUSTIN. That's correct, ma'am.

Senator AYOTTE. And when you were the commander in Iraq, what was your recommendation to the administration on the troop levels that should remain, assuming we could negotiate a status of forces agreement?

General AUSTIN. I—again, I—ma'am, I presented a range of options to the leadership. I provided that recommendation. And I've not—never made public what my recommendations were in—

Senator AYOTTE. Well, it was reported, at the time, that your recommendations were between 14- to 18,000 troops. Was that accurate?

General AUSTIN. Well, again, ma'am, I provided that to the President, in confidence, and I have not made that public, and would not like to make that public.

Senator AYOTTE. Well, let me ask you this, General. The recommendations that you provided, and the number that was ended up, that Senator McCain just asked you, were—that was—was that number significantly below what you recommended?

General AUSTIN. It was, ma'am.

Senator AYOTTE. Okay. Thank you.

You have said, in answer to Senator McCain, that you didn't—at this point, you've not been involved in the decisions on the troop withdrawal in Afghanistan, or the follow-on force, following 2014. Is that right?

General AUSTIN. Yes, ma'am.

Senator AYOTTE. Have you spoken to either General Allen or General Dunford about this topic?

General AUSTIN. Have I spoken with them?

Senator AYOTTE. Have you spoken to them about what their recommendations are?

General AUSTIN. No, ma'am, I have not.

Senator AYOTTE. Would it surprise you that—Senator McCain asked you about the 34,000 withdrawal that the President announced the other day. There was a report in the Washington Post that General Dunford, whom I'm sure you have great respect for, as well as General Allen, that they had been seeking a reduction of no more than 25,000 troops during that same period. And that would have been significantly—certainly, the President's recommendation is much higher. Would that surprise you? Have you followed any of the public reporting on this?

General AUSTIN. I have read what's—well, some of what's in the media. But, my experience, there, ma'am, is that, you know, that's not always accurate, because it doesn't have the complete—

Senator AYOTTE. Well, let me follow up. There's—military officials, on background, were saying that, "Pulling out 34,000 leaves us dangerously low on military personnel, while the fledgling Afghan army and police need our support. It's going to send a clear signal that America's commitment to Afghanistan is going wobbly."

So, I guess I would ask you—I'm actually very surprised, as well, that you've not had conversations, given that you're taking over in CENTCOM, with General Allen or General Dunford about this very, very important question at this point. But, I would ask you, if we're in a position where the withdrawal puts us in a situation where we're going to be—have—be dangerously low on military personnel, I would expect you to come forward to this committee and—when asked—and tell us your professional opinion as to what we should be doing. Will you do that?

General AUSTIN. I will do that, ma'am. And I would say that, as you know, there are a number of things that the commander considers as he makes his recommendation: the tasks that he's been presented with, that he's got to accomplish; what—his assessment of the environment that he's got to work in; any significant transitions—"transitions" meaning things like an election; other things, like maybe the fighting season that he's got to go through. And all that goes into his calculus to provide a range of options, in terms of recommendations there. And as the leadership looks at it, they will consider other things, and I just don't have any idea of what, exactly, went into that specific calculus. So—

Senator AYOTTE. Well, General Austin, I went to a troop deployment, on Sunday, in New Hampshire, of a Guard unit that's going to Khost Province, in Afghanistan.

General AUSTIN. Yes, ma'am.

Senator AYOTTE. And one of the worries that I have is that the numbers that are being floated by the administration on the follow-on—don't we get to a point where, if we don't have sufficient numbers there, we have to worry about the protection of our own forces?

General AUSTIN. Yes, ma'am. And that clearly is one of the things that commanders must take into consideration, whether or not they'll be able to provide the adequate force protection for their troops as they're conducting operations in the area. And again, depending on what the specific missions are that they'll be asked to do, and how much of it they'll be asked to do, you—when you factor in force protection and other things, then that really kind of lays out what the commander thinks his requirements are. And again, typically he will present a range of options.

Senator AYOTTE. Well, I understand it, but certainly we need to take into account the protection of our own troops there. And if we get to a number that's so low that we can't protect our own troops, I'm going to be very concerned about that, and I expect your professional opinion on that as we go forward on this follow-on.

And can—just so that everyone understands, Why does it matter? Why does a good outcome in Afghanistan matter?

General AUSTIN. Well—

Senator AYOTTE. I'd like an answer from both of you on that.

General AUSTIN. Yes, ma'am, thanks. It clearly is important to the region. It's important to the United States of America. We've got a lot invested. You know, we'd like to see this country continue to move forward. We'd like to see the political system, you know, begin to grow. I think, if that—if the right things happen, it'll stabilize things in the region, and certainly it'll help us with, you know, our relationship with Pakistan and some other things.

So, I think this is a—it's important for the region, and it's also clearly important for the country of Afghanistan, important to NATO, and important to the United States of America. So—

Senator AYOTTE. I know my time's up, but, General Rodriguez, I would like your opinion as to, Why does this matter, in terms of the protection of our country, our interests? And we've sacrificed so much there, and obviously, I think it's important that we understand, Why does the stable Afghanistan, the outcome of that, matter?

General RODRIGUEZ. Stable Afghanistan, ma'am, means that—that's one of the things that was the objective, so that it never became a haven for al Qaeda and its adherents so they could attack both the U.S. homeland, the U.S. interests, and our allies worldwide.

Senator AYOTTE. Thank you. I'll have followup questions for both of you.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Senator.

Senator REED.

Senator REED. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And, Generals, thank you for your service to the Army and to the Nation. And I can't think of two more dedicated and experienced officers to lead our forces in the various areas of command you're being assigned.

In fact, General Austin, I—correct me if I'm wrong—you were a brigadier general in the invasion of Iraq, with the 3rd ID, you were a major general in Afghanistan, commanding the 10th Mountain Division, you were a three-star in Iraq, in the multinational forces. So, you are, I think, maybe one of the few CINCs that are going

to an AO where you've commanded at every general officer level. Is that correct?

General AUSTIN. That's correct, sir.

Senator REED. So, I don't think we could find someone better acclimated to the various challenges; and there are quite a few throughout the region.

One of the issues that's been touched upon is Iraq. And, from your perspective, are the problems there more political in nature or more the military capacity? Because what we've seen has been, I think, a very chaotic political situation—demonstrations, sectarian tensions—but, the Iraqi security forces seem to be forming—performing reasonably well, given the training and the investment we've made. Is that a fair assessment?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I would say that's—from my perspective, that's a fair assessment, that the security forces have done reasonably well.

Senator REED. And, going forward, the challenges there seem to be more political than any type of military threat from the outside, or a uncontrollable internal threat. Is that a fair assessment, too?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir.

Senator REED. Thank you.

One of the key factors and key roles that you play—it's not just making sure our forces are well prepared, well organized, and well deployed—it's communicating, explicitly and implicitly, with leaders in different countries. And I can think of several in your AO. One is Pakistan, and one is Egypt, because of our relationship to the militaries. Do you have any perspective now with respect to, sort of, your likely engagement with General Kayani in Pakistan and the Egyptian Army?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir. I look forward to trying to develop a—or, not trying, but developing a good working relationship with General Kayani and the leadership—the military leadership in Pakistan. I think it's essential to our overall relationship, and I think it's a—it will be very helpful in us trying to move forward with what we're doing in Afghanistan.

In Egypt, as you know, we have long enjoyed a great mil-to-mil relationship that's been very helpful to us. And so, we will continue to try to build upon that, going into the future.

Senator REED. Let me ask you another question, and that's with respect to our forces in Afghanistan. As the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, your current role, it would be highly unusual that you would be participating in the deliberations of strategy, going forward, in Afghanistan or any other area of operation. Is that fair to say?

General AUSTIN. That's correct, sir.

Senator REED. Yes. So that it's just—the planning was done appropriately through Central Command, General Mattis, the—beginning with General Allen and his colleague, going up into the Secretary of Defense's office, not through the Vice Chief's office, to the President for the final decision. That's the way it's done.

General AUSTIN. That's correct, sir.

Senator REED. And your collaboration has been—and it'll increase—certainly increase if you're confirmed; and I have every expectation you will—but, at that point, you will be having an oppor-

tunity to work closely with General Dunford and all of the commanders for several—a period of several months, I believe.

General AUSTIN. That's correct, sir. And it—well, it will give me an opportunity to engage leadership on the ground, to engage—to get a clear understanding, from the staff at CENTCOM and also the Joint Staff, in terms of all of the elements that have gone into this, which is, as you know, pretty—typically, a pretty tightly controlled process, and rightfully so.

Senator REED. Right. Thank you very much.

And, General Rodriguez, again, thank you for your service. You're taking over a region which is our newest, I think, unified command, one which is facing a new set of challenges that, 4 or 5 years ago, were not relevant. And I think it's appropriately—and fitting—that you're both sitting side by side, because what happens in Egypt has certain effects in your command, and what happens in your command has certain effects throughout General Austin's command. But, can you give us, sort of, a—your sense, right now—and again, being the FORSCOM commander, you have not, on a day-to-day basis, been engaged in deliberate planning or—can you give us your sense of what the threats are in AFRICOM, and how well positioned you believe AFRICOM is?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir.

Sir, the threats in AFRICOM really revolve around three major areas. Of course, one being al Qaeda and Islamic Maghreb, which is where the ongoing operation—French operation, supported by the African nations and the United States, is ongoing. Then also, Al-Shabaab, over in Somalia, and then Boko Haram. And then, also the LRA, as discussed earlier here. Those are the major threats to stability, militarily; but, of course, they have significant other ones in both government as well as health issues.

Senator REED. Yes, I think you've touched on something that, again, is a critical issue that cuts across both AOs; that is, governmental capacity, the ability of government to provide basic service, the ability of governments to function, if not as—at least to respond to the true needs of their people. And one of the issues that we've talked about, General Rodriguez, is that we have had military training operations that have gone in, over the last several years, into African countries, as far as AFRICOM, with mixed results. Do you have any specific sort of ideas about how you would improve the military training teams that will be a major aspect of your operational capacity?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir. You know, if confirmed, I will look at that very, very hard. And, as General Ham has stated in the past, some of the training has been focused on tactical and technical, and some of the things that we did not emphasize were the values of the army, as well as the role of a military in a democracy. So, those are some of the things that he's already started to work on, and I'll watch that very carefully as—if confirmed—and assess that, and go forward in the best way possible, sir.

Senator REED. My time is expired, but, again, gentlemen, there are very view people who have served the Army and the Nation with your courage and your distinction and your dedication to the soldiers. For that, I thank you.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Fischer.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you, Senator Kaine.

I, too, would like to thank you, gentlemen, and your families, for your service and dedication to this country. And I would also like to thank you, and thank the servicepeople that you represent, and their families, for their service to this country, as well.

If I may, I'd like to continue on that Washington Post article that came out recently. It did suggest that the Pentagon is pushing a plan that would keep only about 8,000 troops in Afghanistan. I know that, General Austin, you weren't a part of the planning process, thus far, but can you support a plan that would schedule withdrawal of troops in advance? You know, we're looking at a withdrawal of troops in Afghanistan, and, according to this article, from about 8,000 down to a thousand, within a very short period of time. I have questions if we can even maintain our mission, let alone complete the mission.

How can you make decisions on troop withdrawal, when, as you stated previously, so much depends upon conditions on the ground, what the government is doing, what their abilities are, up to that point? How would you approach a proposal like that?

General AUSTIN. I certainly would, first, really work hard to make sure I fully understood what the leadership wanted to get done, moving into the future. And I—certainly, my advice, as a commander on the ground or commander of Central Command, would—I would provide my advice to them, based upon where I think the security forces are, and conditions in theater, and what I think we needed to do to move forward, to make sure we maintain the gains that we've achieved.

But, I think so much is tied to what it is, what policy objectives that the leadership wants to accomplish. And, based upon that, you know, I would outline the forces required. I would consider the fact that there's a NATO complement to whatever forces we're going to have. And, again, it really depends on what level that we're advising and assisting the Afghan security forces at. And then, how long we need—you know, how I assess that we need to do that.

So, as I—if I'm confirmed, as I go in, those are things that I will work with General Dunford on, look at very closely, early on. And I know that the leadership is still in the process of making the decisions on, you know, what it's going to look like, you know, post-2014. So—

Senator FISCHER. Do you think it's useful to put those numbers out there so far in advance? Is there a military reason it's useful to put those numbers out there?

General AUSTIN. I don't know—I do know that, you know, we're a part of a coalition effort. And I do know that the coalition really is trying to—members of the coalition are trying to determine what their commitment's going to be, going forward. And they would like—I—my guess is that they would like much—as much predictability as possible.

Senator FISCHER. I appreciated Senator Reed's question that he asked General Rodriguez. How would you prioritize, General Austin, the threats in your future command? What do you see those as being?

General AUSTIN. Well, I—it's a very complex and dynamic region, volatile region. We see a number of things that are kind of working together to fuel that instability. You see sectarian strife in a number of places. You see governments, that are former autocratic governments, that are either failed or failing, creating further instability. So, the instability is an issue there.

And again, there are—certainly concerned about the Iranian aggression in the region, which adds to the complexity there. And, of course, there's this issue—specific issues of Syria and the continuing work that we've got to do in Afghanistan, as well. So, a number of things that are—that have added together.

And also, there is a—there's a persistent threat from elements, like al Qaeda and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, that have the ability to generate a threat to the homeland. So, that's—that is very, very important.

Senator FISCHER. Are we going to be able to meet those, with the troops that are projected to be there? Are we going to accomplish our mission? We've had so many families, in this country, sacrifice. Is it going to be worth it to them? You know, how—and I know you do this every day—how do you look at families and say to them, "We're going to pull out, maybe at levels that I think might be dangerously low, as I'm getting information on this"? How are you able to do that? When do we reach a hollow force, where the men and women that we send into harm's way are no longer protected?

General AUSTIN. Well, we're going to do everything that—the leadership will continue to do everything within our—that we can within our power to make sure that, when our troops are introduced into a dangerous situation, or a—or into combat, that they are ready. And so, whatever we have to do to prioritize, you know, resources to make sure that we support the folks that are doing the hard work of the country, we're going to continue to do that. And again, the services have been clear about the fact that they're going to support our troops that are in combat.

As we look at the, you know, shrinking top-line budgets here—the shrinking top line of the budget—it's going to make it more challenging for us to have forces that are ready to address emerging contingencies. And so, that's my concern, going into the future.

Senator FISCHER. And I would ask both of you gentlemen for your commitment to this committee, and to me, that you will always be honest and let us know that.

General AUSTIN. You have my commitment.

General RODRIGUEZ. You have my commitment.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you so much. And again, thank you for your patriotism, your dedication, and your service to us.

Thank you.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Senator.

Generals Austin and Rodriguez, welcome. I echo the comments made by my colleagues, of appreciate for your service, your stellar credentials.

I'm given additional confidence by the fact that you've worked so closely together in the past, because I think the CENTCOM/AFRICOM real estate and challenges have an awful lot of overlap, and that should give us confidence, as well.

Just to mix things up, I think I'll start with General Rodriguez, a few questions.

AFRICOM has an unusual mission. As I understand from our discussion, your deputy commander is a State Department official, and it is a mission that is heavily focused on partnerships with other agencies, and with the training mission with other governments. I'd like to—you, just for a minute, talk about that unusual nature of the mission, and your own background. Has it—how it fits you to work in that kind of a very multilateral environment.

General RODRIGUEZ. Thank you, Senator.

Well, you know, as you said, the headquarters was designed a little bit differently than most of the other combatant commands, and has more interagency people assigned to the headquarters. And I think all that is a great benefit to the organization, who stretches and reaches across the interagency in a, you know, effort that's very, very—required to be done that way in that interagency effort.

In the “building partner capacity” piece, as—all of our operations are really just—like the one that—the ones that General Austin is talking about—is about helping to build the capacity of that nation to protect itself and provide stability for itself. So, we have worked, you know, very hard over the years, and, you know, we have—both have significant experience trying to build the Iraqi security forces, as well as the Afghan security forces to do it themselves, and also to work with our multinational partners to also ensure that they're, you know, part of the solution, both in our NATO allies and allies throughout the world, as well as the host-nation countries.

So, I look forward, if confirmed, to try to continue that effort to help Africans prepare themselves to take care of themselves.

Senator KAINE. General Rodriguez, some of the most challenging attacks on American embassies in our history have occurred in the AFRICOM footprint. I've been to two hearings, now, on the Benghazi attack—one, a Foreign Relations Committee hearing, and one a hearing of this committee—and still have some confusion about security that's provided in the—to our diplomatic personnel around the world.

In the Benghazi situation, we were dealing with military security through the Marine security guards; we were dealing with State Department security—State Department personnel—but, also, local—two local militias—one unarmed, one that was apparently on some sort of strike or work slowdown because of a dispute over wages and benefits. I'd just like to hear you talk about the embassy security—recognizing that State takes lead on that—but, the embassy security challenges in AFRICOM, and how you would approach them, as the commander.

General RODRIGUEZ. Well, the—thank you, Senator—the challenges, as you state and we discussed earlier, were about the time-and-distance factors. So, if confirmed, I will work very, very closely with Department of State, who has the primary responsibility, as you've stated, to understand and have the best situational understanding that we can have, so we have threats and warnings, so that we understand the ones who are most threatened, so that we can respond appropriately.

We also have to prioritize our collection assets for the things that we don't know, to ensure—and it's a—again, a joint and inter-

agency, as well as multinational, process to get the best situational understanding we can.

The second thing is, of course, the—in collaboration with the State Department, to make sure that the State Department understands our responsiveness and what we can do, so that they can make the best decisions and recommendations to the leadership.

And lastly, as you know, the response forces have already increased, in the aftermath of the Benghazi attack, and some of the lessons that were learned. So, there is now a new Commanders—Commanders in Extremis Force that is forward-stationed, and we have more forces forward-stationed, as well as a special MAGTF, that is also in Djibouti right now. And, in another month, there'll be a regionally aligned force from the Army who is allocated to AFRICOM to help with these challenges.

Senator KAINE. Great.

General RODRIGUEZ. Thank you, Senator.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, General.

General Austin, to return to a point that we've talked about briefly, in your advance policy questions, you stated that maintaining a credible naval force in the region, covered by sufficient aviation combat power, is essential to demonstrating an enduring commitment to regional partners. We've had discussion on this committee, just this week, about the aftermath of the decision of the deferred deployment to the USS *Truman*. So, just focusing on that and the sequester, from your perspective as you prepare to take command of CENTCOM, what is the impact of a reduced naval presence in the region? And will it complicate your ability to carry out your mission?

General AUSTIN. I think it will, sir. I think, certainly, without—again, those forces have been outlined by General Mattis as what he needs to accomplish the goals and objectives that he's laid out. That's been supported by the Joint Chiefs, and resourced by the Office of Secretary of Defense. So, this has gone through a pretty deliberate process to allocate those resources and forces.

When he doesn't have those available, or when a commander doesn't have them available, then, again, it really begins to take away his flexibility to address emerging situations. It—once you reduce the presence in the region, you could very well signal the wrong things to our adversaries. And again, we—we'll want the commander—and I'll certainly want to have, if I'm confirmed—to have as many options available as possible to address the current situation and any emerging situations or crisis.

Senator KAINE. Let me ask you this. The “send the wrong message to allies or adversaries,” what about the message that it sends, just from your own experience, inside the organization, as you deal with your officers and enlisteds? You know, what's the buzz as they continually watch Congress run up against one kind of fiscal crisis after the next, that gives no certainty to the military about its resource capacity?

General AUSTIN. Well, it certainly can be disheartening, sir, if, you know, we kind of know we have things that we're trying to accomplish, we know that we need resources, and it's difficult to get those resources. Having said that, you know, it's the spirit of our military to try to find a way to be successful. But, we want to make

sure that, if at all possible, we're resourcing them with the adequate things—with the things that they need to be successful. So—

Senator Kaine. Thank you very much, to both of you.

Senator Graham?

Senator Graham. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I understand we're going to have two rounds, and I'll—if you could just let me know when 7 minutes is up, I have a few more questions. I'm—and I'll try not to hold everybody up.

Senator Kaine. Great. We'll move right into a second round as soon as you're—

Senator Graham. Okay. Thank—

Senator Kaine.—as you're finished—

Senator Graham. Thank you very much.

Senator Kaine.—if no one else comes.

Senator Graham. This is one of the most important hearings we've had in, probably, a very long time. And that's saying a lot, given the hearings we've had in recent time.

Both of you, thank you for your service. I know you well, appreciate your families. You're fine men.

And, General Austin, here's my dilemma. I'm not so sure—and I may be wrong—that you cannot tell us what you recommended about troop levels. I don't know if that's an executive privilege, or not. I'll have to think about that. I don't know if you have the right to do that, quite frankly.

I know what you told me. You told me, on the tarmac in Baghdad, that we needed somewhere between 18- and 20,000. And I said, "That may be more than the market can bear." And you said, "Well, look at the numbers." And I know what your recommendations were; it was somewhere in the mid-15/16,000. And I think the bottom line, for most people, was 10-. And I've got an exchange between me and General Dempsey about how the numbers went from 19,000, I think, all the way down to 5-, and eventually to zero.

So, I'd like to put in the record the exchange I had with Chairman Dempsey about the ever-changing numbers in Iraq.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator Graham. And the point, Mr. Chairman, was that the Iraqis were not saying, "18's too many, 15- was too many." That wasn't the exchange.

Did you ever—did Prime Minister Maliki tell you that he thought 18,000 were too many?

General Austin. No, sir.

Senator Graham. Okay. So, this was coming from the White House; this is what Secretary—excuse me—Chairman Dempsey said, that the numbers were cascading down, were not because the commanders were saying, you know, "I overshot." It's because the political people were saying, "That's too many," and you kept coming down and down; and at 10,000, I think, you finally said, "That's the lowest I can go." And the cascading effect of the numbers being reduced were not the Iraqis saying, "We can't have all that many troops," it was that our own White House—and they have every right to do this, by the way—was saying, you know, "We just don't agree with the commander's recommendation."

Do you remember that exchange between me and Prime Minister Maliki, in May, when we were over there, in 2011?

General AUSTIN. I do, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. And he turned to me and says, "Well, how many troops are"—'cause we were asked to go to Iraq—myself, Senator Lieberman, and McCain—by Senator Clinton, to see if we could push the Iraqis to make sure we got legal protections for our troops. And I'm with the President on this; I wouldn't have one troop in Afghanistan or Iraq without a status of forces agreement, that he was absolutely right to insist on that. But, when Prime Minister Maliki said, "How many are you going to recommend?" I turned to you and Ambassador Jeffers, and you said, I believe, "We're still working on that." Do you recall that conversation?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir, I do.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay.

And I was a bit astonished, because it's not that General Austin didn't know what he needed, it's just nobody would tell him what they were going to approve.

So, I just want people to be clear that General Austin always had a firm view that we needed at—18- to 20- is what he first said, and I said, "General Austin, that may be more than the political market can bear," because I'm not insensitive to the fatigue back here at home. And so, you kept putting pen to paper. And I know very well that you were making the best recommendations you could.

So, my problem is not with you, General Austin. You put the numbers to paper, and, at the end of the day, we have none.

And I just want to put into the record a load of articles about Iraq: "Blood for Oil," "Iraq's Return to Bloodshed," "Why Kurds Versus Arabs Could Be Iraq's Next Civil War," "Be Warned, Americans' Withdrawal From Iraq Heralds a World of Instability." I'd like permission to put all these articles into the record.

Senator KAINE. Without objection, they'll go into the record.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

So, I just want everybody to know, General Austin thought long and hard about a residual force.

Now, do you remember, when you were first getting the job, taking it over from General O., we had an exchange where I said, "In football terms, how would you put us, in terms of our situation in Iraq in June 2010?" And he said, "I think you've—I did, sir. I think we're on the 10 yardline, and I think that the next 18 months will determine whether we get the—get to the goal line or give, really, the Iraqis an opportunity to get to the goal beyond 2011." I said, "We're having a new quarterback," and you said, "Sir, I'll take the ball." You agreed with me that we were inside the 10, that we needed a residual force. You talked about the Arab-Kurd conflict. You told me, in no uncertain terms, "One of the friction points is—in Iraq was at Kirkuk." Do you remember that?

General AUSTIN. I do, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you remember the Lions Brigade concept, where you had Iraqi security forces?

General AUSTIN. I do, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. You had the Peshmerga Brigade, and you had U.S. forces, working as a team. I think that may have been your idea. It was working so well, because the Peshmerga are, basically, paramilitary forces that are Kurds. And now you see a shooting war about to erupt, I'm afraid, between the Peshmerga and the traditional Iraqi Security Forces. And you told me that, if we had about 5,000 people the Article 140 boundary line, we could keep tensions down. Do you remember that?

General AUSTIN. I do, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you remember telling me that we were one in—perceived slight or insult away from these guys shooting each other, and we need to have a follow-on force to keep tensions low?

General AUSTIN. That was my assessment, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. Well, it was a good assessment.

And what you see now, Mr. Chairman, is the—"Blood for Oil" is a story, last week, about how close they've come to firing at each other over the oil problems in Kirkuk.

So, now let's move on to—and I want to introduce into the record the exchange I had with General Dempsey, General Odierno, and General Austin, in 2010 and -11, about what happened in Iraq.

Senator KAINE. Without objection, it will be entered into the record.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you very, very much.

Now, let's move to Afghanistan. I'm not going to block your nomination at—that's not my intent. But, I do believe it's only fair to the committee that you go talk to General Allen. Pick up the phone. I know he's on leave. Do you agree he's one of the finest officers you've ever served with?

General AUSTIN. He is a fine man, sir. Yes, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you agree with that, General Rodriguez?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. Y'all have been at this for a very long time. All of you. And I just can't thank you enough. And my time's about to expire, so we'll do a second round, here.

What I would like you to do—and you can give this to me in writing—I want you to go talk to General Allen about his recommendations in Afghanistan, and see if they make sense to you, because—and I'm not going to reveal this to the committee—I know, exactly, his bottom line. And I now Senator Ayotte knows his bottom line. And I want to find out what's the proper role of this committee in divulging information, because I really do believe we have a right to know what commanders are recommending, as much as the Commander in Chief, because we fund wars. So, this idea you can't tell us, something I want to explore.

So, I'm going to stop now, let my colleagues do a second round. But, would you please go to General Allen and get briefed on his recommendations—bottom line, top line—and write to me as to whether or not you think they're sound, before we vote. This could be done, I think, relatively quick.

[INFORMATION]

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you.

Senator KAINE. We'll move to a second round.

I just want to point out that the questions that the witnesses both asked at the—answered at the beginning indicated that they would provide answers unless they had a good-faith reason, in consultation with the committee, not to provide them. And I believe some of General Austin's answers have kind of been along that scheme. But, to follow that instruction, and he will come back to the committee.

Senator GRAHAM. And that's it, Mr. Chairman, I—

General AUSTIN. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. Really, I think—I think we have a right to get this, but I don't want to put these—the gentleman in a bad spot.

General AUSTIN. Right.

Senator GRAHAM. So, I'm—

General AUSTIN. Right.

Senator GRAHAM.—that's why I'm going to wait.

Senator KAINE. Either we'll get the answer or a good-faith description for why you believe certain conversations cannot be revealed. We'll get one or the other.

We'll move to a second round of questions, with no one here who has not asked a first round.

And I'll go to Senator Ayotte.

Senator AYOTTE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I share Senator Graham's request, and, obviously, would like to understand, if you can't provide that information, why that is, because I think that is something important for this committee to take up, because we have to make decisions on resources that are very important, and we have an oversight function. And I very much respect the President's function as Commander in Chief, but this is a very important issue.

Having just recently—we were on the same trip to Afghanistan—and having seen the conditions on the ground, and having been to a recent deployment ceremony, I just want to make sure, also, when our guys are still there, that we've got enough people there to protect the guys and gals we have on the ground. So, I appreciate that very much.

I have a question for General Rodriguez. Can you help me understand what's happening in eastern Libya right now with the Qaddafi arms cache that was not secured after the NATO activity in Libya? And what is happening with those arms? Where are they going? And what efforts are we making to secure those arms?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, ma'am. As you know, the—they had significant arms caches throughout Libya; and many of them, of course, in eastern Libya, which is the most unstable part of Libya right now. And the intelligence community has, you know, assessed that those continue to move. Many of them have moved southwest, toward the northern Mali issue, and has increased the capacity of al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb.

The United States and allies are—have several initiatives to try to attempt to stem that flow. Most of them are on training and equipping efforts for both the Libyan army as well as the Libyan border control people who are benefits of some of the training that we're doing.

And then, the mil-to-mil relationships and the coordination that we're doing are all focused on—try to get those under control and

limit the ability of that to continue to migrate away from Libya and into the hands of terrorists.

Senator AYOTTE. But, just so we understand—when we were on our trip, we also went to Egypt—those arms are being trafficked through the Sinai; the arms are going into Syria; they are also going into Mali and other places, where they're getting in the wrong hands. And that continues, as we sit here today.

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, ma'am, that continues, again, in those—all those directions, that's right. It's not only toward Africa, ma'am.

Senator AYOTTE. And in eastern Libya right now, we have those mil-to-mil relations, but we don't have a position where we're—the Libyan government is actually stopping the transfer of those arms, right now, to the wrong people.

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, the—as you know, eastern Libya is the most destabilized place, and the militias—there's no state control of many of those militias, and that's a challenge that the government is dealing with right now—

Senator AYOTTE. So, we still really need to get much tougher on these arms, or—I mean, this is a dangerous situation, and—there have been reports that some of these arms may include MANPADS, correct?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, that's correct, ma'am.

Senator AYOTTE. Well, I hope that, certainly, we—we need to take, I think, greater action on this, because these arms are very dangerous. They're getting into the hands of terrorists, and this is continuing. And so, I look forward to supporting you and the administration to take whatever steps need to be taken to make sure that that happens.

But, I would also point out that I believe that this is one of the reasons where—when we think about the concept of a light footprint, and we're engaged in an area, that those arms should have been secured right following our involvement so that we weren't in the situation where we're chasing them around, trying to get them from dangerous individuals, who are then using it to attack us and our allies.

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, ma'am.

Senator KAINE. General Austin, General Rodriguez, a quick question. Would you agree with me that the number of troops in any theater is not an end, but it is a means to an end, a means to accomplishing a defined mission?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir.

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir.

Senator KAINE. If you are each confirmed in your positions, do you agree that you will—at any time, if you think that the number of troops assigned, or the number of troops you're dealing with, is not sufficient to accomplish the end that you are charged with accomplishing, that you'll share that concern, under appropriate channels, with your colleagues and superiors?

General RODRIGUEZ. I will, sir.

General AUSTIN. I will.

Senator KAINE. All right.

Senator GRAHAM.

Senator GRAHAM. And if we told both of you that you're the only two soldiers left in Afghanistan, you would stay and fight to the end, wouldn't you?

General AUSTIN. If there's work to be done, Senator, I would.

Senator GRAHAM. But, would you also tell us, "We have a high opinion of ourselves, but the chance of success would be pretty low"?

General AUSTIN. That's correct.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. So, what I want to know is—Do you agree with me, General Austin, the last card to play in Afghanistan is the residual follow-on force, in terms of our presence of "closing the deal"? This is a very important decision to make.

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir, I would.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. I appreciate that very much.

And, back to—Senator Kaine, you're absolutely right about numbers, but—General Austin, is Iran watching what we're doing in the region?

General AUSTIN. They clearly are, sir. And as—

Senator GRAHAM. Do you agree with that, General Rodriguez?

General RODRIGUEZ. Sir, everybody's watching what we're doing.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. So, if Syria is deteriorating—and we seem to be leading from behind there—if Iraq is deteriorating, and we pick a number in Afghanistan that makes it a high likelihood of failure, that would be sending the wrong signals, do you agree, to the Iranians, if what I say is true?

General AUSTIN. I would, sir, I would agree with that.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. If you had a recommendation of 8,000 troops in 2014, by 2017 we would be down to 1,000, don't you think the enemy would be focusing on the 1,000, not the 8,000?

General AUSTIN. I clearly think that they would, sir. I think that would—

Senator GRAHAM. Yes. I think that everybody would be focusing on the low number, not the high number.

I don't know what the numbers are going to be, but I do want to say this to the administration. I know the war is unpopular. I want to end it well. Like Senator Levin, I think we can be successful in Afghanistan. The key is their security forces. But, we have to have enough capability to keep them moving forward. And I know the number General Allen picked.

NATO will not stay, in any numbers, if we have 1,000 troops. Do you agree with that? No NATO nation's going to get to our right.

General AUSTIN. That's my assessment, yes.

Senator GRAHAM. So, I'll wrap this up, Mr. Chairman, by saying that—I want to make some—I'll make some of my questions in writing—I believe we're at a pivotal moment in the war in Afghanistan, that NATO is not going to stay unless we show a willingness to stay beyond Kabul itself, and that the enemy will look at the bottom number, not the top number. But, if the President will follow General Allen's recommendations, within reason—and he's the President, not me; he has every right to pick the number; every military commander agrees with it, and I agree with that—but, as a member of the opposition party, and as somebody who cares about this, I will either stand with him or lodge my objections. And I just want the administration to know that, if they can leave a

sufficient force behind, beginning in 2014—and it can be as low as 9- or 10,000—that I will stand with them, that I will keep funding the Afghan army, that I want this to turn out well. I know it won't be popular at home, but it's the right thing to do. But, I do want the administration to know—they have every right to make this decision, but if they overrule the commanders and create a force that cannot, in my view, be successful, I cannot, in good conscience, vote to continue this operation.

And, Mr. Chairman, I can't think of a worse outcome for America than for us to lose in Afghanistan after a dozen years of fighting, bleeding, hundreds of billions of dollars. That's the place we were attacked from. How do you win in Pakistan if you lose in Afghanistan?

And, Mr. Chairman, I will end with this thought. If we don't get this residual force right to continue the momentum, Afghanistan will fall apart quicker than Iraq, and all hell is going to break out.

Thank you very much.

Senator Kaine. Thank you, Senator.

A third round of questions, also 3 minutes.

Senator Ayotte.

Senator Ayotte. General Rodriguez, would you consider Boko Haram a terrorist organization?

General Rodriguez. Senator, Boko Haram has committed some acts that can be associated with terrorism. That's a policy decision that has to be made. And, if confirmed, I'll study that issue and make my recommendations on whether it gets classified as a terrorist organization, or not, ma'am.

Senator Ayotte. I would very much like your opinion, given some of their activities, including a car bomb against—attack—against the United Nations headquarters. So, I think that's—

General Rodriguez. Yes, ma'am.

Senator Ayotte.—certainly appreciate your opinion on that.

And then, also, General Rodriguez, in thinking about what happened in the attacks on our consulate in Benghazi, from your assessment—and obviously, you'll be taking over that area of responsibility, and you and I have talked about it—what are some of the lessons learned, do you think, from that?

General Rodriguez. Ma'am, lessons learned, that both DOD and the Department of State are taken on as the gaps that were created—or were there, in intelligence, and the—that didn't provide the sufficient indication or warnings for us to be able to respond properly. The security decisions that get made by the Department of State have to be well informed by the Department of Defense, so we need to do some closer cooperation there.

And then, the response forces that are available to the combatant commanders need to be continually looked at and appropriate for the situations that are out there throughout the region.

Senator Ayotte. And right now—you talked about the forces that would be—as I understand it, going to Stuttgart, that we would have in place, that we didn't previously have in place—but, how's that—how's that response time, though, when you think about it? Because they're not going to be—we're not going to be Djibouti or Aviano—and also, thinking about the air assets; will we have

any air—AC-130s or anything that, if we had to go to that area again to respond—how would we handle it?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, ma'am. I think that, again, we'll place those—if confirmed, place those requirements on the Department of Defense. And again, they'll have to make some risk decisions, based across the—the situation across the combatant command's area of responsibility, where to put those. And then, if we—the best we can do is to make sure everybody understands the risk that they're incurring, so we can make good decisions on where to keep our people and where not to keep our people.

Senator AYOTTE. Well, I look forward to continuing to—as you're confirmed, to work with you on that. I think that's a challenge that we face in that area, and particularly with what we talked about, with the arms that are still flowing in that area, that are very dangerous, to a whole host of areas that are getting in the wrong hands of al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations.

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, ma'am.

Senator AYOTTE. Thank you.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Senator Ayotte.

I return the gavel to Chairman Levin.

Chairman LEVIN [presiding]. Thank you so much.

I very much appreciate, Senator Kaine, your taking over the gavel this morning.

Just a few questions, if they haven't already been asked. I was trying to catch up to what questions were being asked.

The—General Austin, in your judgment, are the Afghan security forces on track to assume the lead responsibility for security in Afghanistan, starting this spring?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I—my judgment's based upon my interaction with the commanders in the field. I was just recently in Afghanistan, at Thanksgiving—during the Thanksgiving holiday—and, as I went around the country, the commanders that I talked to felt that the Afghans were—had developed significant capability, and were in the lead, in many cases, throughout the country. And they were hopeful and—you know, very positive about where they were, and very hopeful that things would continue in the right direction.

So, based upon that assessment, I think the Afghans will be capable of taking the lead in the prescribed timeline.

Chairman LEVIN. When Senator Jack Reed and I traveled to Afghanistan in January, we heard, from our military commanders, that the Afghan National Security Forces are in the lead already in the vast majority of operations and in the very challenging Regional Command East, that Afghan security forces were conducting operations by themselves in 87 percent of the operation. Have you heard that figure? And, if not, would that not be a very reassuring fact?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I've heard similar reports, and it is, indeed, reassuring. And I—you know, again, I talk to both brigade commanders in that area and also the division commander, and they were very positive about the performance of the Afghan security forces.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

And one more question on Afghanistan, and that's a subject which I've gotten into very, very—repeatedly, and Senator Graham and I have kind of worked together to make the same point, and that has to do with the future size of Afghan security forces. The current proposal is to reduce the size of the National Security Forces in Afghanistan by about a third after 2014, from 352,000 down to approximately 230,000. I believe it sends the wrong signal to the Afghans to do that. They are looking for reassurance that the United States and our allies are committed to an enduring relationship with Afghanistan. We wrote the President again last year—Senator Graham, Senator McCain, Senator Lieberman, myself—to convey that point. At the time when we are drawing down our troops, it is the wrong message to be drawing down or suggesting the drawdown of Afghan forces from their current level to a significantly lower level.

And so, I'm wondering, General Austin, whether or not you feel that we should keep the Afghan security forces at the 352,000 level beyond 2014.

General AUSTIN. Sir, I think keeping the larger-sized force would certainly, as you pointed out, reassure the Afghans. It would also reassure our NATO allies that we remain committed.

In addition to that, sir, I think a larger force—Afghan force—would help to hedge against any future Taliban mischief. And we expect—you could reasonably expect that an enemy that's been that determined, that agile, will very soon, after we transition, begin to try to test the Afghan security forces. And I—further, I think that size of a force provides additional capability to allow the political processes to mature a bit. And so, I think, because of that, it seems to me that a larger force is—a larger force would be of benefit.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

Just one question for you, General Rodriguez, and this has to do with the in-extremis force that is desirable, and other contingency response forces that would be useful, to put the AFRICOM commander in a stronger position to respond to contingencies such as we saw in Benghazi. If you've not been asked that question, can you tell us whether you would look for ways to find the greater capability to provide contingency response forces, beyond what they currently are, and were, in the case of the Benghazi matter?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, Senator, I would. And, if confirmed, that will be one of the top priorities I have, and I'll report back to the committee on that. And, as you know, they've already made some significant improvements in that, and we have to continue to do that.

Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

Thank you both. We look forward to your confirmation.

And, again, I want to thank Senator Kaine for taking over, this morning. It's very much appreciated.

General RODRIGUEZ. Thank you, sir.

[Whereupon, at 12:05 p.m., the committee adjourned.]