

Stenographic Transcript  
Before the

COMMITTEE ON  
ARMED SERVICES

**UNITED STATES SENATE**

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON  
U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND, U.S. AFRICA COMMAND  
AND U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND  
PROGRAMS AND BUDGET IN REVIEW OF THE  
DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION REQUEST FOR FISCAL  
YEAR 2016 AND THE FUTURE YEARS DEFENSE  
PROGRAM

Thursday, March 26, 2015

Washington, D.C.

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Thursday, March 26, 2015

U.S. Senate  
Committee on Armed Services  
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:35 a.m. in  
Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. John  
McCain, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Senators McCain  
[presiding], Inhofe, Wicker, Ayotte, Fischer, Cotton,  
Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Lee, Reed, Nelson,  
McCaskill, Manchin, Gillibrand, Donnelly, Hirono, Kaine, and  
King.

1           OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN McCAIN, U.S. SENATOR  
2 FROM ARIZONA

3           Chairman McCain: Well, good morning. Good morning,  
4 and welcome to General Lloyd Austin, General David  
5 Rodriguez, and General Joseph Votel.

6           The committee meets today to receive testimony on the  
7 posture of U.S. Central Command, U.S. African Command, and  
8 U.S. Special Operations Command.

9           I extend our appreciation to all three of you for your  
10 long and distinguished service, and to the troops and their  
11 families who defend our Nation every day.

12           From Mali to Libya and Somalia, and from Yemen to Iraq  
13 and Syria, the old order across North Africa and the Middle  
14 East is under siege. Both the regional balance among states  
15 and the social order within states is collapsing, and no new  
16 vision has emerged to take its place. Unfortunately, the  
17 lack of clear U.S. strategy and lack of strong U.S.  
18 leadership has confused our friends, encouraged our enemies,  
19 and created space for malign influence to flourish.

20           Despite the fact that Dr. Kissinger testified that,  
21 "The United States has not faced a more diverse and complex  
22 array of crises since the end of the second World War," to  
23 quote, the looming threat of sequestration serves to  
24 compound that threat and help create a leadership vacuum  
25 that fuels the chaos of our current predicament.

1           Retired General Jim Mattis told this committee, quote,  
2 "No foe in the field can wreak such havoc on our security  
3 that mindless sequestration is achieving today." And I  
4 couldn't agree more.

5           Our witnesses are uniquely positioned to describe the  
6 increased risk due to sequestration. To navigate this  
7 chaotic time successfully, we must have unambiguous national  
8 security priorities, clarity in our strategic thinking, and  
9 an unwavering commitment to the resources required to  
10 support the necessary courses of action.

11           For your sake, General Austin, let's hope that your job  
12 performance is not measured by the number of crises you have  
13 to juggle, but how you handle them. My fear is that you're  
14 expected to juggle with one hand tied behind your back.  
15 Whether it's sequestration or direction from above not to  
16 upset Iran during sensitive nuclear negotiations, yours has  
17 to be one of the most difficult jobs on the planet.

18           I'm deeply troubled by comments from senior  
19 administration officials on Iran. Secretary Kerry recently  
20 said -- and I'm not making this up -- that the net effect of  
21 Iran's military action in Iraq is, quote, "positive."  
22 Similarly, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General  
23 Dempsey, said, quote, "As long as the Iraqi government  
24 remains committed to inclusivity of all the various groups  
25 inside the country, then I think Iranian influence will be

1 positive." Again, that's in the category of, "I'm not  
2 making this up."

3 General Austin, I know from our conversations that you  
4 do not suffer the dangerous delusion that somehow Iran can  
5 be a force for good in the region. In your position, you  
6 can't afford that fantasy. Today, I want to discuss our  
7 strategy to address the situation on the ground as it is,  
8 rather than as we wish it to be.

9 General David Petraeus gave a realistic picture in a  
10 recent interview, which is worth quoting. And I quote, "The  
11 current Iranian regime is not our ally in the Middle East.  
12 It is ultimately part of the problem, not the solution. The  
13 more the Iranians are seen to be dominating the region, the  
14 more it's going to inflame Sunni radicalism and fuel the  
15 rise of groups like the Islamic State." I'll be interested  
16 if our witnesses agree with that assessment from General  
17 David Petraeus.

18 Iran is not our ally, yet we learned, just yesterday,  
19 that the U.S. is providing air support in Tikrit, which  
20 media is reporting as being fought by 20- to 30,000 Iran-  
21 backed Shi'a militia fighters and only 3- to 4,000 Iraqi  
22 Security Forces. I have many concerns and questions, about  
23 how and why we are doing this, which I hope you can answer  
24 for us today.

25 In Yemen, a country that President Obama recently

1 praised model for U.S. counterterrorism a success story --  
2 and I'm not making that one up, either -- the prospect of  
3 radical groups like Iranian-backed Houthi militants in  
4 charge of an air force and possessing ballistic missiles was  
5 more than our Arab partners could withstand. The airstrikes  
6 by these concerned Arab nations stems in part of their  
7 perception of America's disengagement from the region and a  
8 total absence of U.S. leadership.

9 In a scenario that, again, you could not make up, while  
10 our Arab partners conduct airstrikes to halt the offensive  
11 of Iranian proxies in Yemen, the United States is conducting  
12 airstrikes to support the offensive of Iranian proxies in  
13 Tikrit. This is as bizarre as it is misguided, another  
14 tragic case of leading from behind.

15 The complex intertwining of ISIL and Iranian problem  
16 sets in Iraq and Syria challenge us on an -- in an area the  
17 administration has poorly handled to date, the ability to  
18 prioritize and deal with multiple crises simultaneously.

19 We're also seeing increasing links between ISIL and  
20 terrorist groups throughout Africa, including a growing  
21 presence in Libya and a newfound relationship with Nigeria's  
22 Boko Haram. Adding to the rising terrorist threat across  
23 the continent, Africa remains plagued by longstanding  
24 conflicts that have resulted in large displacements of  
25 people and rising instability.

1           General Rodriguez, it's obvious, from our discussion  
2 this week in my office, that none of this is news to you.  
3 Yet, despite a growing array of threats, African Command  
4 consistently suffers from significant resource shortfalls  
5 that impact your ability to accomplish your mission.

6           One of the key components of our efforts to combat  
7 global terrorism is the team of men and women of Special  
8 Operations Command. In prepared remarks, General Votel has  
9 said our special operators are deployed in more than 80  
10 countries and are often our first line of defense against an  
11 evolving and increasingly dangerous terrorist threat. They  
12 defend the Nation by training our partners, and, when  
13 required, conducting direct-action operations. However,  
14 demand for Special Operations Forces continues to far exceed  
15 supply, placing an enormous strain on the readiness of the  
16 force. Compounding the strain, the looming threat of  
17 sequestration, which will not just degrade the capabilities  
18 of the force, but also the service-provided enablers it  
19 depends on. General Votel, I look to you to update the  
20 committee on the impact of sequestration on the men and  
21 women you lead and the increased risk to the troops you  
22 would be forced to accept as a result.

23           We need a strategy that spans the same geography as the  
24 threat from ISIL to al-Qaeda to Iran. Our witnesses work  
25 tirelessly to combat these threats together, and we owe them

1 and their forces they lead better than a piecemeal approach  
2 that lacks resources and fails to address the full spectrum  
3 of threats we face.

4 I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

5 Senator Reed.

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1           STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM RHODE  
2 ISLAND

3           Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman,  
4 and good morning.

5           And let me join Senator McCain in not only welcoming  
6 the witnesses, but also thanking them and the men and women  
7 of their command for their extraordinary service to the  
8 Nation.

9           And you represent the combatant commands that are most  
10 engaged in the fight against al-Qaeda and ISIS, and threats  
11 that know no geographic boundaries and require a regional,  
12 and sometimes a transregional, approach to effectively  
13 dealing with them. The rise of a military-capable ISIS  
14 threatens to erase national boundaries between Iraq and  
15 Syria, and the areas under ISIS control are providing a  
16 training ground for foreign fighters who threaten to spread  
17 violence, upon returning to their homes in Europe, Asia, or  
18 even the United States.

19           In Iraq, there's a recognition of the need for Sunni,  
20 Shi'a, and Kurdish factions to overcome their divisions to  
21 confront the ISIS threat. Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi has  
22 taken steps to begin to address Sunni and Kurdish  
23 grievances. And, in these efforts, he needs our support.  
24 In fact, one could argue that, ultimately, the issues in  
25 Iraq have to have a political solution, that military

1 efforts will buy time but not ultimate and decisive success.

2 Similarly, in Syria, addressing the root causes that  
3 helped lead to the rise of ISIS will require promoting the  
4 conditions for a political arrangement as well as success on  
5 the battlefield. Yet, the growing influence of Shi'a-  
6 dominated militia in Iraq, many taking orders from the  
7 Iranian Quds force, threatens to alienate the liberated  
8 Sunni community. Reports of human rights abuses by Shi'a  
9 militia may cause some Iraqi Sunnis to conclude they are  
10 better off with ISIS under the control of Iranian-backed  
11 militias. And that would be an extraordinary setback for  
12 all of us.

13 And, General Austin, we'd be interested in your  
14 assessment of the progress with the efforts to train,  
15 advise, and assist the Iraqi Security Forces to build up the  
16 capability of the Kurdish Peshmerga as they begin to retake  
17 territory from ISIS. We're also interested in your views on  
18 the growing influence of Iran in Iraq and the threat it  
19 poses over the long term to Iraq's stability. And  
20 overnight, as Senator McCain indicated, in Yemen, you were  
21 given an additional task of supporting GCC operations in  
22 their offensive operations in Yemen. And I hope, General  
23 Austin, you can give us an update on those responsibilities  
24 and those operations.

25 Of course, an additional concern is the outcome of the

1 nuclear framework negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran.  
2 We are approaching a deadline. And the implication of  
3 success, failure, or something in between will have profound  
4 impacts in the region. And that, too, I think you have to  
5 assess.

6 In Afghanistan, our military forces are focused on  
7 training Afghan Security Forces, conducting counterterrorism  
8 operations, and solidifying the hard-won gains. And we all  
9 had the privilege of listening to President Ghani yesterday.  
10 I think there's a new hope and a new opportunity, and we  
11 have to move forward, understanding it's still a very  
12 fragile situation.

13 General Rodriguez, you are increasingly facing  
14 challenges that were located in adjacent ORs -- the rise of  
15 ISIL, Boko Haram, all of these things -- jihad in Somalia.  
16 Their operations challenge you in attempting to build the  
17 capacity up of the nations in that region and also to work  
18 with our European allies very effectively to present a  
19 united front against these terrorists. So, again, your  
20 efforts are critical. And also let me commend you and your  
21 forces for the resolve with respect to the ebola outbreak  
22 and what you were able to accomplish.

23 Senator McCain has made this point very clear, very  
24 eloquently. Under sequestration, all of these efforts, both  
25 civilian, military, interagency, will be hammered if it is

1 allowed to prevail. So, I hope you can provide assessment,  
2 not just in AFRICOM, but in CENTCOM and in SOCOM, of the  
3 effects of sequestration on your ability to operate.

4 General Votel, as the Special Operations Forces, you  
5 are working across the globe. Your missions are critical.  
6 But, once again, I think it would help us if you could  
7 indicate where the effects of sequestration would actually  
8 undermine current and projected operations. Again, one of  
9 the points that you made is that you are sort of a global  
10 force, but you rely extensively on the base operations of  
11 the United States Army, United States Air Force, and every  
12 other service, and some civilian agencies. And that would  
13 be helpful to point out.

14 Let me commend you and SOCOM for all of the operations  
15 you've undertaken in the last 13 years. There's no force  
16 that's more stressed, no group of individual men and women  
17 and their families who give so much and go so often to the  
18 battle. So, thank you, General, for your efforts. And  
19 please communicate that to the men and women you lead.

20 Thank you very much.

21 Chairman McCain: General Votel, can we begin with you?

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1           STATEMENT OF GENERAL JOSEPH L. VOTEL, USA, COMMANDER,  
2 U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

3           General Votel: Good morning, Chairman McCain, Ranking  
4 Member Reed, and other distinguished members of the  
5 committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before  
6 you to discuss the current posture of United States Special  
7 Operations Command, or SOCOM, as we refer to it. I'm  
8 especially pleased to be here with my two mission partners,  
9 Generals Lloyd Austin and Dave Rodriguez.

10           SOCOM was created by Congress to ensure that we always  
11 had ready and capable SOF forces to meet the Nation's  
12 challenges. Our ability to address these challenges is due,  
13 in large part, to the strong support we get from Congress,  
14 and especially from this distinguished committee. Thank you  
15 very much.

16           I'd like to start out by commenting on the amazing  
17 actions made daily by our Special Operations men and women:  
18 operators, acquirers, logisticians, analysts, and many  
19 others, Active and Reserve, military and civilian, the total  
20 SOF force. Alongside our conventional force partners, the  
21 69,000 quiet professionals of SOCOM are committed to values-  
22 based excellence and service to our Nation. They  
23 relentlessly pursue mission success. And today, roughly  
24 7500 of them are deployed to over 80 countries worldwide,  
25 supporting geographic combatant commander requirements and

1 named operations.

2 We are a force who has been heavily deployed over the  
3 last 14 years, and our military members, civilians, and  
4 their families have paid a significant price, physically and  
5 emotionally, serving our country. We are very appreciative  
6 of the support we receive from Congress to address the  
7 visible and invisible challenges, and we never forget that,  
8 for SOCOM, people are our most important asset.

9 SOCOM, in conjunction with its partners, supports the  
10 geographic combatant commanders and the missions they are  
11 assigned by the Secretary of Defense and the President. If  
12 they are successful, we are successful. If they fail, we  
13 fail. Today, the United States is faced with many challenges.  
14 The spread of technology and the diffusion of power are not  
15 only being used by responsible leaders to better societies,  
16 but, unfortunately, by wicked actors to orchestrate terror  
17 and violence regionally and globally. Nonstate actors like  
18 al-Qaeda and ISIL and other violent extremist organizations,  
19 menacing state actors like North Korea, destabilizing actors  
20 like Iran, and the growingly coercive actors like Russia,  
21 are just a few examples of the entities affecting the  
22 strategic environment in which SOF forces operate. We are  
23 equally affected by the growing use of cyber capabilities  
24 and social media, which make it easy for our adversaries to  
25 communicate, coordinate, execute, and inspire their actions.

1           The fiscal environment is of concern, as well. While  
2           SOCOM has been well supported in recent years, I remain  
3           profoundly concerned by the impact of another round of  
4           sequestration, and not only how it impacts SOCOM, but, more  
5           importantly, how it will affect the four services upon whom  
6           we are absolutely dependent for mission support.

7           To address the challenging security environment, SOF  
8           provides a portfolio of options for our national leaders and  
9           the geographic combatant commanders. Through small-  
10          footprint operations and by relying on a network of  
11          purposeful partnerships, SOF provides a comparative  
12          advantage through persistent engagement, partner enablement,  
13          network focus, and discreet rapid response to crisis  
14          situations. While we support military operations across the  
15          spectrum, SOF capabilities are uniquely suited to operate  
16          and succeed in the gray zone between normal international  
17          competition and open conflict. And it is in this area that  
18          we see our very best opportunities to help shape the future  
19          environment.

20          To enable our efforts, I have established five  
21          priorities for the command:

22          First, we must ensure SOF readiness by developing the  
23          right people, skills, and capabilities to meet current and  
24          future requirements. To this end, we want to ensure  
25          effectiveness, now and into the future, with the very best

1 SOF operators and support personnel, enabled by the best  
2 technology and capabilities we can field. Along the way, we  
3 want to make the very best use of the unique MFP-11 funding  
4 authorities that Congress has granted us.

5 Second, we must help the Nation win by addressing  
6 today's security challenges. We strive to provide coherent  
7 and well-integrated SOF forces for the geographic combatant  
8 commanders, focused on optimizing our SOF activities.  
9 Nearly everywhere, you will find SOF forces working  
10 alongside, and often in support of, their conventional force  
11 partners to accomplish our security objectives.

12 Third, we must build purposeful relationships to  
13 improve global understanding and awareness to create options  
14 for our leaders. We don't own the network, but we are an  
15 important part of it. And working with our partners will  
16 always produce the best options for our Nation.

17 Fourth, we have to prepare for the future security  
18 environment to ensure that SOF is ready to win in an  
19 increasingly complex world. Ultimately, our goal is to  
20 match exquisite people with cutting-edge capability and the  
21 very best ideas and concepts to help our Nation succeed  
22 against the looming challenges we will face in the future.

23 Finally, we must preserve our force and families to  
24 ensure their long-term well-being. It is in this area that  
25 we are specifically focused on a holistic approach to

1 address the invisible challenges of stress and suicide that  
2 are affecting our servicemembers, civilians, and their  
3 family members.

4 I remain honored and humbled by the opportunity to  
5 command the best Special Operations Forces in the world. I  
6 am incredibly proud of each and every one of our team  
7 members and their families.

8 I look forward to your questions and our dialogue  
9 today.

10 [The prepared statement of General Votel follows:]

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1 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

2 General Rodriguez.

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1           STATEMENT OF GENERAL DAVID M. RODRIGUEZ, USA,  
2           COMMANDER, U.S. AFRICA COMMAND

3           General Rodriguez: Chairman McCain, Ranking Member  
4           Reed, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you  
5           for the opportunity to update you on the efforts of United  
6           States Africa Command. And I'm glad to be between Joe and  
7           Lloyd today.

8           Let me express my gratitude for your support to our  
9           servicemembers and their families who underwrite our  
10          Nation's security in an increasingly complex world of  
11          accelerating change.

12          Today, our Nation faces heightened strategic  
13          uncertainty; risks to our national interests are  
14          significant, and growing. Part of our strategic uncertainty  
15          is our fiscal uncertainty. If sequestration returns in 2016,  
16          I'm concerned about our ability to execute the current  
17          strategy at a manageable level of risk.

18          Threats and opportunities to advance national interests  
19          are growing in Africa. In the past year, we achieved  
20          progress in several areas through close cooperation with our  
21          allies and partners. We have built significant partner  
22          capacity over the years. This capacity has played a major  
23          role in regional efforts to contain violent extremism,  
24          including al-Shabaab, other al-Qaeda affiliates, and now the  
25          Islamic State of Iraq in the Levant, as well as Boko Haram.

1 With our support, French and regional partners have  
2 disrupted violent extremist networks, and a small number of  
3 our unilateral operations have applied additional pressure.

4 We also achieved success with other partners against  
5 other challenges. As an example, in Liberia, we supported  
6 USAID and the Liberian nation in responding to the largest  
7 ebola epidemic in history.

8 Another illustrative example is our support to  
9 strengthening the capacity and coordination of regional  
10 partners in the Gulf of Guinea.

11 Furthermore, in Central Africa, combined military and  
12 civilian efforts significantly reduced the Lord's Resistance  
13 Army's ability to threaten civilian populations.

14 Working closely with the State Department and our  
15 regional partners has allowed us to improve our posture and  
16 capability to protect U.S. personnel and facilities. When  
17 security in Libya deteriorated, we assisted in the safe  
18 departure of U.S. and allied personnel. Conversely, in the  
19 Central African Republic, we provided security that enabled  
20 the resumption of embassy operations.

21 We've had a lot of successes, but many challenges  
22 remain, and there is much work to be done. Transregional  
23 terrorists and criminal networks continue to adapt and  
24 expand aggressively. While al-Shabaab is weakened in  
25 Somalia, it remains a persistent threat to U.S. and regional

1 interests. Al-Shabaab has broadened its operations to  
2 conduct, or attempt to conduct, asymmetric attacks against  
3 Uganda, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and especially Kenya.

4 Libya-based threats are growing rapidly, including an  
5 expanding ISIL presence. If left unchecked, they have the  
6 highest potential among security challenges in Africa to  
7 increase risk to U.S. strategic interests in the near  
8 future.

9 Boko Haram threatens the ability of the Nigerian  
10 government to provide security and basic services in large  
11 portions of the northeast. Boko Haram has extended its  
12 reach beyond Nigeria's borders to Cameroon, Niger, and Chad.

13 In Somalia, Libya, and Nigeria, the international  
14 community is challenged to implement the comprehensive  
15 approaches necessary to advance governance, security, and  
16 development. Declining resources will make this more  
17 difficult.

18 To mitigate increasing risk, Africa Command is  
19 sharpening our priorities and improving the alignment of  
20 resources to strategy. We are coordinating with  
21 international and interagency partners to harmonize our  
22 efforts across the continent. And we are seeking to  
23 increase operational and programmatic flexibility.

24 We continue to provide our best military advice to  
25 policymakers to inform decisions about managing risk.

1           Thanks for your continued support to our mission and  
2 the dedicated people advancing our Nation's defense  
3 interests in Africa.

4           Thank you.

5           [The prepared statement of General Rodriguez follows:]

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1 Chairman McCain: General Austin, welcome.  
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1           STATEMENT OF GENERAL LLOYD J. AUSTIN, USA, COMMANDER,  
2 U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND

3           General Austin: Thank you, sir. Good morning.  
4 Chairman McCain, Senator Reed, distinguished members of the  
5 committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear  
6 here today to talk about the broad efforts and the current  
7 posture of United States Central Command.

8           Up front, and most importantly, I'd like to thank all  
9 of you for your continued and strong support of our men and  
10 women in uniform and their families. I look forward to  
11 talking about them and the exceptional contributions that  
12 they continue to make on behalf of our Command and our  
13 Nation.

14           I'm pleased to appear here this morning alongside my  
15 teammates, General Dave Rodriguez and General Joe Votel.  
16 And I'll join them in making a few -- a few brief opening  
17 comments, and then we're prepared to answer your questions.

18           Ladies and gentlemen, much has happened in the CENTCOM  
19 area of responsibility since I last appeared before this  
20 committee, a year ago. Indeed, the central region is today  
21 more volatile and chaotic than I have seen it at any other  
22 point. And the stakes have never been higher. The forces of  
23 evil that threaten our homeland and our interests in that  
24 strategically important part of the world thrive in unstable  
25 environments marked by poor governance, economic

1 uncertainty, and ungoverned or undergoverned spaces. And  
2 therefore, it's essential that we be present and engaged,  
3 and that we cultivate strong partnerships and continue to do  
4 our part to address emerging threats and to move the region  
5 in a direction of greater stability and security. And we  
6 must be properly resourced to do what is required to  
7 effectively protect and promote our interests.

8         At CENTCOM, in addition to doing all that we can to  
9 prevent problems from occurring while shaping future  
10 outcomes, we spend a great deal of our time and energy  
11 managing real-world crisis. Over the past year, we've dealt  
12 with conflicts in Iraq and Syria. We transitioned from  
13 combat operations to a train, advise, and assist and CT  
14 mission focus in Afghanistan. At the same time, we dealt  
15 with a number of difficult challenges in Yemen, Egypt, and  
16 Lebanon, and in a host of other locations throughout our  
17 area of responsibility. We actively pursued violent  
18 extremist groups, and we took measures to counter the  
19 radical ideologies that are espoused by these groups. We  
20 also dealt with Iran, which continues to act as a  
21 destabilizing force in the region, primarily through its  
22 Quds forces and through support to proxy actors such as  
23 Lebanese Hezbollah.

24         And, while we are hopeful that an acceptable agreement  
25 will be reached with Iran with respect to its nuclear

1 program, either way, whether we reach an agreement or we  
2 don't reach an agreement, Iran will continue to present a  
3 challenge for us, going forward.

4 We are faced with a number of difficult issues in our  
5 region. However, I firmly believe that challenges present  
6 opportunities, and we make progress primarily by pursuing  
7 those opportunities. And we do pursue them. And I am  
8 confident that our broad efforts are having a measurable  
9 impact.

10 Of course, the most immediate threat facing us now is  
11 the threat posed by ISIL, or Daesh. This barbaric  
12 organization must be defeated, and it will be defeated. We  
13 are currently in a process of executing our regional  
14 military campaign plan, and I'm pleased to report that we  
15 are making significant progress.

16 At the outset, we said that we'd have to halt ISIL's  
17 advance. And we've done that in Iraq. We said that we're  
18 going to have to regenerate and restructure Iraq's Security  
19 Forces and help them to reestablish their border. And we're  
20 in the process of doing that right now. We said that we'd  
21 have to help our partners in the region to bolster their  
22 defenses against ISIL. And we continue to help our friends  
23 in Jordan and Lebanon and Turkey. And we said that we'd  
24 have to build credible ground forces to counter ISIL in  
25 Syria and to guard against ungoverned spaces. And we'll

1 soon begin doing so as a part of our Syria train-and-equip  
2 program.

3 Ladies and gentlemen, we are making progress. In fact,  
4 we're about where we said we would be in the execution of  
5 our military campaign plan, which supports the broader  
6 whole-of-government strategy designed to counter ISIL. And  
7 we're having significant effects on the enemy. We continue  
8 to attrite its forces in Iraq and Syria. We've attacked its  
9 command-and-control capabilities. We've destroyed its  
10 training sites and storage facilities, along with hundreds  
11 of its vehicles, tanks, and heavy weapon systems. And, in  
12 doing so, we have significantly degraded his capability, its  
13 ability to command and control its forces, and also his  
14 primary sources of revenue -- namely, his refineries and  
15 crude collection points. The fact is that ISIL can no  
16 longer do what he did at the outset, which is to seize and  
17 hold new territory. He has assumed a defensive crouch in  
18 Iraq. Although he has greater freedom of movement in Syria,  
19 he's largely in a defensive there, as well. He's having a  
20 tough time governing. And this is crucial to his claims of  
21 a caliphate. Indeed, he has begun to expand into other  
22 areas -- namely, North Africa -- in part, because he knows  
23 that he's losing in Iraq and Syria, and he needs to find  
24 other ways to maintain his legitimacy. Going forward, we  
25 should expect this -- to see this enemy continue to conduct

1 limited attacks and to orchestrate horrific scenes in order  
2 to create IO opportunities and to distract and intimidate.  
3 But, make no mistake, ISIL is losing this fight. And I am  
4 certain that he will be defeated.

5       However, there is still work to be done to get to that  
6 point. And we intend to continue to execute the campaign,  
7 as designed. And I say that because how we go about this is  
8 very important. If we don't first get things under control  
9 in Iraq, where there is a government that we can work with  
10 and some amount of reliable security forces, if we don't get  
11 things there right first, before expanding our efforts in  
12 Syria, then we risk making matters worse in both countries.  
13 But, done the right way, in light of the limitations that  
14 exist, I believe that we can, and we will, be successful in  
15 our efforts to defeat ISIL. At the same time, we can be  
16 assured continued progress in pursuit of our principal goal,  
17 which is to move the strategically important region in a  
18 direction of increased stability and security.

19       Going forward, we will all be required to make tough  
20 choices. We'll need to find ways to do more, or at least as  
21 much, with less in the current fiscal environment. That  
22 said, I remain concerned by the fact that capability  
23 reductions can and will impact our ability to respond to  
24 crisis, and especially in the highly volatile central  
25 region. The resulting loss in flexibility makes the U.S.

1 and our interests increasingly vulnerable to external  
2 pressures.

3 And so, I would ask Congress to do its part to make  
4 sure that we avoid sequestration and other resourcing  
5 limitations that serve to degrade the readiness of America's  
6 military forces.

7 Chairman McCain, Senator Reed, members of the  
8 committee, I want to thank you once more for your strong  
9 support that you continue to show towards servicemembers,  
10 our civilians, and their families. They are the very best  
11 in the world at what they do, and they continue to  
12 demonstrate absolute selflessness. And they make enormous  
13 sacrifices on behalf of the mission in support of one  
14 another.

15 Thank you, sir.

16 [The prepared statement of General Austin follows:]

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1 Chairman McCain: Thank you, General.

2 I'd ask the witnesses, do they agree with General  
3 Petraeus's comments, a few days ago, that Iran was as great  
4 or greater threat in the Middle East than ISIS? Do you  
5 agree with that, General Austin? With that statement?

6 General Austin: Sir, I would say that, in terms of the  
7 long-term threat in the region, Iran is the greatest threat  
8 to stability. I would say the most pressing threat is ISIL,  
9 and one that we have to deal with and defeat in the near  
10 term.

11 Chairman McCain: General Rodriguez?

12 General Rodriguez: Yes, I agree, sir, with both  
13 General Austin and General Petraeus, the short- and long-  
14 term challenges.

15 Chairman McCain: General Votel?

16 General Votel: Mr. Chairman, I agree.

17 Chairman McCain: So, now we are seeing --

18 Oh, General Austin, when were you told by the Saudis  
19 that they were going to take military action in Yemen?

20 General Austin: Sir, I had a conversation with the  
21 CHOD right before they took action. And so, it was shortly  
22 before. I --

23 Chairman McCain: Right before they took action.

24 General Austin: Yes, sir.

25 Chairman McCain: That's very interesting.

1           Now, you were talking about how we're defeating ISIL.  
2     Right now, the battle for Tikrit is stalled, and we are then  
3     launching airstrikes into Tikrit. Is that -- isn't --  
4     that's obviously correct. And it's my understanding --  
5     please correct me if I'm wrong -- that there's about 2,000  
6     Iraqi military fighting there and about 20,000 the -- Shi'a  
7     militia that are doing the majority of the fighting. Is  
8     that roughly correct?

9           General Austin: Sir, it's about 4,000 Iraqi Security  
10    Forces, combined, in that area. Currently, there are no  
11    Shi'a militia. And, as reported by the Iraqis today, no PMF  
12    forces in that area, as well. So --

13          Chairman McCain: So, there's 4,000 Iraqi. Who are the  
14    others?

15          General Austin: The Shi'a militia that were there have  
16    pulled back from that area, sir.

17          Chairman McCain: So, the fighting is all being done by  
18    the Iraqi forces?

19          General Austin: Sir, when the --

20          Chairman McCain: I've only got a few minutes, and  
21    maybe you can shorten the answer. They're pretty  
22    straightforward questions.

23          General Austin: Yes, sir. The clearance of the town  
24    of Tikrit, which is, as you know, on the west side of the  
25    river, is being done by the Iraqi Special Operations Forces

1 and the federal police, with our air support.

2 Chairman McCain: So, why do we see pictures of  
3 Suleimani everywhere, and leading and orchestrating this  
4 effort?

5 General Austin: Those pictures were from before. And,  
6 as you know, that effort that Suleimani and the Iranians  
7 were sponsoring, it stalled. It stalled because they didn't  
8 have --

9 Chairman McCain: So, they're no longer in the fight.

10 General Austin: He is no longer -- well, he was no  
11 longer on the ground, as of --

12 Chairman McCain: No, I mean, the Shi'a militias are no  
13 longer in the fight.

14 General Austin: The folks that we are supporting in  
15 clearing Tikrit --

16 Chairman McCain: Are the Shi'a militias still in the  
17 fight?

18 General Austin: No, sir, they're not a part of the  
19 clearing operations in Tikrit.

20 Chairman McCain: So, we are -- the airstrikes that  
21 we're carrying out in support are only in support of Iraqi  
22 military activities.

23 General Austin: That's correct, sir. Preconditioned  
24 for us to provide support was that the Iraqi government had  
25 to be in charge of this operation, the -- they had to know

1 -- we had to know exactly who was on the ground, we had to  
2 be able to deconflict our fires, they had to have a credible  
3 scheme of maneuver, which they not only replanned, but we  
4 caused them to rehearse it, and they had to be able to talk  
5 to the folks on the ground, as well.

6 Chairman McCain: We -- in our airstrikes in --

7 By the way, I totally disagree with you about ignoring  
8 Syria. There's no strategy for Syria. And we all know  
9 that. And ISIS doesn't respect those boundaries. But,  
10 somehow you seem to, and the President does. There's no --  
11 they know no boundaries. And so, to say that we are going  
12 to have a strategy for Iraq first and then Syria, of course,  
13 is sophistry.

14 Right now, in our airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, of the  
15 12,000 sorties, 3,000 of them actually drop weapons. Is  
16 that true?

17 General Austin: I think that's about right, sir.

18 Chairman McCain: Don't we put our pilots in great  
19 danger if they're not going to drop weapons? And isn't it  
20 the argument that we really need the Joint Terminal Attack  
21 Controllers, JTACs, on the ground if we're going to be  
22 effective? Or are you going to have three out of four  
23 fighter sorties fly around in circles, and then return?

24 General Austin: Sir, the hours-flown-to-ordnance-  
25 employed ratio is really based upon a couple of factors.

1 One is, the type of enemy that we're opposing. And the  
2 second is that -- are the distances that we're dealing on a  
3 daily basis.

4 If you take a look at an operation like Desert Storm,  
5 where you had fielded forces and infrastructure that you  
6 could attack with preplanned sorties, then that ratio --  
7 certainly, you'll have a greater ratio of hours flown to  
8 ordnance employed.

9 The type of enemy that we're facing currently is -- it  
10 started out as an extremist element that wanted to behave  
11 like an army. And because of that, we were able to attack  
12 his mass formations early on, but he very quickly resorted  
13 to behaving like an irregular force, where he began to blend  
14 in with the population. As he did that, it became more  
15 difficult to --

16 Chairman McCain: Which shouldn't -- which should have  
17 surprised no one.

18 General Austin: It didn't surprise us, sir. But, the  
19 nature of this fight is such that, you know, we need to be  
20 able to support the --

21 Chairman McCain: So, we're satisfied with a situation  
22 where we launch 12,000 sorties, when only one out of four  
23 actually drop weapons.

24 General Austin: Sir, it's --

25 Chairman McCain: That, General, is not a viable or,

1 frankly, a good use of the taxpayers' dollars.

2 General Austin: Sir, I would just make the point that,  
3 as we compare that ratio to what we've done in Afghanistan,  
4 it's equal to that -- because it's the same type of fighting  
5 there, principally. And the ratios are comparable. In  
6 fact, the ratios in OIR are even better than what we saw in  
7 Afghanistan.

8 Chairman McCain: Well, I would argue that that's  
9 comparing apples and oranges, but I -- my time has expired.

10 Senator Reed.

11 Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

12 General Austin, just again returning to Tikrit, we are  
13 operating at the request of the Prime Minister of Iraq,  
14 Prime Minister Abadi, who is the democratically elected  
15 leader, and we set conditions as to what we would require  
16 before we would be engaged. Is that correct?

17 General Austin: That's correct, sir.

18 Senator Reed: And your comments to Senator McCain  
19 suggest that the popular mobilization forces, the Shi'a  
20 militias, have withdrawn. Initially, they were engaged in  
21 the fight, but they've pulled back, and now the operation is  
22 being conducted by Iraqi regular forces, their special  
23 operations --

24 General Austin: Special Operations Forces and the  
25 federal police, yes, sir.

1           Senator Reed: It appeared, just a few days ago, in  
2 fact, that this fight would go -- succeed simply with the  
3 mobilization forces, the Shi'a militias, and -- which would  
4 have added a significant sort of a at least rhetorical claim  
5 to both the militias and to the Iranians. Now it appears  
6 that they cannot effectively clear the city without the  
7 support of the United States and our airpower. Is that --

8           General Austin: That's correct, sir. And I've -- if I  
9 could, make a point, here, to highlight why it failed. It's  
10 the way that the -- these forces went about trying to do  
11 this. These forces obviously were not being controlled by  
12 the Government of Iraq, they didn't have a coherent scheme  
13 of maneuver, command, and control. They didn't have  
14 precision fires to support this effort. And so, trying to  
15 go about the difficult task of clearing a place like Tikrit  
16 without that caused them to stall. And what we have done  
17 is, number one, as you pointed out, sir, highlighted a  
18 number of preconditions that must be present before we would  
19 provide ISR and employ fires. And once those conditions  
20 were met, which included Shi'a militias not being involved,  
21 then we're able to proceed.

22           And I'd like just -- just to highlight, sir, that, you  
23 know, three tours in Iraq, commanding troops who were  
24 brutalized by some of these Shi'a militias, I will not, and  
25 I hope we never, coordinate or cooperate with Shi'a

1 militias.

2 Senator Reed: And part of the operation in Tikrit --  
3 and we're doing all we can to assist the Iraqi regular  
4 forces to succeed -- will be a prelude to operations in  
5 Mosul, which have always been contemplated to be conducted  
6 by Iraqi Security Forces with -- if they make the  
7 conditions, with our support. Is that accurate?

8 General Austin: Yes, sir.

9 Senator Reed: All right.

10 General Votel, we have the Assistant Secretary of  
11 Defense for SOLEC, and he is the service secretary-like  
12 responsibilities for Special Operations Forces, your forces.  
13 And do you have any views -- because he's established a  
14 Special Operations Policy and Oversight Council -- do you  
15 work with the Council? What's your relationship?

16 General Votel: Senator, we absolutely do. And I meet  
17 with Secretary Lumpkin on a regular basis. And the SOPAC,  
18 as it's referred to, the Special Operations Policy and  
19 Oversight Council that meets in the Pentagon, really  
20 provides a good forum to pull together a number of the  
21 senior leaders within OSD and, frankly, on the Joint Staff  
22 in SOCOM to ensure that we are looking at the requirements  
23 for SOF forces and ensuring that it's well coordinated  
24 within the building. And we're getting both oversight and  
25 advocacy for our activities.

1           Senator Reed: Let me ask an additional question.  
2    You've talked about, in your prepared remarks, the campaign  
3    plan for global special operations, which, of necessity, has  
4    to interact with the campaign plans of AFRICOM and CENTCOM  
5    and NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM, et cetera, et cetera. So, can  
6    you comment about how you manage this plan? And, just  
7    quickly, because my time expired, General Rodriguez and  
8    General Austin might make a comment, too.

9           General Votel: Absolutely. So, the campaign plan for  
10   global special operations is really designed to support my  
11   principal task of supporting my geographic partners out  
12   here. And it's designed to synchronize our SOF activities to  
13   help us prioritize our resources and where we are putting  
14   them in support of the GCCs. It's designed to address the  
15   partnerships that we need to have in place. It's designed  
16   to look at the things that we will do to shape the  
17   environment for the geographic combatant commanders. And  
18   then it ensures that we have provided SOF aligned to those  
19   specific areas so that they can develop the capacity and the  
20   skills and capabilities they need to best support the  
21   geographic combatant commanders.

22          Senator Reed: General Rodriguez, your comments on this  
23   interaction?

24          General Rodriguez: When we make our strategic plan,  
25   sir, our theater Special Operation Command is fully

1 involved. And all those things that Joe does about  
2 allocating the forces and the capabilities across the world  
3 all support my plan exactly how I want it to be.

4 Senator Reed: General Austin, a quick comment or one  
5 for the record? My time's expiring. Are you comfortable  
6 with the interaction?

7 General Austin: I am very comfortable with it, sir.

8 Senator Reed: Thank you.

9 Thank you, gentlemen.

10 Chairman McCain: Senator Inhofe.

11 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 As I told you, General Rodriguez, I was going to  
13 concentrate my questions on AFRICOM. When Senator McCain  
14 talked about being under-resourced, it is true that, when  
15 you were formed, and up to the current time, you don't  
16 really have resources. You depend on EUCOM for almost  
17 everything. Is that correct?

18 General Rodriguez: We got a little bit more resources  
19 in the last year and a half, Senator, to include a special-  
20 purpose MAGTF, a commander's response force, a special  
21 operations force, and we've also got a couple of key  
22 enablers for force. But, I --

23 Senator Inhofe: Yeah, and --

24 General Rodriguez: -- also do depend quite a lot on  
25 EUCOM capacity, sir.

1           Senator Inhofe: Yeah. I think you do. And I think  
2 that other things that come up, like the LRA and things like  
3 that specifically, you inherit resources to help put out  
4 those fires. However, with the restructuring, the European  
5 infrastructure consolidation, are you concerned about how  
6 that might affect what resources might be available when  
7 called upon?

8           General Rodriguez: Right now, the -- from the European  
9 infrastructure consolidation, most of the moves have been to  
10 the south and east to help the responsiveness of EUCOM  
11 forces to support both CENTCOM and AFRICOM. So, the ones  
12 that got enacted, I agree with, sir.

13           Senator Inhofe: I understand.

14           I don't know where you were when we put together the  
15 whole -- the AFRICOM. You know, before that, it was in  
16 three different commands, and -- PACOM, EUCOM, and, I guess,  
17 CENTCOM. And that was a wise thing to do. But, the  
18 discussion at that time was where to put the headquarters.  
19 And we were all promoting the idea that it should actually  
20 be in Africa. That continent is so huge. We understand  
21 what happened politically at that time, that -- this fear of  
22 colonization and all of that, that people just wouldn't buy  
23 it. But, the presidents would. In fact, I've talked to  
24 most of them, all of the presidents in that area. They  
25 thought that would have been a good idea.

1           At the time that we put it together, AFRICOM, there was  
2           some discussion that, after a period of time, they might  
3           consider making that move. Have you heard anything at all  
4           about that? Is there anything in the mill talking about --

5           General Rodriguez: No. Many of the African leaders  
6           have talked to me about that, but the current assessment by  
7           the Secretary of Defense is to continue to leave it where it  
8           is for the foreseeable future, sir.

9           Senator Inhofe: Yeah. Well, you know, the  
10          "foreseeable future" is beyond us now from when they first  
11          put this thing together. But, I don't know, I know that  
12          would still be a problem.

13          Let me ask you, my first experience with Joseph Kony  
14          and the LRA was way back in 2001. That's 14 years ago.  
15          Joseph Kony was old and sick then. How is he now?

16          General Rodriguez: He's older and sicker, sir.

17          [Laughter.]

18          Senator Inhofe: And do you think that we are getting  
19          in a position right now -- it appears to me, from the  
20          reports that we get -- and I think you'd probably agree;  
21          I'll ask you if you do agree -- that most of the stuff now  
22          he's doing is just trying to move around and avoid it. He's  
23          no longer making the hits that he did back at that time.  
24          And our involvement, which we are -- have been involved in,  
25          is actually being -- is working. General Rodriguez: Yes,

1 sir, it is working. And it's in a great team effort with  
2 all the country teams as well as many of the civilian  
3 organizations that have built a durability in the civilian  
4 population to better resist the problems he has. Right now,  
5 he's about -- down to about 200 real fighters, and the  
6 impact on the civilian population is very minimal. He is  
7 using illicit trafficking to continue to sustain his  
8 efforts. But, it's tough for him, because of continual  
9 pressure over the last 14 years.

10 Senator Inhofe: As he's being chased around -- places  
11 like CAR, Eastern Congo, even, briefly, Rwanda, Uganda,  
12 South Sudan -- it seems like it was a trail of blood  
13 following him. And it's not that way so much anymore. I  
14 just think that we haven't talked about that in a long time.  
15 We need to get on the record that some things are -- seem to  
16 be working there.

17 General Rodriguez: Yes. A long-term effort against  
18 Kony, with, really, you know, fairly modest resources. But,  
19 that long-term effort has done exactly what you said, it has  
20 significantly decreased his impact on any of the civilian  
21 population, sir.

22 Senator Inhofe: Yeah.

23 General Rodriguez, last year you testified that only 12  
24 percent of your ISR requests are being met. I'm reading  
25 this from the transcript last year. Has there been any

1 change in this intelligence gap?

2 General Rodriguez: Just a little bit more, sir. I'm  
3 about 13 percent now. But, that's a great question. As far  
4 as the impacts of sequestration, just for the committee, we  
5 will lose more CAPs in sequestration than I have in the  
6 theater right now. So, you can see the impact that's going  
7 to have on our intelligence, surveillance, and  
8 reconnaissance assets. Thank you.

9 Senator Inhofe: Yeah. Thank you very much.

10 Thank you, Chairman.

11 Chairman McCain: Senator Manchin.

12 Senator Manchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 And thank all three of you for your service to our  
14 country and things that you do every day.

15 With that, General Austin, I said, last year, if I  
16 believed sending U.S. trainers and weapons to Syria would  
17 make Americans safer, I would definitely have supported it.  
18 I did not then, and what I'm hearing from the region further  
19 supports my belief. Last week, reports emerged the  
20 Department of Defense is unable to account for more than  
21 \$500 million of military assistance to Yemen, including  
22 weaponry, aircraft, and equipment -- and I'm sure that you  
23 all have seen the same pictures on YouTube that we're  
24 getting, of our equipment being used for people against us  
25 and against our efforts -- all of which could potentially

1 fall into the hands of Iranian-backed rebels or al-Qaeda.

2 In Syria, we've heard reports that al-Nusra Front  
3 seized U.S. weapons from CIA-trained Syrian rebels,  
4 including 60 to 90 TOW antitank missiles. Two days ago,  
5 video footage was posted of al-Nusra, allegedly showing them  
6 using a captured U.S. TOW missile in a fight. And these are  
7 not just immediate events. We supported individuals in the  
8 '80s -- 1980s in Afghanistan, who formed elements of  
9 Taliban. Last year, in Iraq, we watched ISIS capture  
10 weapons, vehicles, and military equipment that Iraqi  
11 Security Forces abandoned, which are millions and millions  
12 and millions of dollars being used against us now, even  
13 after we spent the better part of a decade training them.  
14 We have a history of supplying weapons and training that end  
15 up being used against us.

16 And, General Austin, who's responsible for the weapons  
17 and equipment the U.S. has supplied in these cases? Or are  
18 these reports accurate? And will any of this bring action  
19 be taken?

20 General Austin: Well, clearly, sir, what -- with not  
21 having the ability to be in Yemen currently to monitor the  
22 disposition of the weapons, then certainly we can't -- we  
23 don't have the ability to oversee the safeguarding or the  
24 employment of those weapon systems. I -- that 500 million,  
25 I believe, was the amount of funds that were required for

1 both providing weapon systems and training. And, as you  
2 know, training eats -- takes up -- it's pretty expensive --

3 Senator Manchin: This was Yemen.

4 General Austin: Yes, sir.

5 Senator Manchin: I know about the 500 million  
6 requested for Syria.

7 The only thing I'm saying is, Is there nobody in our  
8 Government, in our Defense, Pentagon, that's responsible?  
9 Like when we give all this equipment to Yemen, and then we  
10 see it falling apart, do we not have any way to retrieve  
11 that?

12 General Austin: Certainly, in a case like Yemen, sir,  
13 it's -- we don't have the ability to go back and retrieve  
14 it. We don't have --

15 Senator Manchin: But, as we see it falling apart, we  
16 can't take any actions at all to keep it from falling into  
17 --

18 General Austin: Once we've provided the weapons to  
19 them, sir, we --

20 Senator Manchin: It's theirs.

21 General Austin: Yes, sir. We -- and we will continue  
22 to monitor their -- the usage of those weapons and make sure  
23 that, if they're not being used properly, then we don't  
24 continue to provide capability to them. So --

25 Senator Manchin: What -- do you all confirm -- I mean,

1 do you all agree with the reports of how much weapons and  
2 the lethal volatility of these weapons being used against  
3 us? There are weapons being used against us.

4 General Austin: I don't doubt that what's --

5 Senator Manchin: I mean, are these accurate? They're  
6 widely reported.

7 General Austin: Yes, sir. If we're not there, then --  
8 and we've provided weapons, and it's reasonable to expect  
9 that some of that material will fall in the hands of the  
10 people --

11 Senator Manchin: Well, not -- I mean, that's -- let's  
12 just -- let's go with Mosul first, and the Iraqi forces that  
13 abandoned. That was substantial, I'm sure. Correct?

14 General Austin: It was, sir.

15 Senator Manchin: Okay. And we know that's being used  
16 against us.

17 General Austin: Yes, sir.

18 Senator Manchin: Okay. Then we know about Yemen now.  
19 And we have concerns about -- you know, will this be  
20 repeated? And it -- are we taking any steps, from what we've  
21 seen happen? How can you assure me that Syria -- that  
22 whatever -- whoever we support in Syria, that won't fall in  
23 the wrong hands?

24 General Austin: There's no way we can absolutely  
25 assure you that that won't happen, sir. What we do is to

1 try to train the folks that we're working with and providing  
2 capability to, to be responsible as they use and safeguard  
3 these weapons. And, in the event that they are not, then we  
4 certainly quit doing -- we quit providing them the  
5 capability.

6 Senator Manchin: And one quick question for General  
7 Votel.

8 General Votel, in West Virginia, I had the privilege of  
9 observing the training of some of our National Guard --  
10 Special Force soldiers in the National Guard. And both the  
11 19th and 20th Army Special Forces group have fought with  
12 great success in Iraq and Afghanistan, complementing our  
13 Active Duty Special Forces groups. How do you see the  
14 future of the National Guard Special Operations community  
15 moving forward?

16 General Votel: Well, as you just pointed out, they are  
17 absolutely integrated into everything we are doing. So, not  
18 just on the Army side with Special Forces, but on the Air  
19 Guard side. And so, some of our unique ISR capabilities,  
20 our manned ISR capabilities, will reside in some of our Air  
21 Guard and Air Reserve organizations. So, they are  
22 absolutely and totally integrated into everything that we  
23 are doing now and will do in the future.

24 Senator Manchin: Thank you.

25 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1           Senator Wicker: General Austin, when it comes to  
2 fighting ISIL, I appreciate your determination, your  
3 military drive. And that's coming through. I do question  
4 the sort of optimistic note that you have in your testimony,  
5 because it just seems that things are not going as  
6 positively as you're suggesting.

7           You mentioned, beginning on page 11 of your testimony,  
8 "The President's announcement this past September, five key  
9 elements to what the administration wants to do involving  
10 coalition partners, Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon, train and  
11 equip, having reliable partners to assist on the ground."  
12 And then you say, "Once we do all these things, we will have  
13 defeated ISIL through a combination of sustained pressure, a  
14 systematic dismantling of ISIL's capabilities, and by  
15 effectively expanding our regional partners' CT capacities."  
16 It's just hard to see -- hard to be very encouraged about  
17 that happening, at this point. And I want to ask about our  
18 partners.

19           Now, not everything we hear is in these big hearings.  
20 We've met with the King of Jordan, not in a classified  
21 setting, but the King of Jordan tells us, "We can't want  
22 this more than the Arab neighborhood wants it." And so, I  
23 do want to ask you about that. He said he'd be going back  
24 and trying to get the partners together and make this work  
25 on the ground.

1 I think everybody has been saying boots on the ground  
2 are going to be needed to defeat ISIL. Are those boots on  
3 the ground going have to be Iraq -- the Iraqi Army boots on  
4 the ground? Because I don't see the Jordanians really having  
5 that capacity. We met with the Ambassadors from UAE and  
6 Saudi Arabia, just the other day, and they want this  
7 coalition to take effect, and they want Egypt to be part of  
8 it. I just wonder who, in that whole list of neighboring  
9 countries, has the capacity to go in and retake this  
10 territory?

11 You mention, on page 12, that we're doing precision  
12 airstrikes. But, I think we all know that that's not going  
13 to get it done. And then you talk about, "The intent of the  
14 regional campaign is not simply to destroy ISIL, but --  
15 although that's our primary objective."

16 So, how is this going to be wrapped up by troops going  
17 in and taking the territory back, and the United States not  
18 employing boots on the ground?

19 General Austin: Thank you, sir.

20 One of -- a couple of things that we said up front was,  
21 number one, that this would take time, because we are  
22 working with indigenous forces, we are using the Iraqi  
23 Security Forces to conduct the ground operations.

24 As you pointed out, sir, we've also said that you can't  
25 do this with just airpower alone. It has to be a complement

1 of fires and maneuver forces on the ground.

2 And our approach is to generate those forces by  
3 training and equipping Iraqi Security Forces. And we're --  
4 you know, as we have halted ISIL's advance into Iraq, we've  
5 started the business of training and equipping new Iraqi  
6 Security Forces so that they'll have the ability to train --  
7 to take back their borders and secure their sovereign  
8 spaces.

9 Senator Wicker: Is there any prospect of Saudi forces  
10 being there in numbers that would be significant? UAE?  
11 Jordanian forces? They've got a police force, but not much  
12 else.

13 General Austin: They all have some capability, sir.  
14 None of them have volunteered to come forward and put boots  
15 on the ground in Iraq right now. In Iraq, certainly Iraq  
16 needs to want to be able to take that on and take those  
17 forces in. But, to this point, as you look at what Saudi's  
18 dealing with on its borders with Yemen, it's currently  
19 focused on that right now. So --

20 But, to answer your question, sir, there is capability  
21 with countries in the region, but none -- no countries have  
22 come forward and volunteered to put boots on the ground in  
23 Iraq.Senator Wicker: Thank you, sir. Well, good luck to  
24 you. And again, I appreciate your determination and resolve.  
25 I hope you're as successful as you believe you will be.

1 General Austin: We will be successful, sir.

2 Chairman McCain: Senator Donnelly.

3 Senator Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 And thank all of you for all your efforts.

5 General Votel, I'd just like to talk about a different  
6 issue for just one minute, and that is, I want to thank you  
7 for your top-down leadership on mental health with the  
8 Special Operations. Since assuming command at SOCOM, you've  
9 been incredibly frank about this challenge. And that,  
10 alone, sends an important message to the troops.

11 Can you talk about the psychological component of your  
12 Preservation of the Force and Family Program, and how that's  
13 going today?

14 General Votel: I can. Thank you for the question,  
15 Senator. We appreciate the continued support we get from  
16 Congress in this very significant challenge to us.

17 We are looking at a variety of things. We are looking  
18 at peer-to-peer programs that we use within organizations to  
19 help provide access to our members and their family members  
20 and others, to reach out and talk to their friends and their  
21 peers about that. And I think this is an important  
22 component of it.

23 Likewise, we are pursuing training programs to ensure  
24 that our leadership, our chaplains, and others are well  
25 trained in the ability to identify those behaviors that we

1 think are related to stress, and potentially which can lead  
2 to suicide.

3 And, third, I think the -- one of the most important  
4 things we are doing is trying to send the very clear message  
5 across the entire SOF force that it is absolutely normal and  
6 expected to ask for help when you need it, and you can do  
7 that without concern of stigma or any concerns about your  
8 standing within the Command. And we are putting -- really  
9 working double tides to put effort on that particular theme  
10 and message throughout this.

11 The real census of our program, here, is to empower  
12 people by communicating early and often, by trying to enable  
13 them, by giving them easy access to programs and resources  
14 so they can get help, and then encouraging them with this  
15 message. So --

16 Senator Donnelly: And will you work us to help us take  
17 the lessons that you've learned at SOCOM and work with the  
18 other parts of our military?

19 General Votel: Absolutely. And we are well --

20 Senator Donnelly: Thank you very much. Thank you.

21 General Austin, it appears that the efforts in Tikrit  
22 are stalled at the moment. And so, my concern, my -- one of  
23 the areas I'm looking at is, How do we empower the moderate  
24 Sunnis? Are they the key to making this work? And if you're  
25 a moderate Sunni -- and I asked this the other day -- the

1 concern would be, Why do you want to team up with the  
2 Shi'ite militia. When ISIS is also Sunni, they may be like  
3 the bad cousin that shows up at the event, but they're still  
4 your cousin. I mean, how do we empower the moderate Sunnis?  
5 And do you see them as the key to moving this thing along  
6 and to having success in Iraq?

7 General Austin: Sir, I do believe that getting the  
8 Sunni population involved is really, really important, in  
9 terms of being successful, going forward. And, you're  
10 right, the previous operation in Tikrit did stall. And it  
11 stalled because, I think, the wrong approach was taken.  
12 Those -- many of the forces that were being employed were  
13 not controlled or supervised by the Ministry of Defense or  
14 Government of Iraq. That has recently changed. As of the  
15 last several days and today, when we -- yesterday, when we  
16 started supporting this effort. We think that this effort  
17 will begin to move forward with the employment of the  
18 Special Operations Forces and the help of our enablers.

19 But, I think --

20 Senator Donnelly: Can you --

21 General Austin: -- that it's absolutely key that,  
22 number one, the government has to be accommodating to both  
23 the Sunni and the Kurd population, and we have to  
24 increasingly get the Sunnis involved.

25 Senator Donnelly: Can you help make that happen?

1 Because the concern is Abadi -- a lot of the folks that  
2 surround him are still from the previous administration.  
3 And the other part about this is, you've had extraordinary  
4 experience in the al-Anbar area, in all the service you're  
5 done for our country throughout Iraq. Can you help to  
6 identify the key Sunni moderate leaders to make them part of  
7 this? And is that what's going to -- you know, you look,  
8 and you say, "Hey, we think we're going to get it right this  
9 time." How do you think this turns out?

10 General Austin: Sir, to answer both your questions, we  
11 are encouraged -- we continue to encourage the leadership in  
12 Iraq to do -- to be more accommodating to the Sunni  
13 population and do some things that are demonstrable, that  
14 are -- that they -- that increases their confidence in the  
15 leadership, in the government. And you may know that we are  
16 helping the Iraqi Security Forces and the Government of Iraq  
17 reach out to the tribal elements in Anbar and bring in some  
18 of those elements to train and equip them and get them  
19 involved in the fight, as well. And those that we have  
20 trained and equipped have performed remarkably well.

21 Senator Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22 Chairman McCain: Senator Fischer.

23 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 General Votel, when we met last week, you talked about  
25 how the resources allowed you to meet threats with moderate

1 risk. And over the past year, we've seen that terror threat  
2 increase, smaller problems become more serious, they become  
3 crisis. And then this -- do you believe that this is part  
4 of the result of the strategy that accepts moderate risk?  
5 Are we less able to nip those problems in the bud and so  
6 that they grow into these serious threats?

7 General Votel: Senator, thanks for the question.

8 I -- first of all, I think we can continue to -- I  
9 think all commanders operate in an area where they're  
10 constantly balancing risk of their forces and the missions  
11 that are being done on a regular basis. And I think that's  
12 what I'm principally paid to do.

13 As we move forward and continue to deal with the  
14 changing and complex situations -- for me, I think it gets  
15 down to prioritization. And, for us, what we will attempt  
16 to do is offset the risk that is associated with increased  
17 operations by ensuring that we prioritize on those  
18 operations for which we can have the biggest impact and we  
19 can help support the broadest national objectives.

20 Senator Fischer: Is Libya a place where we're going to  
21 accept moderate risk?

22 General Votel: That -- again, I think that perhaps may  
23 be a policy question. Certainly, from my perspective,  
24 working with my partner in AFRICOM, we are looking at the  
25 things that we can do to address the threats that are in

1 Libya today.

2 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

3 General Rodriguez, in your opening statement, you say  
4 that, "Libya-based threats to U.S. interests are growing.  
5 If left unchecked, I believe they have the highest potential  
6 among security challenges on the continent to increase risk  
7 to U.S. and European strategic interests in the next 2 years  
8 and beyond." You also described Libya as "emerging as a safe  
9 haven, where terrorists, including al-Qaeda and the Islamic  
10 State of Iraq in the Levant-affiliated groups can train and  
11 rebuild with impunity." That, to me, doesn't sound like  
12 we're on the right trajectory.

13 Do you think our approach to Libya is not adequate?  
14 Are we accepting too much risk?

15 General Rodriguez: Thanks, Senator.

16 For -- first of all, for -- to make sure everybody's  
17 clear on what we're doing in and around Libya, we're -- a  
18 significant effort is going in around Libya to prevent that  
19 from spilling over. So, when you look at what is happening  
20 in Tunisia, in Niger, Chad, and Egypt, we're working with  
21 our partners, as much as we can and as much as we're -- have  
22 the authorities to do that, to strengthen their capacities  
23 to limit the spillover of that effort. We're also working  
24 with our European partners to increase their effort there.  
25 And we are supporting, at this point in time, the U.N.

1 effort to come to a diplomatic solution. And anything past  
2 that will require a policy decision, ma'am.

3 Senator Fischer: How would you rate the success of the  
4 efforts that you just described? The spillover, the work  
5 with our European partners in the U.N.

6 General Rodriguez: The work with our partners has, for  
7 the most part, gone very well, with the exception of one or  
8 two sensational attacks that you read about in Tunisia the  
9 other day; but their capacities have continued to grow, and  
10 they handle that threat every day, as does Niger and Chad.  
11 And the work of the -- the European efforts in the U.N. has  
12 not had as much progress as anybody wants, to date, yet,  
13 ma'am.

14 Senator Fischer: Okay, thank you.

15 And, General Votel, if I can just return to that idea  
16 of moderate risk for my closing questions here. Over the  
17 long term, do you think that, if we see risk continue to  
18 increase, and those smaller problems continue a -- to  
19 accumulate -- how do we prioritize that? If they're viewed  
20 as smaller problems at the time, but yet they continue to  
21 escalate and become greater and greater risk to this  
22 country, not just the region they're in, how are you going  
23 to prioritize? How are you going to address it, and do you  
24 have the resources you need?

25 General Votel: Thanks. Thanks, Senator.

1           Right now, I think I do have the resources that I need  
2 to support the GCC commanders at a moderate level of risk  
3 for the things I'm being asked to do today. What I think we  
4 will do for the future, as I mentioned in my opening  
5 comments here, I think SOF plays a particular role in the  
6 gray zone, in the area before operations, before we get to  
7 open conflict. And so, I think the important piece that I  
8 bring to the geographic combatant commanders is our ability  
9 to come in and help shape, develop partnerships, to help  
10 build capacity, and support relationships in all of those  
11 areas so that we can strengthen partners before big problems  
12 grow into -- or, before small problems grow into big  
13 problems. And I really think that is the direction in which  
14 we should be focusing SOF into the future.

15           Senator Fischer: General Rodriguez, did you have a  
16 response?

17           General Rodriguez: Thanks, Senator.

18           The -- as far as the prioritization is going, again,  
19 that's done by the policymakers, relative to our national  
20 security interests. And then, the input we put, in addition  
21 to the risk, is what our partners can handle and what  
22 they're doing, themselves. And we prioritize it based on a  
23 whole-of-government and interagency effort and who can help  
24 most in different places. So, I think that's what is done  
25 every day in the Defense Department, ma'am.

1           Senator Fischer: Thank you, gentlemen. And thank you  
2 for your service.

3           Thank you, Mr. Chair.

4           Chairman McCain: Senator McCaskill.

5           Senator McCaskill: Thank you.

6           I'm now determined that budget gimmicks have no  
7 attachment to party, that both parties are capable of using  
8 budget gimmicks as we approach the challenges of  
9 sequestration and defense spending. It is now being used,  
10 in the current budget we're debating and the budget that  
11 passed the House yesterday. Rather than confront  
12 sequestration and be honest about the challenges we have in  
13 our base budget that we've all given a lot of time, in terms  
14 of rhetoric, to, we are now going further down the road of  
15 using OCO as a slush fund. It's not good for fiscal  
16 accountability. It's not good for restoring faith of the  
17 American people that we can face the tough decisions and not  
18 retreat to rhetoric and gimmickry that is not really true.  
19 We're not going to build a -- as my colleague has said,  
20 we're not going to build a PX someplace in America with OCO  
21 funds. The question is, Can we use -- and I'll ask you all  
22 -- Do you believe that the Army can buy back force strength  
23 with OCO funds?

24           General Austin: I do not, Senator.

25           Senator McCaskill: Do you believe that the Navy can

1 address the shortfalls in shipping with OCO funds?

2 General Rodriguez: No, ma'am.

3 Senator McCaskill: Okay.

4 I just think that we've got to be -- and I'm -- believe  
5 me, I'm not saying that we come to this with clean hands, as  
6 Democrats. We don't, because we have engaged in gimmickry,  
7 also. But, I know that the Chairman wants to face this  
8 head-on, and I know it's a challenge in this political  
9 environment. But, I did want to bring it up, that we have  
10 obviously not met the challenge with the budget as it's  
11 currently configured.

12 I wanted to specifically ask you, General Austin, about  
13 something that's very troubling to me, and that is that I've  
14 been told that there has been a determination that Operation  
15 Freedom Sentinel is a new contingency operation. It -- do  
16 you see it as a new contingency operation?

17 General Austin: It's a continuation of our efforts,  
18 Senator, so, you know, I -- in terms of the types of things  
19 that we're doing, you know, we're continuing to train the --  
20 and advise and assist the Afghan Security Forces. But, in  
21 terms of, you know, how we account for the funding, that's  
22 -- that we're allocating to that, that's a different issue.  
23 So --

24 Senator McCaskill: Well, the reason I'm asking this  
25 is, I'm told that there is an effort underway of naming a

1 new lead Inspector General in Afghanistan, as opposed to  
2 SIGAR of the Special Inspector General on Afghanistan. And  
3 I think, if that determination is made -- I just want to  
4 make sure everybody understands -- that's going to impose a  
5 lot of additional burdens, in terms of oversight  
6 requirements, on contracting. You know, I know there's  
7 continuity in SIGAR. I don't understand the value right now  
8 of changing Inspector Generals at this point on the projects  
9 that are ongoing that the Special Inspector General in  
10 Afghanistan is aware of and is working on. I don't get it.  
11 And if there is really a sincere attempt to replace him by  
12 labeling this a new contingency, somebody's going to have  
13 some explaining to do, I think, to me and, I hope, others on  
14 this committee, as to why that would be a good idea. Are you  
15 aware of an effort to do that at this point?

16 General Austin: I don't know -- I am not aware of the  
17 effort. But, certainly, I'll go -- I'll find out, I'll look  
18 into it, Senator.

19 [The information referred to follows:]

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1           Senator McCaskill: That would be terrific. As you  
2 know, we've worked very closely with the Special Inspector  
3 Generals, both in Iraq and Afghanistan. I think the body of  
4 work they have done is incredibly helpful to our Nation's  
5 military. As we look at how we honestly confront  
6 sequestration, one of the ways is being better stewards of  
7 the resources that we have allocated to these efforts.

8           General Rodriguez, I understand that most of the  
9 servicemembers who deployed to Africa as part of the ebola  
10 response, Operation United Assistance, have begun returning  
11 home. Is there any effort to keep track of the number of  
12 contractors around this effort and how many of them have  
13 been pulled and how many of them remain in ebola as we  
14 continually try to stay on top of contractor costs?

15           General Rodriguez: Yes, ma'am, there is. There's a  
16 very, very strict accounting that is done. We've had  
17 oversight from the DOD IG from the beginning, and we were  
18 very cognizant of the challenges with contractor oversight  
19 and also paying too much money for contracts that's out of  
20 line with what the USAID as well as the host nation is  
21 providing. So, we have a strict accounting on it, yes,  
22 ma'am.

23           Senator McCaskill: That would be terrific. We'd love  
24 it if you would share that with --

25           General Rodriguez: Yes, ma'am.

1 Senator McCaskill: -- with our office.  
2 [The information referred to follows:]  
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1           Senator McCaskill: And also, General Austin, if you  
2 could share with us how many contractors have been plussed-  
3 up in Iraq as a result of our efforts against ISIL. You  
4 know, we had gotten to the point that we were just counting  
5 contractors in Afghanistan, now we're back to counting  
6 contractors again in Iraq. And we would appreciate an  
7 update on that number, also.

8           General Austin: Yes, Senator. I'll take that for the  
9 record.

10           [The information referred to follows:]

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1 Senator McCaskill: Thank you so much.

2 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 Chairman McCain: Senator Cotton.

4 Senator Cotton: Thank you, gentlemen, for all your  
5 service and for the men and women who sit behind you, not  
6 just on behalf of all the troops you represent, but you,  
7 personally. I know you've spent many years downrange.

8 General Austin, I want to return to the topic Senator  
9 McCain was addressing about our airstrikes in Tikrit. So,  
10 do I understand you correctly to say that there are now no  
11 Iranian forces in Tikrit?

12 General Austin: The forces that are clearing Tikrit  
13 are ISF forces, Special Operations Forces, and federal  
14 police. And, as of this morning, when I checked with my  
15 commanders, the Shi'a militia and PMF have pulled back.

16 Senator Cotton: So, do -- by "pull back," do we mean  
17 there are still Shi'ite militias, like the Badr organization  
18 or even Iranian forces from Quds Force, in the vicinity of  
19 Tikrit?

20 General Austin: I'm sure they're still in the area.  
21 I'm sure that there are forces probably on the east side of  
22 the river. And, as you know, Tikrit is -- the city of  
23 Tikrit is on the west side of the river.

24 Senator Cotton: Do we know the whereabouts of Qasem  
25 Suleimani?

1           General Austin: To my understanding, Qasem Suleimani  
2 is -- you know, my last update, he was not in Tikrit or in  
3 that area.

4           Senator Cotton: In any way have we implemented fire  
5 control measures to ensure that we don't strike any of the  
6 Shi'ite paramilitary forces or Iranian elements that are in  
7 the vicinity of Tikrit?

8           General Austin: We certainly have -- we've caused the  
9 Iraqi Security Forces to develop a scheme of maneuver that  
10 can effectively accomplish the mission of clearing the town.  
11 And our fires are supportive of that effort. And so, we're  
12 focused on that. We always do everything that we can to  
13 ensure that there's not excessive collateral damage. But,  
14 our focus is on the ISF forces that we're supporting.

15          Senator Cotton: Would you consider it collateral  
16 damage if members of the Quds Force, to include Qasem  
17 Suleimani, was in the vicinity of an American airstrike?

18          General Austin: I would consider that unintended  
19 consequences.

20          Senator Cotton: Does Qasem Suleimani have freedom of  
21 movement within Iraq?

22          General Austin: I believe he does, Senator.

23          Senator Cotton: General Votel, 6 months ago, President  
24 Obama cited Yemen as a example of a success of our  
25 counterterrorism strategy. Do you believe Yemen is a

1 success story today?

2 General Votel: Certainly with the withdrawal of our  
3 SOF forces over the weekend, it's certainly put us in a  
4 different posture right now, particularly against the threat  
5 that we were focused on, there, of al-Qaeda in the Arabian  
6 Peninsula. So, it's much more challenging today than it was  
7 when we had people on the ground.

8 Senator Cotton: General Austin, do you consider Yemen  
9 a success story today?

10 General Austin: Certainly Yemen is a very troubled  
11 country today, with the challenges that it's facing and the  
12 activity of the Houthis. And so, I think the country's in  
13 turmoil.

14 Senator Cotton: General Austin, approximately 10  
15 months ago, the President released five Taliban commanders  
16 in exchange for Bowe Bergdahl, who yesterday was charged  
17 with desertion by his chain of command. I believe their  
18 house arrest agreement expires in 2 months. Is that  
19 correct?

20 General Austin: I believe that to be correct, Senator.

21 Senator Cotton: Do we know what will happen to those  
22 five Taliban commanders in 2 months in Qatar when that  
23 agreement expires?

24 General Austin: I don't, Senator.

25 Senator Cotton: Will they have freedom of movement

1 both inside and outside Qatar at that point?

2 General Austin: I think that's -- I would probably  
3 have to consult the Qatar Government -- Qatari government  
4 and also the elements in our government that are charged  
5 with monitoring the movement of these elements. So, I can't  
6 answer that, Senator. I can take that for the record and  
7 try to do the research on it.

8 [The information referred to follows:]

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1           Senator Cotton: I would like to get an answer for that  
2 for the record. Thank you, General Austin.

3           And I'll address this to General Austin and General  
4 Rodriguez. Given the situation in Yemen, if there were  
5 action by militants there to block the Mandeb Strait, I  
6 presume that American forces would immediately act to reopen  
7 that strait.

8           General Austin: We would work in conjunction with our  
9 GCC partners to ensure that those straits remain open. It's  
10 one of our core interests, to ensure that we have free flow  
11 of commerce through both straits.

12          General Rodriguez: Yes, sir. We'd also work with both  
13 the host nations of Africa as well as our European partners  
14 to support those efforts, sir.

15          Senator Cotton: Thank you, gentlemen. I appreciate  
16 your answers. And, once again, I appreciate your service to  
17 our country.

18          Chairman McCain: For the record, I'd like a response  
19 to Senator Cotton's question. Do you consider Yemen a  
20 success story, or not? Yes or no. It's pretty simple,  
21 straightforward question.

22          General Austin: It's currently not a success story,  
23 sir.

24          Chairman McCain: General Votel?

25          General Votel: I agree, Senator, it's not a success

1 story today.

2 Chairman McCain: Thank you very much.

3 Senator King.

4 Senator King: When the President made that statement,  
5 he was talking about our antiterrorism efforts against AQAP,  
6 was he not, General Votel?

7 General Votel: I believe that's correct, Senator.

8 Senator King: He wasn't talking about Yemen, itself.  
9 He was talking about the success of our counterterrorism  
10 against AQAP. Naturally, the deterioration of the situation  
11 in Yemen has compromised that.

12 My followup question is, How much has it compromised  
13 it? Are we able to maintain that counterterrorism effort  
14 against AQAP, or is that in abeyance, pending the dust  
15 settling in Yemen?

16 General Votel: Well, I think right now, Senator-- I  
17 think what we'll obviously be doing is working in  
18 conjunction with General Austin's headquarters and our other  
19 partners in the area to try to look at how we regain  
20 situational awareness and understanding of what's happening  
21 on the ground, and then look at how we can continue to  
22 address the threats that emanate from Yemen.

23 Senator King: Thank you.

24 I'd like to just briefly associate myself with Senator  
25 McCaskill's comments about using OCO to solve the

1 sequestration problem. It obviously doesn't go the base  
2 budget. And it's unpaid for. It's just absolutely the  
3 wrong way to approach this problem. And I hope that  
4 Congress can find a more realistic and responsible solution  
5 to sequestration.

6 Also, General Austin -- again, without -- because  
7 you've talked to Senator Donnelly about this -- it seems to  
8 me that it's critically important that we use the leverage  
9 that we have, which apparently was used in the Tikrit  
10 battle, to be sure that this isn't a Shi'ite militia-led  
11 offensive. Because if this becomes another version of a war  
12 of Shi'ites against Sunnis, we've lost. This has to be  
13 inclusive. And I hope that your relationship with the --  
14 with President Abadi and the Iraqi government emphasizes  
15 that, because it's -- it's just essential to a successful  
16 outcome in Iraq, regardless of the short-term strategic  
17 advantage in Tikrit or Mosul or -- would you agree with  
18 that?

19 General Austin: Sir, I would. And I would say,  
20 further, that we take -- I take every opportunity to  
21 emphasize those exact points to the leadership in Iraq when  
22 I engage them.

23 Senator King: And it sounds like that -- this  
24 airstrikes in the last couple of days in Tikrit were, in  
25 fact, conditioned on that kind of consideration. Is that

1 correct?

2 General Austin: That's correct, sir. This operation  
3 had to be under the control of the Government of Iraq and  
4 Iraqi Security Forces. There had to be a force, once the  
5 city is cleared, to maintain stability in that city. And  
6 that force needs to be an Iraqi Security Force. And so,  
7 those things -- those conditions were met, early on, in  
8 terms of the planning and the synchronization. And so, we  
9 were able to provide them some support.

10 Senator King: Well, I certainly hope you stay that,  
11 but I think you can argue that a lot of the problems we're  
12 having in Iraq now are because of the Maliki government's  
13 failure to be inclusive. And we can't make that mistake  
14 again.

15 Let's turn for a moment to Afghanistan. We heard a  
16 wonderful, strong, passionate speech from President Ghani  
17 this week. I'm concerned that we're still in a calendar-  
18 driven status in Afghanistan. And even though the President  
19 has allowed troops to stay through 2015, the -- we're still  
20 talking about Kabul-only at the end of 2016. Do you believe  
21 that's going to be sufficient in order to support the  
22 Afghans? I mean, we've made such progress there. I would  
23 just hate to see us pull out, in terms of air support,  
24 authorities for air support, and train-and-direct services.  
25 Give me your thoughts on that.

1           General Austin:  Sir, I certainly agree with you that  
2 the new leadership in Afghanistan causes all of us to be  
3 encouraged and optimistic.  And I think, from what I've seen  
4 both President Ghani do and also the CEO Abdullah do, in  
5 terms of reaching out to the international community, in  
6 terms of reaching out to the folks in the region as well,  
7 it's all encouraging.  The relationships with the security  
8 forces, they're supportive of the security forces.  Their  
9 statements of common goals with the U.S., I think, all very  
10 encouraging.

11           So, I think this gives us opportunities -- new  
12 opportunities that, you know, we didn't have before.  And we  
13 really have to think about what we want our relationship to  
14 be with Afghanistan, going forward, and what it means for  
15 the region.

16           Senator King:  Well, I certainly hope you will counsel  
17 the White House to think seriously about what I would  
18 consider a modest additional investment to maintain the  
19 tremendous gains that have been had.  It's not for sure that  
20 the regime in -- or the Government of Afghanistan can  
21 withstand the Taliban on their own.  And, after what we've  
22 invested over the past 13 years, to walk away at the -- at 5  
23 minutes of midnight and see it all collapse, I think would  
24 be a real shame.  So, I hope you will urge that on the  
25 policymakers, based upon General Campbell and the other

1 information you're receiving from the field. They need not  
2 only those troops, but they need authorities, they --  
3 President Ghani talked about air support. I think that's  
4 going to be crucial. So, carry that message, will you, sir?

5 Chairman McCain: Senator Ernst.

6 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

7 Gentlemen, thank you very much for being here today,  
8 and also to your staff. Thank you for your many years of  
9 combined service to the United States.

10 General Votel, I just want to mention, in your  
11 testimony today -- I would like to thank you for mentioning  
12 not only our Active Duty forces, but the Reserve and  
13 National Guard components, your operators, your  
14 logisticians, your analysts, and so forth. It's all one  
15 team, one fight. So, I appreciate you acknowledging that  
16 today.

17 Something else that you brought up, and a couple of  
18 others have mentioned, too, is stress and suicide with our  
19 Active Duty members and with our veterans, those that have  
20 gotten off of Active Duty. It is important that we continue  
21 with resiliency programs and making sure that, not only are  
22 they physically fit for the fight, but they're mentally fit,  
23 as well. So, thank you for bringing that forward. A number  
24 of us are working on initiatives to make sure that they are  
25 well cared for.

1 I would like to address my question and thoughts --  
2 General Austin and General Votel. Last week was the 12th  
3 anniversary of our entrance into Iraq with the Iraq War.  
4 We've had 3,000 -- excuse me -- 4,000 American servicemen  
5 and -women that have lost their lives in Iraq. And we've  
6 had another 40,000 that have been injured in that war. And  
7 I want to thank you for your service in that war. I know  
8 all of you have engaged, at one point or another, in the war  
9 in Iraq. Many of our servicemen and -women will come home  
10 with not only invisible injuries, but physical injuries that  
11 will impact their lives for many, many years. But, before  
12 we ever entered into Iraq on March 20th of 2003, the Iraqi  
13 Kurds were already engaged and preparing the battlefield  
14 before we ever got there. They have been an important part  
15 of our effort in Iraq. And so, I would like your thoughts  
16 on involving -- more involvement of the Iraqi Kurds, the  
17 Peshmerga, in this fight, and, really, what their role has  
18 been from 2003 forward. If you would please address that.

19 General Austin?

20 General Austin: Thank you, Senator.

21 And I agree. You know, I was, as you probably know,  
22 with the elements when we went into Iraq, back in -- you  
23 know, 12 years ago. And -- whereas, I didn't initially make  
24 it all the way up to Kurdistan, I can tell you that what the  
25 Kurds were doing in the north at that point in time was very

1 instrumental to the forces, our forces that followed in or  
2 flowed in later and facilitated our work there.

3 Most recently, with their efforts in the current fight  
4 against ISIL, they really have done a terrific job. And,  
5 you know, I've talked with President Barzani and his staff,  
6 on numerous occasions, about, you know, what we're doing,  
7 what the requirements were, and what they needed to do more.  
8 As you look at what they've done in the north up there, in  
9 terms of actually inflicting damage on ISIL, I think their  
10 efforts have really shaped this overall fight in a very  
11 positive direction. And they continue to do more on a daily  
12 basis. So, they're a big part of this fight. They've  
13 punched above their weight class, and I think they will  
14 continue to do so.

15 Senator Ernst: General Votel?

16 General Votel: Thank you, Senator.

17 I absolutely agree with what General Austin said. I  
18 would only add that a key part of the Kurdish relationship  
19 really has been the long-term relationship with them. And  
20 so, they were a key partner with SOF forces when we were  
21 there from 2003 through 2011, and helped us address a  
22 variety of networks. And I do believe that the great and  
23 enduring relationship that we have had with them, from a SOF  
24 force to Kurdish force aspect, really was one of the initial  
25 successes we were able to achieve when we went back in there

1 late last summer. We were able to quickly renew those  
2 relationships, draw on those partnerships, and get going  
3 very, very quickly in some areas. And so, that -- to me,  
4 that highlights the importance of that -- of the long-term  
5 relationship that we've been able to develop with them.

6 Senator Ernst: Do you believe that our resources would  
7 be best utilized if we were directly arming the Peshmerga,  
8 the Kurdish forces?

9 General Votel: Well, I think that -- that, I think, is  
10 a policy question. Certainly, they are very capable forces.  
11 And so, I do think they would make good use of any resources  
12 that are provided to them.

13 Senator Ernst: Yes, I think they have been an  
14 exceptional force and ally to our American forces in that  
15 region.

16 Thank you very much, gentlemen, for your service, and  
17 also to your staff for being here in support today.

18 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

19 Chairman McCain: Senator Kaine.

20 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 And thank you, to the witnesses, for your strong  
22 testimony this morning.

23 I want to begin with Yemen. I was intrigued with the  
24 account in news this morning about the Saudi and other  
25 action in Yemen; and, in particular, the number of partners

1 that have been part of this. In addition to Saudi Arabia,  
2 Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, Jordan, Morocco, there is press  
3 report that Egypt is involved, and, perhaps a little  
4 surprisingly, Pakistan and Sudan. So, nine nations, in  
5 addition to Saudi Arabia, springing into action to deal with  
6 this threat of the Houthi takeover of the government in  
7 Yemen.

8 I'm gratified by that. I want to see a region that  
9 will stand up and try to deal with its own problems, rather  
10 than telling us, you know, quietly, that they think it's a  
11 problem, and not doing anything.

12 But, I was also struck by the fact that those nine  
13 nations haven't come together and acted with dispatch  
14 against ISIL. They're involved, but they are not acting  
15 with dispatch against ISIL, even nearly a year into ISIL's  
16 sort of accelerated taking of territory in Syria and Iraq.

17 And, just -- you know, as experts who have spent a lot  
18 of time in the region, what explains why these nine nations  
19 would react with such speed and force to the Houthi takeover  
20 in Yemen, but would not be so engaged in the fight against  
21 ISIL?

22 General Austin: Sir, like you, I am very encouraged  
23 that we've seen what we've seen here in -- recently, with a  
24 number of nations coming together to address a problem. The  
25 core of these nations is -- are GCC nations. And I

1 certainly believe that they all think that Yemen is a very  
2 critical piece of real estate, just based upon the  
3 geography. Most important, it shares a border with Saudi  
4 Arabia and Oman. And I think -- so, the GCC countries are  
5 naturally predisposed to helping protect another GCC  
6 country. And then, the relationships between the Saudis and  
7 the Egyptians and others are really what's driving their  
8 participation there.

9 I would remind you, Senator -- I know you're -- you --  
10 you are very, very well aware of this, but -- the night that  
11 we flew into Syria for the first time, we had five Sunni  
12 Arab-led nations fly in that formation with us, which is  
13 really unprecedented. And we continue to see them offer  
14 support to -- in terms of -- you know, they -- material  
15 support, and they also have offered to train and equip  
16 forces. But, throughout, they have remained with us, in  
17 terms of flying strikes against Syria. So, they have  
18 continued to participate in that. Now, as they begin to  
19 focus on the Yemen problem, naturally, because of resources,  
20 we'll probably see less of an effort in Syria.

21 Senator Kaine: The -- you indicated that you thought  
22 -- in response to earlier questioning -- that you thought  
23 that ISIL was our most pressing challenge, but Iran was our  
24 greatest long-term challenge. Is a possible explanation for  
25 the force of the action against Yemen is that all of these

1 nations believe that Iran is their more pressing challenge,  
2 and actually don't think of ISIL as the same kind of  
3 pressing challenge that they view when they look at Iran?

4 General Austin: I can attest to the fact that they do  
5 see ISIL as a pressing challenge, sir. I do think that a  
6 big driver here is that -- you know, that the geography  
7 associated with this -- Yemen border, Saudi, and Oman -- and  
8 clearly a direct threat to their homeland. So --

9 Senator Kaine: Each of you work in the military lane,  
10 but with partners. Partners: State, AID, DOJ, DEA, DHS,  
11 the intel agencies. There's been questions here about the  
12 effect of sequester on the military mission. But, would you  
13 not also agree that, to the extent that sequester affects  
14 your allied agencies that you work with in your COCOMs or in  
15 Special Forces, that that is also an aspect of sequester  
16 that we need to take seriously if we're trying to avoid  
17 challenges to our national security?

18 General Austin: I agree, Senator.

19 General Rodriguez: I do, too, Senator.

20 General Votel: I definitely agree, Senator.

21 Senator Kaine: General Rodriguez, the attack in  
22 Tunisia was particularly troubling. Tunisia, small country,  
23 but, you know, kind of a bright spot, in a way, in terms of  
24 how they have come out of the Arab Spring with a  
25 constitution, with Islamic parties participating in

1 democracy, even stepping back from power. What has your  
2 observation been about the Tunisian government's -- newly  
3 formed, newly elected government's reaction to the terrorist  
4 attack at the museum in Tunisia? And what's your assessment  
5 of how they are, going forward, and how we can help them  
6 succeed?

7 General Rodriguez: I think that their response has  
8 been very effective. Their military institutions are strong  
9 and was also a stabilizing influence as that -- they went  
10 through that transition. And we continue to work with them  
11 to build some of their capacities with some of our  
12 interagency partners. Those elements were involved in that  
13 effort. And we continue to also share intelligence with  
14 them. And we will continue to build up their capacity to  
15 ensure that they continue to move in a positive trajectory,  
16 sir.

17 Senator Kaine: Thank you.

18 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 Chairman McCain: Senator Sullivan.

20 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 And, gentlemen, thank you for your service.

22 Mr. Chairman, I want to let -- wanted to let you know,  
23 10 years ago, as a Marine Corps major, I had the privilege  
24 of serving with General Austin. And I can tell you he's one  
25 of the finest officers I've ever served with. So, I'm very

1 heartened that he's in this very important position.

2 Chairman McCain: He's not generally very nice to  
3 marines, so I'm glad to hear that.

4 [Laughter.]

5 Senator Sullivan: I see he's got one there on his  
6 staff, so, keeping in full tradition of the CENTCOM respect  
7 for the Marine Corps, I appreciate that.

8 General Votel, I wanted to ask you a question relating  
9 to -- really some clarification. You know, one of the  
10 things I think it's very important for us, in the Congress  
11 and in the military and in the administration, is to speak  
12 with language that's -- gives our citizens a sense of what's  
13 really happening. And one of the things that you hear a lot  
14 about now -- President, the administration, talks a lot  
15 about, you know, "winding down combat operations," "combat  
16 operations are over," "we've ended combat operations in  
17 Afghanistan." That's been stated several times. The  
18 President of Afghanistan even mentioned that in a joint  
19 session of Congress yesterday. But, you also mentioned that  
20 we have a robust CT effort. So, aren't we kind of speaking  
21 out of both sides of our mouths? Isn't a robust CT effort  
22 the very definition of combat operations? And don't we  
23 still have combat operations going on in Afghanistan?

24 General Votel: We are -- Senator, thanks for the  
25 question -- we are obviously supporting our Afghan partners

1 in their execution of what could be termed as combat  
2 operations, at their effort.

3 To your first part of your question with respect to,  
4 you know, counterterrorism, you know, counterterrorism, I  
5 think, is -- as we pursue this here, isn't -- is not just  
6 the kinetic aspect of it. And --

7 Senator Sullivan: But, it is kind of the epitome of  
8 combat operations.

9 General Votel: It is --

10 Senator Sullivan: Aren't American soldiers, when  
11 they're conducting combat operations in Afghanistan, or  
12 counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan -- isn't that the  
13 definition of combat operations? They're going in with  
14 weapons, killing bad guys. Correct?

15 General Votel: We are not doing that today. What we  
16 --

17 Senator Sullivan: There's no --

18 General Votel: -- are doing --

19 Senator Sullivan: There's no CT operations where we're  
20 engaged --

21 General Votel: There are --

22 Senator Sullivan: -- with the enemy?

23 General Votel: There are CT operations. But, CT  
24 operations involve not only helping and enabling our  
25 partners, who are helping us with our CT objectives, the

1 conduct of discreet action that we are taking, like kinetic  
2 strikes that are specifically against threats there, and  
3 then how we address the overall ideology and narrative  
4 aspect of this. So, there --

5 Senator Sullivan: But, our CT operations are not  
6 members of the U.S. military in action against enemy forces?

7 General Votel: Right now, today, we are not putting  
8 people as -- in unilateral U.S. operations in against forces  
9 on the ground in Afghanistan. We are supporting our Afghan  
10 partners as we get after those, and we are doing other  
11 operations related to those networks.

12 Senator Sullivan: Okay. I -- again, I think that  
13 clarification is important, just because -- seems to me if  
14 we have Special Forces operators in Afghanistan, in direct  
15 combat, we should let the American people know. But, if  
16 you're saying that's not the case, that there's no combat  
17 going on, there's no SF actions, direct actions, against al-  
18 Qaeda operatives or anything else like that -- is that --

19 General Votel: Senator, I'm not saying there's no  
20 combat going on. What I'm saying is, there's no unilateral  
21 U.S. combat going on. We are working through our partners  
22 when we do operations on the ground.

23 Senator Sullivan: Do we have JTACs on the ground,  
24 either in Syria or Iraq, calling in missions?

25 General Votel: We have JTACs that are operating at

1 command-and-control locations --

2 Senator Sullivan: But, they're not on the ground --

3 General Votel: They're --

4 Senator Sullivan: -- front-line troops calling in --

5 General Votel: They're certainly not accompanying  
6 forces forward, doing operations.

7 Senator Sullivan: General Austin, I was wondering --  
8 you know, you mentioned the whole-of-government approach  
9 with regard to ISIL. I appreciate that. Appreciate the  
10 fact that you're focused on the military aspects of that.  
11 But, what are the other instruments of power that we're  
12 bringing to bear with regard to -- American power with  
13 regard to ISIL? And -- I just haven't really seen the  
14 administration articulate that at all. You mentioned it in  
15 your testimony. I think that's very encouraging. But, what  
16 is it? We haven't really seen it. Again, I know it's not  
17 your realm that you're responsible for, but it would be  
18 heartening to know what other instruments of our American  
19 power we're integrating to the fight with regard to  
20 defeating ISIS.

21 General Austin: There are a couple of important things  
22 that have to be done, Senator, as you know, in order to  
23 really defeat this enemy. The kinetic piece of it's one  
24 issue. But, you really have to take -- do some very  
25 constructive things to begin to cut off the enemy's ability

1 to resource themselves. So, countering the threat financing  
2 is one issue. And then stopping the flow of foreign  
3 fighters, or slowing down the flow of foreign fighters.  
4 Both of those issues have to be worked by, you know, our  
5 government -- whole-of-government, and they have to be  
6 worked in conjunction with other countries, not only in the  
7 region, but internationally.

8 And also, there is a requirement or a need to counter  
9 the narrative. And so, I think we have to do more there. I  
10 know there are some initial steps that have been taken to  
11 begin to do that, but there's a lot of work yet to be done.

12 Senator Sullivan: Thank you.

13 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 Chairman McCain: Senator Ayotte.

15 Senator Ayotte: Thank you, Chairman.

16 I want to thank the witnesses for being here and for  
17 what you've done for our country, and continue to do.

18 I wanted to ask, General Austin again, a couple of  
19 questions about Yemen. Senator Kaine had pointed out that  
20 there were -- in addition to the Saudis, there were nine  
21 other countries that were participating in this coalition to  
22 assist in Yemen. So, just to be clear, we've been,  
23 obviously, participating, State Department side, on  
24 negotiations with Iran for -- very intensely, probably for  
25 the last year, at least, if not more. And during that

1 period, what has Iran been doing in Yemen? And is it not  
2 the fact that Iran's influence in support of the Houthis  
3 which is, in part, prompting the Saudis and others to engage  
4 in this?

5 General Austin: Certainly, Senator, Iran is -- has  
6 been enabling the activity of the Houthis as they've done  
7 what they've done. And I would go further to say that, you  
8 know, Iran's desire is to be a hegemon in this region.

9 Senator Ayotte: Meaning regional domination.

10 General Austin: Right. Right.

11 Senator Ayotte: Yeah.

12 General Austin: And it -- as it seeks to increase its  
13 influence in various countries, it does so through the reach  
14 of the Shi'a populations in those countries. That won't  
15 allow Iran to dominate any specific country in the region,  
16 but what it does do is, it increases -- it serves to  
17 increase sectarian tension, and thereby, it serves as a  
18 destabilizing effort.

19 Senator Ayotte: Let me just be clear. When we're  
20 talking support, both -- I know, General Votel, you're  
21 familiar with this, as well -- when we're talking about the  
22 support, we're talking about money and arms, aren't we? I  
23 mean, we're not just talking about, "Boy, we support you,  
24 because you're Shi'a." I mean, we're talking about actual  
25 support. Aren't they giving -- on the ground?

1           General Austin: Yes, we -- yes, Senator, we are  
2 talking about material support, as well. And -- but, again,  
3 I think that support is provided through the Shi'a --

4           Senator Ayotte: Through their proxies --

5           General Austin: Right.

6           Senator Ayotte: -- they give them the money and the  
7 arms, which has undermined our interests in the mission that  
8 we had, and cooperation that we had, to try to deal with al-  
9 Qaeda. Isn't that right, General Votel? In Yemen?

10          General Votel: I -- yes, Senator, I think it is true.

11          Senator Ayotte: So, the other thing I wanted to ask  
12 about, General Austin, is Bahrain. We have an important  
13 partnership in Bahrain, do we not? In fact, we have the  
14 location there of the United States 5th Fleet, correct?

15          General Austin: That's correct, Senator.

16          Senator Ayotte: And what's Iran doing with regard to  
17 the Bahrain Government right now, which is a Sunni  
18 government? As I understand it, they are also trying to  
19 destabilize that government, which, of course, would, in my  
20 view, threaten our interests there.

21          General Austin: Correct, Senator. We see the same  
22 reach through the Shi'a population, which increases  
23 sectarian tension and serves as a destabilizing effect.

24          Senator Ayotte: Which -- you know, obviously, Bahrain  
25 is a different country than Yemen, but it's a similar

1     playbook in a different country, is it not?

2             General Austin:  It's a similar approach.  I --

3             Senator Ayotte:  Similar approach, but I -- I mean,  
4     obviously, they're very different countries.

5             General Austin:  Yes, ma'am.

6             Senator Ayotte:  But, I think we need to be clear here  
7     what Iran's activities have been.  And, as I look at your  
8     testimony, you -- one of the things you pointed out, General  
9     Austin, is that the Iran routinely engages in malign  
10    activity through the Iranian threat network.  Iran is also  
11    engaging in malign activity through support to proxy actors,  
12    such as Lebanese Hezbollah and Hamas, which threatens the  
13    sovereignty and security of Israel.  This has all been going  
14    on in addition to undermining our interests in Yemen,  
15    correct?

16            General Austin:  That's correct.

17            Senator Ayotte:  So, you know, this is obviously, I  
18    think, as we look at this issue of the regional -- attempt  
19    at regional domination by Iran, this is of deep concern to  
20    us, in the long term, and even in the short term, in terms  
21    of how this region can be destabilized further.  Is that  
22    true?

23            General Austin:  There is a significant concern, for a  
24    long time -- long-term effects, in terms of this type of  
25    behavior destabilizing the region and having effects in

1 other parts of the globe, as well.

2 Senator Ayotte: And, in fact, I think could further  
3 fuel sort of a Sunni-Shi'a fight in the region if they  
4 continue their efforts towards regional domination. Would  
5 you agree?

6 General Austin: Yeah, I would.

7 Senator Ayotte: Thank you.

8 I just wanted to comment, as well, on Senator Cotton's  
9 question to you about the status of the Taliban five. And I  
10 know that you're going to get back to him on it, but I have  
11 to say, I find it shocking, the fact that you are Commander  
12 of AFRICOM and that the State Department has not already  
13 coordinated with you. It's not -- not putting this on you,  
14 is -- my point is, the fact that we've got these dangerous  
15 -- you're -- you know, you're the Commander of CENTCOM.  
16 These two countries, Qatar and also where the Taliban five  
17 is from and could return and could prevent -- and present  
18 great danger into Afghanistan. It would seem to me that you  
19 would be, I would hope, most closely consulted on this. So,  
20 I'm actually kind of dumfounded that they aren't consulting  
21 you now and that there doesn't appear to be a plan.

22 So, you know, I look forward to the followup, but, you  
23 know, to the State Department, to everyone else out there,  
24 to this administration, seems to me the Commander of CENTCOM  
25 needs to be brought in this, in terms of the five potential

1 commanders that could get back on the ground in Afghanistan  
2 and threaten our troops.

3 Chairman McCain: Senator Lee.

4 Senator Lee: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 And thanks, to all of you here today, and to the men  
6 and women who serve under your command, and all you do to  
7 help protect us.

8 Last year, I expressed some reluctance regarding the  
9 Syria train-and-equip program, based on concerns that any  
10 lethal assistance that we may provide might end up  
11 inadvertently -- or, in some cases, perhaps purposely -- end  
12 up in the hands of some of the very extremists that we're  
13 attempting to fight against. And that could possibly fuel  
14 further violence in the region.

15 While I believe that the servicemembers who are under  
16 your command, who are in the process of executing this  
17 program, are the most skilled in the world at what they do  
18 -- and that's really what gives this program the very best  
19 chance of success -- the losses of U.S.-provided equipment  
20 by the Iraqi Security Forces last year, and in Yemen this  
21 year, are stark lessons that the fluid and volatile nature  
22 of the Middle East can compromise even our best-laid plans.

23 I'm further concerned that, for this program to have  
24 the best chance of success, the United States will need to  
25 become more militarily involved in this conflict than many

1 Americans may realize.

2 Secretary Carter stated recently, when referring to the  
3 forces that we train and equip in Syria, that, quote, "We  
4 will have some obligation to support them after they're  
5 trained," close quote. Yet, we don't know what that support  
6 would look like, nor do we know, at this point, what the  
7 costs associated with that would look like.

8 This program, as part of the administration's strategy  
9 to address the ISIS threat, should be fully and openly  
10 debated in this body so that the American people might have  
11 a say in how their military forces are used.

12 General Austin, since this program was conceptualized,  
13 it was reasonable to expect a situation in which Syrian  
14 rebels we armed might face a larger or better-equipped army  
15 -- larger or better-equipped enemy. Why was the decision  
16 made to start the train-and-equip program -- why was that  
17 decision made before determining whether the United States  
18 would provide further protection or support for the groups  
19 once they were trained and equipped and returned to Syria?

20 General Austin: It was made because we will need a --  
21 an element on the ground to complement the work that we're  
22 doing with our fires to begin to counter ISIL in Syria.  
23 And, you know, my best military advice as we go forward is  
24 that, as we introduce forces that we've trained and  
25 equipped, then we should provide them support. We should

1 not only look to provide them fires, we should provide them  
2 logistics, we should provide them intel support, as well.  
3 And so, I think that gives them the best opportunity for  
4 success.

5 Senator Lee: So, do you think that Assad's forces in  
6 Syria will attempt to attack some of these opposition  
7 members that we've trained and equipped? And, if so, what  
8 level of military involvement should we expect from American  
9 forces?

10 General Austin: I think there's a likelihood that that  
11 can happen. We'll try to -- initially, as we put forces in  
12 and begin to build combat power, we'll put them in those  
13 positions where they are focused on ISIL. That's the first  
14 task at hand. And then, again, if they are attacked, then I  
15 think we should protect them.

16 Senator Lee: What do we do if the forces that we train  
17 and equip end up attacking Assad's forces?

18 General Austin: Well, initially, that's not the --  
19 that's not what we -- we're focused on. So, we will  
20 discontinue providing support to those forces if they vector  
21 off and do things that we haven't designed them to do  
22 initially and asked them to focus on initially.

23 Senator Lee: Do you think that the success of the  
24 opposition groups that we're training and equipping, that  
25 we're supporting, do you think that'll require a new

1 governing structure in Damascus? And, if so, would the U.S.  
2 military be involved in helping to facilitate that change?

3 General Austin: I think eventually forces will need to  
4 plug into some type of structure, for sure. And again,  
5 that's not what the military typically does. But, again,  
6 this is a whole-of-government approach, here, so --

7 Senator Lee: Okay, thank you, General Austin.

8 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9 Chairman McCain: General, I'd just like to follow up  
10 on what Senator Lee said. In Syria, these young people we  
11 are training and we send them back into Syria, if they're  
12 attacked by Assad, we're not going to protect them?

13 General Austin: Sir, I --

14 Chairman McCain: Are we going to protect them?

15 General Austin: My thought -- my recommendation would  
16 be that we protect them, no matter who's attacking them.  
17 So, we have to protect these forces once we've trained them  
18 and put them on the ground.

19 Chairman McCain: Well, are we going to have any  
20 provision to protect them?

21 General Austin: We currently don't have that, that  
22 policy decision, sir. But, as I --

23 Chairman McCain: So, we're going to train them to go  
24 back into Syria; and, if Bashar Assad barrel-bombs them, we  
25 don't have a policy yet as to whether we protect them, or

1 not?

2 General Austin: We -- currently, sir, that decision  
3 has not been taken, and --

4 Chairman McCain: Well, then why are we training them  
5 if we're not going to be able to tell them that we're not  
6 going to -- whether we're going to protect them, or not?

7 General Austin: I'm very hopeful that we will be able  
8 to tell them that, sir.

9 Chairman McCain: Well, I'm very hopeful, too. But,  
10 hope really doesn't stop barrel-bombing.

11 Could you -- could I ask you again when it is that the  
12 Saudis notified you that they were going to begin attacks in  
13 Yemen?

14 General Austin: Sir, I had a discussion with the Saudi  
15 CHOD the day of the attack, so it was not much before that  
16 they actually started the attacks.

17 Chairman McCain: Isn't that quite a commentary on our  
18 relationship with Saudi Arabia and the other 13 countries in  
19 their coalition, that they would -- on literally the day of  
20 their attacks, they tell you that -- tell the United States  
21 of America that they're going to launch a major campaign? I  
22 mean, that is really a fantastic indicator of the  
23 deterioration of the trust and confidence that these  
24 countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, have in us. And it  
25 authenticates what has been quoted quite frequently, that

1 some people believe it's better to be an enemy of the United  
2 States than a friend. And -- I mean, this is really quite  
3 remarkable.

4 And again, finally, I do not know how you recruit young  
5 people to fight, and tell them that they're going to back in  
6 to a country, and we don't have a policy yet whether we're  
7 going to protect them, or not. General, that's immoral.  
8 It's not only unworkable, it's immoral to tell people to not  
9 -- to tell the -- be able to tell them that, if we train and  
10 equip them to go in and fight, that we're not going to --  
11 that we haven't yet got a policy on whether we're going to  
12 protect them, or not. I would say that that would also be  
13 something of a disincentive for recruitment.

14 So, I hope, for the sake of these young people's lives  
15 that we are training now, that we at least have a policy  
16 decision as to whether we're going to protect them, or not.

17 And, of course, the best way to do that is with a no-fly  
18 zone, which has been recommended, years ago, without any  
19 result from this President.

20 Senator Gillibrand.

21 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22 I want to follow the Chairman's line of questioning.  
23 So, what do you believe the strategy is for this new  
24 campaign? And what's the ultimate goal? In Yemen, sorry.

25 General Austin: I don't know what the Saudis -- the

1 specifics of their goals and objectives. I can tell you  
2 that they're interested, number one, in protecting their  
3 homeland -- they have a border with Yemen, obviously -- and  
4 also, that they received requests from the President of  
5 Yemen to help with military assistance. So --

6 Senator Gillibrand: What advice have you given, or  
7 will you give, the President about what our role should be?

8 General Austin: Our current position is that we'll  
9 help the Saudis with intelligence and logistics and planning  
10 support. And again, they're great partners, and I think  
11 they're very much appreciative of the help that we'll  
12 provide them.

13 Senator Gillibrand: What's your assessment of the  
14 likelihood of success?

15 General Austin: In Yemen?

16 Senator Gillibrand: Yes.

17 General Austin: Again, Senator, I don't currently know  
18 the specific goals and objectives of the Saudi campaign.  
19 And I'd have to know that to be able to assess the  
20 likelihood of success.

21 Senator Gillibrand: Well, I do hope you get that  
22 information sooner than later, because, you know, more than  
23 \$500 million in U.S. military assistance to Yemen can no  
24 longer be accounted for and has fallen into the wrong hands.  
25 We have a role in Yemen that we have to have much greater

1 accountability for. How does something like that happen?  
2 And, given the instability in the region, what steps should  
3 the U.S. be taking to protect or prevent losses like that in  
4 the future?

5 General Austin: Yeah, so the \$500 million, as I  
6 understand it, Senator, were -- is the amount of investment  
7 over an 8-year period that we've made to help the Yemeni  
8 government, the Yemeni military forces, or security forces,  
9 build capacity. This not only includes materials, but it  
10 also includes training. And, as you know, training can be  
11 somewhat costly. When we are there, we have the ability to  
12 monitor how this equipment's being used. But, of course, you  
13 know, the embassy's no longer there, and it doesn't have a  
14 Office of Security Cooperation that would typically do these  
15 things. And so, we don't have that ability, currently. If  
16 we have the opportunity to go back in and partner with the  
17 new government, or a government, then I think, you know,  
18 that'll be a -- one of our focus areas.

19 Senator Gillibrand: Well, given that the Houthis are  
20 still in control, how do you believe we should deal with al-  
21 Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, given the state of Yemen?

22 General Austin: Thanks, Senator. I think that, as we  
23 have done and will continue to do in every case where we  
24 don't have people on the ground but there is a threat there  
25 that we need to be concerned about, we'll use every

1 intelligence-collection capability that's available to us to  
2 continue to monitor what's going on with this extremist  
3 network. And we do have resources that are in the region  
4 that we can use to apply to counter this network once we've  
5 developed the appropriate intelligence.

6 Senator Gillibrand: And what do you see is the  
7 presence of ISIL in the region? And is that going to be  
8 affected by the state of Yemen today?

9 General Austin: If I could get you to -- if I could  
10 ask a question on -- get you to ask that question again,  
11 Senator, I missed a piece of it. How do I see --

12 Senator Gillibrand: How do you see the threat of ISIL  
13 in that region?

14 General Austin: Well, I think the threat of ISIL in  
15 the region, Senator, is the most pressing threat that we're  
16 facing. And, as I --

17 Senator Gillibrand: In Yemen. I'm still on Yemen.

18 General Austin: In Yemen, that's really undetermined.  
19 I know that the most recent attack was attributed to an ISIL  
20 element in Yemen, but I think the intelligence agencies are  
21 still working their way through that, you know, to determine  
22 the veracity of whether or not this is really a hardcore  
23 ISIL element or someone claiming to be ISIL or, you know,  
24 what this really is. Clearly, AQAP is dominant in that  
25 country. And whether or not ISIL and AQAP can coexist is

1 left to be seen.

2 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you very much.

3 Chairman McCain: I thank the witnesses, and --

4 Senator Cotton: Senator McCain, can --

5 Chairman McCain: Senator Cotton.

6 Senator Cotton: One point, to follow up on something  
7 that he just said. There's a Breaking News Alert from the  
8 Associated Press, General Austin, that Egypt and Saudi  
9 Arabia have begun a ground incursion into Yemen. Did Saudi  
10 Arabia or any other country give you or Central Command  
11 advance notice of this, if this report is accurate?

12 General Austin: No, I did not have advance notice of  
13 that.

14 Senator Cotton: Thank you.

15 Chairman McCain: That's quite a commentary.

16 This hearing is adjourned.

17 [Whereupon, at 11:37 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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