

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON COUNTER-ISIL (ISLAMIC STATE
OF IRAQ AND THE LEVANT) OPERATIONS AND MIDDLE EAST
STRATEGY

Thursday, April 28, 2016

Washington, D.C.

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U.S. Senate

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Committee on Armed Services

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Washington, D.C.

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10 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:32 a.m. in
11 Room SH-216, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. John McCain,
12 chairman of the committee, presiding.

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Committee Members Present: Senators McCain

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[presiding], Inhofe, Sessions, Wicker, Ayotte, Fischer,

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Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Lee, Graham, Reed,

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Nelson, McCaskill, Manchin, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal,

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Donnelly, Hirono, Kaine, King, and Heinrich.

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

3 Chairman McCain: Well, good morning. Good morning,
4 ladies. Good morning. The Senate Armed Services Committee
5 meets this morning to receive testimony on the U.S. strategy
6 in the Middle East and efforts to counter so-called Islamic
7 State.

8 I thank our distinguished witnesses for appearing
9 before us this morning and for their continued service to
10 our Nation during a time of war. Please convey the
11 gratitude and appreciation of this committee to all the men
12 and women you lead.

13 Since our witnesses last appeared before this
14 committee, we have seen a steady increase in operational
15 activity in Iraq and Syria. Airstrikes have steadily
16 increased and improved; new capabilities, such as the A-10
17 and now attack helicopters, have gradually been added;
18 efforts to train and equip vetted Syrian forces have been
19 restarted and slowly expanded; and additional U.S. troops
20 have been periodically deployed to the fight, a few dozen
21 and a few hundred at a time. These operational adjusted --
22 adjustments have resulted in some operational gains. We
23 have seen security -- Iraqi Security Forces make modest
24 gains against ISIL in Anbar Province, and a coalition of
25 Syrian Kurds with small numbers of Sunni Arabs take

1 territory away from ISIL across parts of northern Syria. All
2 the while, the United States and coalition Special Operation
3 Forces continue their daily degrading of ISIL fighters in
4 Iraq and Syria. These gains are real and encouraging, and
5 testify to the excellence of our military leaders and troops
6 on the ground.

7 The purpose of this hearing is certainly to review
8 those operational issues, but, more importantly, to try to
9 put them into some strategic context. Too often, it seems,
10 policymakers, politicians, and the media all want to engage
11 at the operational level. I understand. Military
12 operations are important and interesting. But, I worry that
13 we are staring at our challenges in the broader Middle East
14 through soda straws. We need to lift our sights.

15 At a more strategic level, we see a Middle East
16 descending into chaos. In the words of Henry Kissinger --
17 and I quote -- "There's a struggle for power within states,
18 a conflict between states, a conflict between ethnic and
19 religious groups, and an assault on the international
20 system." While the epicenter of this conflict for power and
21 identity is in Iraq and Syria, where ISIL established its
22 caliphate, it is a growing contagion that affects Libya,
23 Egypt, Yemen, parts of East and West Africa, Afghanistan,
24 and beyond. And, as we have seen from Paris to San
25 Bernardino to Brussels, this threat is increasingly capable

1 of targeting us, as many of us predicted that it would. And
2 yet, at this strategic level, we always seem to be a step
3 behind, a day late, and a dollar short. While too many of
4 our leaders, both in the administration and, yes, in the
5 Congress, too, fixated on and sought to micromanage military
6 operations in Iraq and Syria, ISIL executed a strategic
7 countermove, launching sophisticated attacks into the heart
8 of Western civilization and deepening its presence in Libya.
9 In a country that America helped to liberate 5 years ago and
10 then precipitously abandoned, we now see thousands of
11 terrorists in training camps and reports of external attack
12 plotting, all the warning signs that existed in Afghanistan
13 on September 10th, 2001. The administration increasingly
14 appears focused on this problem, but, once again, the
15 response has been reactive, slow, and insufficient.

16 Similarly with Russia, last year Vladimir Putin moved
17 to fill the strategic vacuum that the United States has left
18 in the Middle East. In its first out-of-country military
19 since the time of the tsars, Russian forces moved into
20 Syria, doubled down on the Assad regime, and decimated the
21 moderate Syrian opposition groups that America and our
22 allies said we were supporting. Russia has used Syria as a
23 live-fire exercise for its modernizing military.

24 Despite predictions of a Russian quagmire, Putin has
25 instead used limited military means to achieve distinct

1 political goals. Despite Putin's pledged withdrawal from
2 Syria, Assad's forces, backed by Russia, now appear poised
3 to retake Aleppo. Meanwhile, advanced Russian military
4 capabilities remain in Syria, enhancing Putin's ability to
5 project power beyond the region. Once again -- once again
6 -- the U.S. response has appeared confused, reactive, and
7 inadequate.

8 None of this is happening because our adversaries are
9 10 feet tall or somehow more capable than us. Instead, as
10 sophisticated and ruthless as ISIL is, it has major
11 strategic vulnerabilities, not least the resentment it
12 engenders among the very Muslim communities it seeks to
13 oppress. Vladimir Putin is playing a weak hand,
14 economically and demographically, but he is consistently
15 playing it better than we are playing ours.

16 So, too, with the Iranian regime. Even with a windfall
17 of sanctions relief, Iran -- Tehran remains militarily and
18 economically weak, but it is aggressively expanding its
19 malign influence and subverting our long-term partners.

20 Put simply, too many of our leaders appear involved in
21 the tactical fight, the incremental calibration and
22 escalation of military operations, and not enough in the
23 strategic fight. And, despite the real tactical gains we
24 have made, we must ask ourselves, Is this working? Are we
25 winning? Are we getting ahead of the threats and problems

1 we face, or are they getting ahead of us? What enduring
2 objectives do we hope to achieve across the Middle East, a
3 region that is experiencing greater turmoil than at any time
4 since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire? How will we
5 achieve those goals? And of what -- on what timeline and at
6 what cost?

7 I understand the American people are frustrated with
8 Washington. I know there's a belief out there that we
9 invaded and occupied Iraq, and it failed; that we
10 intervened, but did not occupy, Libya, and it failed; and
11 that we did not intervene in Syria, and that failed, too.
12 But, what ties all of this together is that we left. We
13 left. Or we never engaged, in the first place. We pulled
14 away and stood back and tried to convince ourselves that
15 everything would be all right. And look at the result. No
16 new order has emerged in the Middle East. Only chaos. And
17 the vacuum we left behind has been filled by the most
18 extreme and anti-American of forces: ISIL, al Qaeda, Iran
19 and its terrorist proxies, and now Russia. We cannot afford
20 to believe that this is not our problem. It is our problem.

21 As General David Petraeus wrote last week, quote, "The
22 attacks and other activities of extremists will not be
23 confined to the areas or regions in which they are located.

24 Rather, as in the case of Syria, the actions of the
25 extremist groups are likely to spew instability, extremism,

1 violence, and refugees far beyond their immediate
2 surroundings."

3 We cannot go on pretending that we can avoid these
4 problems or that the current approach of trying to treat the
5 symptoms of the disease, rather than its cause, will work if
6 only we give it more time. It will not. We need to stop
7 fixating on military details and look at the bigger picture.

8 No one believes there are easy solutions to the underlying
9 problems in the Middle East. But, after the past 7 years,
10 this should -- much should be clear. Walking away isn't the
11 answer, and time is not on our side.

12 Senator Reed.

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

Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me join you in welcoming Secretary Carter and General Dunford.

Gentlemen, thank you for your service to the Nation and your presence here today.

This morning's hearing to update the committee on the status of coalition military operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL, is especially timely. It comes on the heels of visits to the region by the President, Secretary Kerry, and both of you as part of the administration's continuing review of our ongoing efforts as part of Operation Inherent Resolve. We look forward to hearing your assessment of the situation on the ground, the progress that has been made to date, and the military tasks that can be accomplished in the months ahead.

In recent days, the Department has announced two deployments, one each for Iraq and Syria. These deployments are intended to bolster our efforts in those two countries

1 as the focus of coalition operations increasingly turns to
2 isolating Mosul and Raqqa, as well as ensuring that our
3 partners on the ground in Iraq and Syria have the enabling
4 support needed to continue their momentum against ISIL.

5 The deployment to Iraq comes at a sensitive time for
6 Prime Minister Abadi, who continues to struggle to bring
7 together the Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurdish elements of the
8 political establishment in Iraq, a complicated reality that
9 was in full display earlier this week, when the Prime
10 Minister partially reshuffled his Cabinet amidst stepped-up
11 pressure by thousands of protesters threatening to storm the
12 Parliament. As we consider our policy in Iraq,
13 particularly, it's important to remember that the coalition
14 is there at the invitation of the Iraqis, and we must remain
15 cognizant of the political opposition of some to our
16 continued and growing presence in the country. Ignoring that
17 reality risks damaging our broader strategic goal of a
18 lasting political solution for Iraq and the defeat of ISIL.

19 In Syria, the cessation of hostilities has seen a
20 growing number of violations in recent days. Of most
21 concern are the violations by the forces of the Assad regime
22 in Aleppo and the surrounding region. In March, President
23 Putin announced Russia was to begin withdrawing its forces
24 from Syria, but, as is often the case with President Putin,
25 the public message is not consistent with the reality of

1 events on the ground. According to reports, forces loyal to
2 the Syrian government are beginning to amass and concentrate
3 combat power around Aleppo. These actions do not portend
4 well for the direction of this conflict. I hope the
5 Secretary and Chairman will provide their updated assessment
6 on the military actions of the regime and Russian forces,
7 and how these figure into our planning.

8 One matter currently before the committee is a request
9 by the administration to extend the DOD's authority to train
10 and equip the Moderate Syrian Opposition. As we
11 consider this request, it is my assessment that, without our
12 local Syrian partners on the ground, the recapture of
13 Kobani, Hasakah, and Shadadi, and a number of other towns
14 and villages would not have been possible, and I hope the
15 Secretary and the Chairman will speak to the importance of
16 this request for an extension.

17 In addition to Iraq and Syria, I hope the Secretary or
18 the Chairman will provide their updated assessment on the
19 threat posed by ISIL's growing presence in Libya. There
20 have been public reports of a number of U.S. military
21 operations, Libya, and some suggestions that more may
22 follow. As the committee moves towards the markup of the
23 defense authorization bill, it's critical that we have a
24 keen understanding of you -- your view on the threat
25 emanating from Libya.

1 Gentlemen, I look forward to your testimony.

2 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 Chairman McCain: Welcome. Secretary Carter.

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10 STATEMENT OF HON. ASHTON B. CARTER, SECRETARY OF
11 DEFENSE

12 Secretary Carter: Chairman McCain, Ranking Member
13 Reed, thank you. Thank you for those statements, and for
14 this hearing, and for the range, both geographic and in
15 terms of tactical, operational, and strategic, that you're
16 asking us to speak to. Thank all the members of the
17 committee for being here, for your interest in this. And,
18 above all, Chairman, thank you for thanking the troops.
19 Means a lot. You have many opportunities to carry that to
20 them directly, but I'll try to do that, too, when I do.
21 Appreciate that.

22 I will briefly, in my opening statement, address all of
23 the aspects of the subjects raised in your two statements;
24 obviously, our campaign to defeat ISIL, but, more broadly,
25 our military strategy in the Middle East. And I appreciate

1 that this is my seventh appearance before this committee,
2 the fifth one focused on the Middle East, since I became
3 Secretary of Defense. And the timing is, as Senator Reed
4 noted, fortuitous, in the sense, I just returned from a 2-
5 week trip to the Asia-Pacific and also the Middle East, both
6 regions critical to U.S. and global security, and where our
7 men and women in uniform are deeply engaged, as they are all
8 over the world. It's emblematic of why, with all the
9 challenges going on today, particularly the five challenges
10 I discussed with you last month in my budget testimony --
11 namely Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and terrorism,
12 especially ISIL -- DOD can't choose between one or the
13 other, or between acting in the present and investing in the
14 future. We have to do them all.

15 While there's much I could say about the Asia-Pacific,
16 I'm obviously going to focus my comments here today on the
17 Middle East. There our actions and our strong military
18 posture continue to be guided by our North Star of what's in
19 America's national interests. These are several things.
20 They include dealing ISIL a lasting defeat. That was the
21 principal purpose of my visit to Iraq last week, where I
22 conferred with our commanders and visited with our troops,
23 met with Prime Minister Abadi and Defense Minister Obeidi,
24 spoke to Kurdistan Regional Government President Barzani,
25 and announced a number of key next steps that our --

1 President Obama has directed to further accelerate the
2 defeat of ISIL. More on that in a moment.

3 When I appeared before this committee to discuss our
4 counter-ISIL campaign in early December, I outlined how we
5 embarked -- had embarked on a major acceleration of this
6 campaign, an effort Chairman Dunford and I had recommended
7 to the President in October. And it consisted of multiple
8 steps. First, there were a number of immediate accelerants.

9 We deployed additional strike aircraft to Incirlik,
10 supporting an expanded air campaign against new targets and
11 new categories of targets illuminated by refined
12 intelligence. We deployed an initial contingent of Special
13 Operations Forces to Syria. We expanded equipping of Syrian
14 Arab forces engaged in the fight against ISIL. We began
15 enabling capable, motivated, local forces in southern Syria,
16 also, and enhancing Jordan's border control and defenses.
17 We leveraged airpower and advisors to help the Peshmerga
18 take Sinjar, cutting the Iraqi side of the main line of
19 communication between ISIL's power centers in Raqqa and
20 Mosul. We introduced an expeditionary targeting force. We
21 worked to improve our ability to target ISIL's leadership
22 and presence beyond Iraq and Syria. And we started to
23 expand the military campaign against ISIL to every domain,
24 including cyber and space.

25 All these capabilities were marshaled against a clear

1 coalition military campaign plan, focusing on operations on
2 three objectives. One, destroying ISIL's parent tumor in
3 Iraq and Syria, which is necessary -- not sufficient, but
4 necessary. Second, combating the metastases of the ISIL
5 tumor worldwide, wherever they appear, as has been noted by
6 both the Chairman and Senator Reed. And, three, our most
7 important mission, which is to help protect the homeland.

8 In addition to accelerating the campaign with
9 additional U.S. capabilities, we renewed our outreach to
10 coalition members. And, over the last 3 months, I've
11 conveyed my -- convened my counterparts several times -- in
12 Paris, Brussels, last week in Riyadh, next week in Europe --
13 to brief them on the coalition military command plan, but,
14 above all, to urge them to contribute more, and in more
15 meaningful ways.

16 Since we embarked on that major acceleration, results
17 followed. And they've continued even in recent weeks. On
18 the battlefield in Iraq, the Iraqi Security Forces retook
19 Ramadi and Hit, and, along with Kurdish Peshmerga, have
20 begun operations to isolate and pressure Mosul, with the
21 intent to collapse ISIL's control over that city. And in
22 Syria, capable and motivated local forces, supported by our
23 coalition, retook the Tishrin Dam, in the west, and the town
24 of Shadadi, in the east, cutting off two significant lines
25 of communication in Raqqa, including one of the last major

1 northern arteries between Raqqa and Mosul, and therefore,
2 between ISIL in Syria and ISIL in Iraq.

3 We've also seen results in targeting ISIL's leaders and
4 finances. We've systematically eliminated ISIL's Cabinet,
5 having taken out its so-called Ministers of War and Finance.
6 We captured one of the principals of ISIL's chemical warfare
7 enterprise, removed external plotters from the battlefield,
8 and, most recently, took out the ISIL emir for southern
9 Mosul, weakening ISIL's ranks there.

10 And our attacks on ISIL's economic infrastructure, from
11 oil wells and trucks to cash storage to ISIL's financial
12 leaders, is putting a stranglehold on ISIL's ability to pay
13 its fighters, undermining its ability to govern, and making
14 it harder to attract new recruits.

15 These are the results in our coalition's -- there are
16 also results in our coalition's train-and-equip efforts, as
17 well. So far, with your support in Congress, we've trained
18 over 20,000 Iraqi Security Forces and provided six full
19 brigade sets of equipment to the Iraqi Army. And we've
20 provided two brigade sets to the Peshmerga, part of more
21 than 12 million pounds of critical supplies donated by more
22 than 20 countries. For our part, ranging from ammunition to
23 small, medium, and heavy weapons to counter-IED equipment.

24 Meanwhile, in addition to the local forces we're
25 working with in both Iraq and Syria, 90 percent of our

1 military coalition partners from Europe, the Gulf, and Asia
2 -- 26 countries in all -- have committed, in the past few
3 months, to increase their contributions to help accelerate
4 the defeat of ISIL.

5 All this has been necessary for putting ISIL on a path
6 to the lasting defeat. But, it's not sufficient. Indeed,
7 I've consistently told you that we're looking to do more,
8 and that we would be doing more. As we take advantage of
9 opportunities, we're generating new ones, and then seizing
10 those opportunities to repeat this cycle, reinforcing
11 success. This has been our intent and is consistent with
12 our overall strategic approach, which is to enable capable,
13 motivated, local forces to recapture and then hold and
14 govern territory tyrannized by ISIL.

15 Now, based on the results we've had and on our desire
16 to continue accelerating ISIL's lasting defeat, we are
17 conducting the next plays of the military campaign. They
18 are, one, stabilizing Iraq's Anbar Province; two, generating
19 Iraqi Security Forces to envelope Mosul; three, identifying
20 and developing more local forces in Syria that will isolate
21 and pressure Raqqa; and, four, providing more firepower,
22 sustainment, and logistical support to our partners to
23 enable them to collapse ISIL's control over both these
24 cities.

25 To help facilitate these next plays, we're taking a

1 number of key actions in both Iraq and Syria, actions
2 President Obama directed and that he and I announced over
3 the last week and a half. And I should note that the
4 President has approved all the actions that Chairman Dunford
5 and I have recommended to him to date.

6 In Iraq, our actions are in support of Iraqi Security
7 Forces operations to isolate and pressure Mosul. They've
8 all been approved by Prime Minister Abadi. As I told our
9 troops in Baghdad last week, we'll be placing advisors with
10 the ISF down to the brigade and battalion level. We'll be
11 leveraging Apache attack helicopters to support the ISF's
12 effort to envelope and then retake Mosul. We'll send
13 additional HIMARS to support the Iraqi ground offensive
14 there. We'll provide financial assistance to the Peshmerga,
15 up to \$415 million, to bolster one of the most effective
16 fighting forces against ISIL. And to do all this, we're
17 going to adjust how we use U.S. forces -- the U.S. forces
18 already in Iraq, and immediately bring in about 215 more of
19 them.

20 In Syria, our actions are to help our local partners
21 continue isolating and pressuring Raqqa. As the President
22 announced on Monday, we're increasing U.S. forces there
23 sixfold, from 50 to 300. These additional 250 personnel,
24 including Special Operations Forces, will help expand our
25 ongoing efforts to identify, train, and equip capable,

1 motivated, local anti-ISIL forces inside Syria, especially
2 among the Sunni Arab community. They'll also serve as a hub
3 to incorporate partners' Special Forces from both European
4 and gulf partners that will augment our coalition's counter-
5 ISIL efforts there.

6 In the meantime, in addition to initiating training
7 inside Syria, we're also continuing to train and equip other
8 vetted Syrian forces outside of Syria, keeping our focus, as
9 we have in recent months, on battle-hardened, proven anti-
10 ISIL leaders, whom we can make more capable as enablers and
11 amplifiers of our effects. And, in this context, let me say
12 that the Section 1209 program is central to our ground
13 campaign in Syria, and we're now carrying out a different
14 approach than before; instead, one that we've used to train
15 and enable local elements that have proven themselves
16 against ISIL on the battlefield. We've moved away from last
17 year's disappointments with a former approach to the
18 program, and we need your support to fully overcome them.
19 Focus on the program as it is now, and, in particular,
20 release the now-\$349 million in 1209 funding currently
21 blocked by Congress.

22 And, Mr. Chairman, I understand you intend to help
23 clear these funds with the committee, and I hope other
24 committees will follow suit. And I'm grateful for that.
25 The fact is, our command -- for our commanders to be agile

1 in accelerating our cam against -- campaign against ISIL, we
2 need a similarly agile congressional funding process.

3 We're required to submit reprogramming requests, as you
4 all know, to the four congressional defense committees.
5 And, so far, on these funds, we've received differing
6 responses on differing timelines, and sometimes with
7 conflicting demands. We must get this working better, going
8 forward.

9 I would also urge you and the other three defense
10 committees to consider ending the reprogramming requirement
11 for Syria so that it's on equal footing with how you've
12 structured our oversight -- your oversight of our train-and-
13 equip programs in Iraq and Afghanistan. As it stands, the
14 current setup involves -- invites troubling micromanagement
15 of a wartime effort, and risks inhibiting results.

16 Beyond Iraq and Syria, we're also addressing ISIL's
17 metastases. In Afghanistan, since we authorized our forces
18 to conduct targeted strikes against ISIL there, we've been
19 able to degrade the terrorist groups' elements in that
20 country. And in Libya, we have continued to follow ISIL
21 activities closely, undertaking a successful strike last
22 year in which we took out ISIL's key leader in the country.

23 Another strike in February against an ISIL training camp.
24 And, as the new Libyan government gets on its feet, we will
25 support it in the fight against ISIL. We will counter ISIL

1 and work with partners wherever ISIL has or tries to gain a
2 foothold, whether in Yemen, West Africa, or South or
3 Southeast Asia.

4 Even as we do more, we're continuing to marshal our
5 friends and allies across the counter-ISIL coalition to do
6 more also to accelerate ISIL's lasting defeat. When I met
7 with my counterparts from the Gulf Cooperation Council last
8 week, I emphasized the importance of their countries doing
9 more, not only militarily, as Saudi Arabia and the UAE have
10 been doing, but also politically and economically. That's
11 because Sunni support for stabilization, multisectarian
12 governance, and reconstruction will all be critical to
13 ensuring that ISIL stays defeated.

14 And, Mr. Chairman, I just want to second the point you
15 made, which is, in the region, in my conversations there,
16 parties are already beginning to look beyond the defeat of
17 ISIL and ask what their situation is at that point. That's
18 -- reinforces the need, as you indicated, to think
19 strategically.

20 Next week, in Stuttgart, Germany, I'll be convening my
21 fellow Defense Ministers from the major contributors to the
22 military campaign to discuss ways we can all continue to
23 accelerate our efforts. That said, while the military
24 momentum is gathering strength and ISIL is struggling to
25 resist our multifaceted pressure, I am increasingly

1 concerned about political, economic, and diplomatic
2 challenges in both Iraq and Syria affecting the pace of the
3 military campaign.

4 In Iraq, as the proximity of the ISIL threat against
5 Baghdad has diminished, political ambitions have created
6 discord. And, in some instances, ethnosectarian competition
7 has increased, creating an added burden and distraction for
8 Prime Minister Abadi's government before the task of
9 defeating ISIL is complete. This, of course, is occurring
10 while Iraq struggles with significant fiscal challenges due
11 to the lower price of oil and a huge reconstruction bill as
12 it retakes cities from ISIL.

13 And in Syria, competing agendas for the future of the
14 political transition are inhibiting the generation and
15 coalescing of anti-ISIL forces. Secretary Kerry, Secretary
16 Lew, and my colleagues from the other departments and
17 agencies are focused on this intently, but they need support
18 from you in Congress to help ensure that military momentum
19 is matched with political and economic momentum, and that
20 the military defeat of ISIL in Syria and Iraq, when it is
21 complete, will be lasting.

22 I've articulated a clear strategy, with the end state
23 being a lasting defeat of ISIL. And that means it must be
24 achieved by local forces. Our strategic approach is,
25 therefore, to enable such forces, to collapse ISIL's control

1 of Mosul and Raqqa by bringing to bear in support of them
2 the full might of the U.S. military through some of our most
3 unique capabilities, such as precision air campaign and
4 expeditionary targeting forces, offensive operations in
5 cyberspace, training, logistics, sustainment, and equipment.

6 Enabling local forces, not substituting for them, is
7 necessary to ensure a lasting defeat. And sometimes that
8 means our pace is predicated on the speed at which local
9 forces can absorb our enabling.

10 Now, some seem to suggest we pursue different
11 strategies. And there are, in fact, alternative strategies.

12 And I've addressed these alternatives in previous
13 testimonies. But, we don't recommend them. And here is
14 why:

15 One alternative would be to leave the complex and
16 chaotic Middle East, try to contain ISIL's danger to the
17 United States and target terrorists entirely from offshore.

18 An approach of this sort has its attractions, since it
19 avoids the many complexities of the Middle East. But, the
20 reality is that such a containment approach simply cannot
21 succeed in today's connected and globalized world. And I
22 don't recommend it.

23 And another alternative would be to introduce a
24 significant foreign ground force, hypothetically
25 international, although almost certainly preponderantly

1 American, to capture Raqqa and Mosul and other territories
2 used by ISIL. But, as I have testified previously, there
3 are several problems with this approach that have led me not
4 to recommend it either. In the near term, such a strategic
5 approach would entail a significant military undertaking
6 that, much as we'd wish otherwise, realistically we would
7 embark upon largely by ourselves. And it would be ceding
8 our competitive advantage of Special Forces, mobility, and
9 firepower; instead, fighting on the enemy's terms of ground
10 combat amidst a local population that has previously
11 responded violently to such an approach.

12 In the medium term, by seeming to Americanize or
13 Westernize the effort to expel ISIL from the populations of
14 Iraq and Syria, we might turn those local people who are
15 fighting ISIL, who are inclined to resist their rule, into
16 fighting us instead. As Chairman Dunford has said, ISIL,
17 quote, "would love nothing more than a large presence of
18 U.S. forces on the ground in Iraq and Syria so that they
19 could have a call to jihad," end quote.

20 And, lastly, in the long term, there would still remain
21 the problem of securing and governing the territory
22 recaptured, which, in the end, must be done by local forces.

23 We cannot substitute for them.

24 The bottom line is this. We can't ignore this fight,
25 but we also can't win it entirely from the outside in.

1 That's why we're helping capable, motivated local forces in
2 every way we can without taking their places.

3 And finally, I want to include with -- conclude with a
4 few word about -- words about resources, as I have serious
5 concerns with a proposal from one of the defense committees
6 to underfund DOD's overseas warfighting accounts by \$18
7 billion and spend that money on programmatic items we didn't
8 request. I have to say, this approach is deeply flawed and
9 troubling. Having detailed my objections yesterday before
10 the Appropriations Committee, today, in this context of this
11 testimony, I just want to highlight the danger of
12 underfunding our war effort and gambling with funding for
13 our troops in places like Iraq and Syria. As Secretary of
14 Defense, I cannot support such a maneuver.

15 Indeed, it's exceedingly important that we provide our
16 troops and commanders in the field with all the resources
17 they need to succeed. And I know that, with your support,
18 and with the continued dedication of our people and our
19 partners, we will deliver ISIL a lasting defeat.

20 Thank you.

21 [The prepared statement of Secretary Carter follows:]

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Chairman McCain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
General Dunford.

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STATEMENT OF GENERAL JOSEPH F. DUNFORD, JR., USMC,
CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

General Dunford: Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed,
distinguished members of the --

Chairman McCain: Mr. Secretary, I mean.

General Dunford: Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed,
distinguished members of the committee, thanks for the
opportunity to join Secretary Carter in appearing before you
today to talk about the counter-ISIL campaign.

Secretary Carter just provided a campaign update and an
overview of our strategic approach. Before taking your
questions, I'd like to briefly share my perspective on where
we are in the military campaign, and where we're going.

Mindful that ISIL is a transregional threat with
affiliates located from South Asia to West Africa, our top
priority remains to disrupt attacks against the homeland,
the American people, our allies, and our partners,
regardless of the source. We continue to assess that the
most dangerous threat remains core ISIL in Iraq and Syria.

I just returned from Iraq last week and received the

1 campaign update from our commanders and Iraqi leadership. I
2 also had the opportunity to visit with our troops and to
3 observe Iraqi forces at their training sites. While the
4 situation is complex, with no shortage of political and
5 military challenges, I was encouraged by what I heard and
6 what I saw on the ground. Last fall, it would have been fair
7 to say that ISIL had the momentum. I don't believe that is
8 any longer the case.

9 Without repeating the detailed progress outlined by
10 Secretary Carter, I'll summarize by saying that, with our
11 strikes, and in conjunction with Iraqi Security Forces, the
12 Peshmerga, and Sunni tribal forces, we've reduced ISIL's
13 territorial control, undermined its brand and aura of
14 invincibility, and destroyed much of its warfighting
15 capability. The enemy's resources and freedom of movement
16 have also been significantly reduced. And the pressure we
17 are applying is degrading the enemy's morale. More
18 importantly, the progress of the last several months has
19 instilled confidence in our Iraqi partners. They believe
20 they can defeat ISIL.

21 Currently, Iraqi forces are continuing operations in
22 the Anbar Province while simultaneously conducting shaping
23 operations to isolate Mosul. In the months ahead, Iraqi
24 forces, the Peshmerga, and Sunni tribal forces will bring
25 increasing pressure to bear against the enemy in Mosul.

1 Meanwhile, we'll be aggressive in looking for opportunities
2 to reinforce success, as Secretary Carter has said, and
3 we'll seize every opportunity to maintain the momentum and
4 increase the effectiveness of our partners.

5 Similarly, in Syria, the pressure we've put on ISIL has
6 degraded their capabilities, limited their freedom of
7 movement, and reduced their resources. In the past few
8 months, the local Kurdish and Arab forces that we support
9 have retaken a significant percentage of the territory
10 previously under ISIL control in northeast Syria.

11 Other vetted Syrian opposition forces are currently
12 fighting along the Turkish-Syrian border in operations that
13 will put additional pressure on ISIL, further stemming the
14 flow of foreign fighters and supplies into Syria. The
15 recent authorization of additional U.S. forces in Syria will
16 allow us to increase the capacity and capability of
17 indigenous ground forces and set the conditions for
18 operations against Raqqa.

19 In closing, I believe we've moved the campaign forward
20 over the last few months. The progress is real. That said,
21 we're not satisfied or complacent about where we are, and we
22 won't be satisfied until ISIL is defeated in Iraq and Syria
23 and wherever it attempts to take root.

24 Once again, thanks for the opportunity to appear
25 before you this morning, and I look forward to your

1 questions.

2 Chairman McCain: Thank you very much, General.

3 You know, Secretary Carter, it's frustrating to a lot
4 of us to -- as you outlined the options that we have, the
5 option that you left out, which is entirely doable -- and I
6 know this for a fact -- is if we had a -- about 10,000 of
7 100,000-person contingent, of which the Sunni nations would
8 contribute, that would go in, on the ground, and take Raqqa
9 and Mosul. And when you talk about the territorial gains,
10 you forget to mention that the second-largest city in Iraq
11 is still in ISIS hands, and they have, still, no strategy,
12 so far, to retake Raqqa. But, it's really frustrating to us
13 when you set up these strawmen that the only alternatives we
14 have is to walk away, and the other is a preponderantly
15 American force. That's not true. The other option is --
16 that we have been pushing for months and months, years -- is
17 a international force, of which the United States would be a
18 small component of. And that is doable. And when I keep
19 hearing this, that, "Oh, we only have these two choices,"
20 it's -- I say, with all due respect, it's intellectually
21 dishonest.

22 Now, when -- on the issue of the reprogramming, yes, I
23 was, quote, "blocking" the approval of the reprogramming,
24 until yesterday, when I had a very excellent briefing from
25 General Dunford that cleared up concerns that I had. And

1 why did I have those concerns, Mr. Secretary? -- is because,
2 when we spent a couple of hundred-million dollars the last
3 time, then the Commander of Central Command testified before
4 this committee that we had four or five people left after
5 expending a couple of hundred-million dollars in what I
6 predicted would be an abysmal failure, which was making
7 these people pledge that they would only attack ISIL.

8 Now, my question is, Is that still the case with this
9 force? Are they prohibited from responding to being attacked
10 by Syria?

11 Secretary Carter: Thank you, Chairman. I'll address
12 both of your questions and ask the Chairman to do the same.

13 You're right, I described two bookends, if you like,
14 and there are various gradations in between. So, I --
15 you're absolutely right.

16 With respect to the option you describe of a 9-to-1
17 ratio of international forces to U.S. forces, that would be
18 a highly desirable circumstance to be in. I do not -- I
19 doubt that'll -- I have no indication from those countries,
20 despite a lot of effort --

21 Chairman McCain: I --

22 Secretary Carter: -- of a willingness to do that.

23 And the second point I'd just like to make, and then
24 I'll leave that point, is the -- as I was describing the
25 possibility of foreign forces entering Iraq and Syria, I

1 tried to describe there the welcome that they might receive
2 and the remaining issue of sustaining territory once it is
3 taken and held. And I think that's the principal strategic
4 issue with a large foreign force, whether American or --

5 Chairman McCain: Please --

6 Secretary Carter: -- hypothetically --

7 Chairman McCain: Please accelerate your answer. I --

8 Secretary Carter: I will.

9 And, second, on the 1209 program, thank you for that,
10 Chairman. And I just want to acknowledge -- and I
11 acknowledged this last year -- we made a disappointing start
12 at that, and no bones about that. We have changed the
13 approach to that, fundamentally. I hope -- I believe -- in
14 fact, the Chairman has described that to you, and that's the
15 basis on which you've indicated a willingness to support it.

16 Just to be brief about what the difference is, we were
17 trying, when that program was initiated, to make forces,
18 brand-new forces to counter ISIL in Syria. Our approach now
19 is to identify -- and this is where the Special Forces have
20 been valued to -- valuable to us -- forces already fighting
21 ISIL, whom we can enable, with the great might of the
22 American military. That's our new approach.

23 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

24 Secretary Carter: Chairman.

25 Chairman McCain: Please -- don't want -- I've got to

1 ask more questions.

2 Don't -- do you believe that the cease-fire is
3 collapsing, General Dunford?

4 General Dunford: Chairman, I do believe there's some
5 difficulty with the cease-fire.

6 Chairman McCain: So, that -- and we know what happened
7 last time, before the cease-fire, and that was that the
8 Russian air was bombing the daylight out of the moderate
9 forces, many of which we have trained and equipped. What
10 are we going to do -- with the collapse of the cease-fire, a
11 resumption of Russian bombing of American-trained forces,
12 what is going to be our option there?

13 General Dunford: Chairman, if our forces are attacked
14 by regime forces, we have the authority to respond.

15 Chairman McCain: Will we give them the ability to
16 respond?

17 General Dunford: We will, Chairman.

18 Chairman McCain: That means surface-to-air capability?

19 General Dunford: It does not mean that, Chairman.

20 Chairman McCain: The -- well, I guess I have to go
21 back to the problem that we face, and that is that, with the
22 cease-fire breaking down, with millions of refugees, with
23 200-and- -- or at least 300,000 people killed, and the
24 resumption of hostilities, now with Russian air practicing
25 indiscriminate bombing, what are we going to do about that

1 situation? And can we count on a couple of thousand
2 American-trained-and-equipped forces to reduce or counter
3 what is clearly a consolidation of power on the part -- in
4 the hands of Bashar Assad? I hate ISIS, but it isn't ISIS
5 that's killed 300,000. It isn't ISIS that's driven millions
6 into refugee status. It's Bashar Assad. And I wonder what
7 you believe our options are in this obviously deteriorating
8 situation in Syria, which means a resumption of the
9 slaughter, a resumption of the flow of refugees.

10 Mr. Secretary?

11 Secretary Carter: May I start? And then the Chairman
12 could chime in behind it.

13 We are intent upon fighting ISIL in Syria because our
14 principal and paramount responsibility is to protect the
15 American people, and ISIL's trying to attack the American
16 people. But, I agree with you, also, about the Assad
17 regime. And it's a reason why Assad can't be part of the
18 future of that country, in my judgment, because of what he's
19 done to his people.

20 The -- and I also agree with you that, while the
21 cessation of hostilities has had an important effect,
22 particularly -- in both the north and the south, but very
23 much in the south -- in permitting humanitarian assistance,
24 it is not being completely abided by. That is especially by
25 the Syrian regime.

1 And finally, you mentioned Russia. And while you're
2 mentioning Russia, I'll just remind you of what I said to
3 you before. The Russians said they were coming into Syria
4 to fight ISIL. And that's not what they did. They
5 supported Assad and thereby prolonging the Syrian civil war.
6 So, that is a tragic situation, and we -- and Secretary
7 Kerry is trying to work on that. And, as you know, I can't
8 describe here the full extent of our efforts with respect to
9 the Assad regime. But, again, I'd just go back to our focus
10 in this testimony. And our focus pretty much in the
11 Department of Defense, not exclusively, but largely, is on
12 protecting America. And that means destroying ISIL.

13 Chairman McCain: My time has expired. But, obviously,
14 according to General Nicholson, the situation in Afghanistan
15 is deteriorating. Isn't it imperative that we revisit the
16 decision on reducing the number of troops in Afghanistan by
17 half now? And shouldn't we do that before these important
18 meetings in June and July? I'd -- either --

19 Secretary Carter: Chairman, we're constantly
20 reevaluating the situation in Afghanistan. I think we've --

21 Chairman McCain: But, we have to make a decision --

22 Secretary Carter: We do. We do. And I -- we're
23 constantly making --

24 Chairman McCain: Will we be -- will the President be
25 making that decision?

1 Secretary Carter: I think the President will be making
2 those -- he's indicated, in -- a continued willingness to
3 adjust to circumstances there and to ensure the success of
4 something we've --

5 Chairman McCain: But, you agree --

6 Secretary Carter: -- worked on for a long time.

7 Chairman McCain: -- it's important our allies know
8 that --

9 Secretary Carter: Yes, it is.

10 Chairman McCain: -- decision before --

11 Secretary Carter: I do.

12 Chairman McCain: Thank you very much.

13 I apologize to the committee for overdoing -- -staying
14 my time.

15 Senator Reed.

16 Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

17 Again, gentlemen, thank you for your testimony.

18 And, in this very complex region, sometimes we have

19 difficulties with our allies as well as our adversaries.

20 And Turkey has been both a supporter, in allowing us to

21 operate out of Incirlik, and also someone who has not been

22 completely cooperative in some of our requests.

23 Mr. Secretary, you will be seeing them, I presume, in
24 Stuttgart. And can you comment on what you would like them
25 to do more and whether they are capable or willing to do

1 that?

2 Secretary Carter: Thanks. And it's a timely question,
3 and a very important one, because, by dint of geography,
4 they are the single most important in -- of the NATO Western
5 family of countries that can have an influence on the
6 situation in Syria. They are doing more, and I'm grateful
7 for what they are doing. They're doing more along the
8 border. They're helping us to operate in some ways I can go
9 into in another setting. And I'm very grateful for that.
10 And I'd like them to do more. I've wanted them to do more
11 for some time. I think I've made that clear. But, we
12 continue to work with them. They're an important party.
13 They're an important ally. They can make a larger
14 contribution.

15 Senator Reed: Those are -- in the spectrum of possible
16 operational approaches that you laid out, the one that's
17 being adopted now is a rather light footprint, Special
18 Operations troops, air going in, trying to degrade both ISIL
19 around Raqqa, ISIL around Mosul. A more significant ground
20 presence will require, I presume, a adjacent country
21 providing both the operational and political support for a
22 staging area. Have you any indications of that being
23 accepted, tolerated, or agreed to --

24 Secretary Carter: Well, Turkey's allowed us to operate
25 out of Incirlik. Enormous part of the air campaign. Very

1 grateful. So, they are willing to allow us to operate
2 against ISIL.

3 And with respect to the Special Forces in Syria, I just
4 want to distinguish that from the Iraq -- if -- in the Iraq
5 case, we have a -- the -- there aren't Special Forces. We
6 have thousands of Americans that are doing all kinds of
7 things that are necessary. There are logistics -- because,
8 remember, the -- this Iraqi Army needs to be rebuilt, it
9 needs to be sustained, it needs to have its line of
10 communications sustained as it goes up the Tigris River
11 Valley towards Mosul. There's a lot of pieces to this. The
12 reason for these -- again, without going into a lot of
13 detail -- for the Special Forces presence in Syria is not
14 their numbers, themselves; it's their ability to go in,
15 identify groups that are willing to go after ISIL, and then
16 bring down in, like, a funnel of a tornado, the great weight
17 of the American military power through those forces and
18 amplify, enable their effects. That's what they're so good
19 at. That's why they're there. That's why we're increasing
20 their numbers.

21 Senator Reed: No, I concur, but I -- the point would
22 be that those types of operations -- Special Operations --
23 have been supported by adjacent countries. Is there
24 indication they would support a large land force mobilizing
25 on their territory and going across their territory?

1 Secretary Carter: I don't have any indication from the
2 Turks that they would do that, no.

3 Don't know if the Chairman wants --

4 Senator Reed: Let me shift gears.

5 Many in the committee have been urging that we take a
6 much more proactive cyberpresence in the conflict. And that
7 seems to be emerging. And I'm wondering -- both you, Mr.
8 Secretary, and you, General Dunford -- can comment upon that
9 cyberoperations.

10 Secretary Carter: I'd comment very generally on it. I
11 asked, with -- the Chairman, a number of months ago --
12 Admiral Rogers, our CYBERCOM Commander and also the NSA
13 Director -- to take on the war against ISIL as essentially
14 the first major combat operation of CYBERCOM. He has done
15 that. The objectives there are to interrupt ISIL command-
16 and-control, interrupt its ability to move money around,
17 interrupt its ability to tyrannize and control population,
18 interrupt its ability to recruit externally. All of that,
19 it does in a cyber-enabled way.

20 And so, we're talking about cyberoperations in Syria
21 and Iraq. And my feeling about that was, and is, very
22 direct, which is, you know, we're bombing them, and we're
23 going to take out their Internet and so forth, as well. In
24 the modern world, that's necessary to defeat an enemy, and
25 we've got to use every tool that we have. This is the first

1 big test of CYBERCOM. I have very high expectations they
2 can be successful.

3 Let me ask if the Chairman --

4 Senator Reed: Brief comment, General --

5 Secretary Carter: -- wants to add anything.

6 Senator Reed: -- please.

7 General Dunford: Senator, I think, just to add to what
8 the Secretary said, I mean, the overall effect we're trying
9 to achieve is virtual isolation. And it complements very
10 much our physical actions on the ground. And the particular
11 focus is external operations that might be conducted by
12 ISIL.

13 Senator Reed: Thank you very much.

14 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 Chairman McCain: Senator Inhofe.

16 Senator Inhofe: Mr. Secretary, the -- this week, we've
17 been talking about the 250 troops that are being deployed --
18 additional troops in Syria and then 217 in Iraq. How many
19 boots do we have on the ground now in Syria and Iraq?

20 Secretary Carter: In Iraq, the total is around 3500
21 now. I just want to remind you that that's the force
22 management level. And it's not like --

23 Senator Inhofe: Yes, I understand.

24 Secretary Carter: -- the way we do it everywhere else.
25 And the Special Operations complement that we're multiplying

1 sixfold is from 50 to those 300 in Syria.

2 Senator Inhofe: Okay.

3 General Dunford, talk a little bit about rules of
4 engagement. Because a lot of times they talk about train-
5 and-equip. We know that train-and-equip would only include
6 defensive activity in certain areas. Where are they now on
7 that?

8 General Dunford: Senator, you talk about our forces on
9 --

10 Senator Inhofe: Our forces, yes.

11 General Dunford: -- our forces on the ground. Number
12 one, they're going after ISIL, so that -- that's the area.
13 They're unrestricted in going after ISIL. That includes our
14 air campaign. And then, if they're under attack and there's
15 positive identification of an enemy and a hostile intent,
16 they're authorized to engage.

17 Senator Inhofe: Oh, they are. Okay. That's good.

18 Now, the question that I have is -- the second question
19 is, the -- all of the activity -- we have, during the course
20 of this hearing, not really talked about anything outside of
21 Syria and Iraq, when other things are happening right now.
22 The -- they're talking about, in Reuters yesterday, the
23 Islamic State has greatly expanded its control over
24 territories in Libya, militants claiming key positions and
25 all of this. Our -- Director Clapper recently warned that

1 ISIL is spreading in Europe, that opens the borders across
2 Europe, they have allowed ISIL to plant sleeper cells, and
3 so forth. General Rodriguez, who is the Commander of
4 AFRICOM, has said that the ISIL force in Africa has grown to
5 6,000 in the past year, with major presence in eastern
6 cities. We talk about eastern cities, we talk about Libya,
7 we talk about Tunisia, we talk about Algeria. But, now it's
8 gone down further. It's in sub-Sahara Africa. We're
9 talking about Somalia, we're talking about Nigeria. And I
10 have friends who say that even in the Central Africa
11 Republic and the Eastern Congo, it's becoming apparent.

12 Now, my question is this. When we developed AFRICOM,
13 to start with, it was developed without resources. They
14 have to get their resources from EUCOM and other sources.
15 And that being the case, it's -- what is happening right now
16 -- I think if we say that we had a strategy to contain ISIL,
17 that the strategy didn't work, that we are not containing
18 ISIL. So, we talk about our troops, what they're doing up
19 there in the train-and-equip programs, and in Syria and
20 Iraq, but what about these new areas that they're going into
21 now? And how are we going to be -- how are we going to be
22 able to resource them, should we have to? What's -- what
23 are your thoughts about that?

24 Secretary Carter: I'll give a start, and then Chairman
25 has been working on this very much also.

1 The -- you're absolutely right, we have seen -- and I
2 -- Director Clapper, I'm not familiar with the specific
3 testimony, but I'm sure it's absolutely right. And you know
4 Africa, of course, extremely well, yourself, Senator.
5 There's a mixture of two things going on. One is a
6 rebranding of existing extremist groups signing up, so to
7 speak, to ISIL, and the other is newly inspired or newly
8 funded nucleuses of groups. Both of those are of concern.
9 And our -- I wouldn't say "containment," I would say
10 "destruction" of ISIL wherever it emerges is the right
11 strategy. And it can't -- and with Syria and Iraq, that's
12 necessary; it's not sufficient. We need to do it elsewhere.
13 And we are, both following those developments really
14 closely and taking some action, some of which we can discuss
15 here.

16 And I'll turn it over to the Chairman at that point.

17 General Dunford: Senator --

18 Senator Inhofe: Again, before your answer, is
19 Rodriguez right when he talks about the number of -- the
20 6,000 number down there?

21 General Dunford: I agree with that assessment,
22 Senator.

23 Senator Inhofe: All right.

24 General Dunford: I agree with that assessment.

25 Right now, with regard specifically to AFRICOM,

1 AFRICOM's conducting operations in West Africa, in East
2 Africa, and in Libya. General Rodriguez recently developed
3 a concept of operations for support of Libyan forces in the
4 Libyan government. We have, as a result of his concept of
5 operations, reallocated resources. The Secretary made that
6 decision about a month ago, a month and a half ago, to
7 reallocate resources to AFRICOM to further develop the
8 intelligence that we would need to support operations in
9 Libya and throughout Africa. We're also working closely
10 with the French in West Africa in -- with a coalition in
11 East Africa.

12 Senator Inhofe: Yeah. And in sub-Saharan Africa, down
13 there, all the activity now in Nigeria, the same thing?

14 General Dunford: We also have ISR in that area and are
15 working with partners on the ground in that area.

16 Senator Inhofe: All right. Thank you.

17 Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

18 Chairman McCain: Senator Heinrich.

19 Senator Heinrich: Thank you, Chairman.

20 Secretary Carter, before I get to a couple of different
21 questions regarding ISIL, I just want to bring to your
22 attention an important issue facing our national security at
23 the moment, in terms of the availability of domestic trusted
24 supply of state-of-the-art microelectronics for our
25 military's weapon systems and platforms. You may be aware

1 there was a recent sale of IBM's trusted foundry, which had
2 been DOD's sole-source supplier of leading-edge technologies
3 for over a decade now, to a company based in Abu Dhabi. I
4 think that raises some serious concerns about the future
5 stability of DOD's trusted microelectronics source. I
6 think, between defense microelectronics activity -- at
7 Sandia National Labs, and certainly the capable state-of-
8 the-art industry suppliers here in the U.S., we ought to be
9 able to fill that void. But, I just want to urge you to
10 take a hard look at that and make sure we have a long-term
11 strategy.

12 Secretary Carter: We -- Senator, thank you -- we have,
13 and we do have a mitigation strategy. I'd be happy to have
14 someone come over and discuss it with you. But, it's an
15 important point. And we need a trusted source of
16 microcircuits, especially for, you know, very special and
17 essential functions.

18 Senator Heinrich: Exactly. Well, I look forward to
19 that.

20 To the issue of the day for both you, Secretary, and
21 General Dunford, we all recognize that ISIL continues to be
22 a very serious threat, but there have been some positive
23 signs of progress since last year. And according to media
24 reports, new foreign fighters joining ISIL, those numbers
25 are at a significantly lower rate this time than they were

1 last year. The news reports have suggested that they're on
2 the order of something like 200 a month from something close
3 to 2,000 a month a year ago. I want to ask you, Are those
4 numbers that we see in the media actually accurate? To what
5 do you attribute the sharp decline? And whether or not
6 CYBERCOM, which you mentioned, is having a role within that,
7 overall, as well.

8 Secretary Carter: The -- we do observe that trend. I
9 think it's very hard to be precise about these numbers, but
10 I think that that trend is one the intelligence community
11 does say is very discernible. You know, at the same time,
12 from my point view, any is too many. So --

13 Senator Heinrich: Yes.

14 Secretary Carter: -- we're not done until there are
15 none. But, I -- I'm told that that trend is observable in
16 the numbers, as well as we're able to discern those numbers.

17 Senator Heinrich: General.

18 General Dunford: Sir, I would attribute the reduction
19 -- and I'm with the Secretary, in terms of specific numbers
20 -- but, I think that reduction is for a couple of reasons.
21 One is, we assess that foreign fighters come from about 145
22 countries, and a number of those countries now have come
23 together in a more meaningful way to share information and
24 intelligence. And it's not what we would want it to be, but
25 it's much better than it was a year ago. And we do have a

1 specific organization that's been established to bring those
2 nations together, to exchange information, and to be
3 proactive about foreign fighters. And so, our visibility on
4 foreign fighters has increased.

5 Secondly, the Turks have been helpful in that regard.
6 And I think the efforts that they have taken along the
7 border have, in fact, reduced the numbers of foreign
8 fighters that flow back and forth between Turkey and Syria.

9 But, again, in both areas, both with regard to what the
10 Turks are doing and with regard to the information and
11 intelligence exchanges that we have, we have much more work
12 to do, and we're not satisfied with the level, but it has
13 proven to make an impact.

14 Senator Heinrich: Well, we appreciate that you don't
15 intend to let up until the job is done.

16 Have we had a -- any success in, sort of, cutting off
17 the ability of ISIS to reach right into even suburban
18 communities in the United States and create a demand for --
19 you know, I think a number of us have had news reports where
20 kids in our own communities, teenagers, people in their 20s,
21 suddenly decided to buy a ticket and try and get to Syria.
22 How is that process going? Are we able to cut off that,
23 sort of, electronic foreign fighter source? And are we
24 having an impact in that area, as well?

25 Secretary Carter: Our effort in Iraq and Syria is

1 aimed at making it more difficult for them to operate out of
2 those locations, including by trying to lure Americans into
3 acts of violence. I do have to say that the law enforcement
4 community and Homeland Security have an enormous effort
5 here, home. I don't want to speak for them, but I --
6 they're working extremely hard on that. And that's not our
7 -- in our area of responsibility, but it's essential. So,
8 they're -- so, they're working, so to speak, the other end
9 of the problem.

10 Senator Heinrich: Thank you both for --

11 Oh, General, did you want to add anything?

12 General Dunford: Senator, I was just going to say that
13 one thing that's encouraging -- there was a recent poll that
14 talked about the appeal of ISIL to Islamic youth worldwide,
15 and there's been a fair reduction in that. And I would
16 attribute that, in part, to our success against ISIL. And
17 the -- again, that narrative of invincibility has been
18 shattered over the past year. The less success they have on
19 the battlefield, the less of an appeal there is, the less of
20 the appeal they have to be a global caliphate.

21 Senator Heinrich: Right.

22 Thank you both very much.

23 Chairman McCain: Senator Wicker.

24 Senator Wicker: Thank you very much, gentlemen.

25 General Dunford, as Chairman McCain just pointed out,

1 most of the fatalities and civilian casualties in Syria are
2 caused by Bashar Assad's barrel bombs and air attacks. Do
3 you agree that we have the capability to take out Assad's
4 air force?

5 General Dunford: I do, Senator.

6 Senator Wicker: And why have we not done so?

7 General Dunford: We have not declared war on the
8 Syrian regime, Senator.

9 Senator Wicker: We -- you're not saying it would take
10 a congressional declaration of war to take that action. Are
11 you --

12 General Dunford: I think it would take the President
13 directing us to do that, Senator.

14 Senator Wicker: Okay. So, the -- I wonder why the
15 President has not directed us to prevent these civilian
16 fatalities and casualties by taking out Assad's air force.

17 General Dunford: The task he's given us militarily is
18 against ISIL, Senator.

19 Senator Wicker: What would be your recommendation in
20 that regard?

21 General Dunford: Specifically on -- as to whether to
22 attack the regime --

23 Senator Wicker: As to whether we should take out the
24 air force that is causing the majority of the civilian
25 fatalities and casualties.

1 General Dunford: Yeah. Senator, I'd prefer not to
2 give that recommendation in public. That's a policy
3 recommendation that, if I was going to provide that, I'd
4 provide it to the President, in private.

5 Senator Wicker: Okay.

6 Secretary Carter, you said Assad cannot be part of the
7 future. Is that the explicit view of the President of the
8 United States?

9 Secretary Carter: I -- yes, it is. And that's why
10 Secretary Kerry is working on a political transition to a
11 regime after Assad. As the Chairman just indicated, we
12 haven't undertaken to change that regime by force now for a
13 number of years. We have not made that undertaking. Our
14 focus in Syria, as the Department of Defense, is on fighting
15 ISIL because of its threat -- direct threat to Americans.
16 But, with respect to the tragedy of the civil war in Syria,
17 we're working on that political transition, but it's a
18 political transition. Our leadership and -- I think, has
19 indicated it necessarily involves Assad removing himself
20 from the scene because of exactly what -- everything he's
21 done to his people, which you've just cited.

22 Senator Wicker: Assad voluntarily removing himself
23 from the scene.

24 Secretary Carter: No, I think -- here's where the
25 Russians would do well to make what they do correspond to

1 what they say. They -- and that is to move the political
2 transition forward, use the leverage that they have and that
3 they've gained by intervening on Assad's side to end the
4 civil war, and get Assad to step aside while keeping some
5 structure to the Syrian government that can then marry up to
6 moderate opposition, whom we support, and create a life and
7 a government for the people of that shattered country --

8 Senator Wicker: Well, we certainly haven't seen that
9 out of the Russian leadership.

10 Let me just ask. There were reports last December --
11 there was an article in Bloomberg saying, "Obama no longer
12 seems sure Assad should go." Are you -- I think what you're
13 saying is that that's not accurate. And so, let me just
14 make sure. Is the President ruling out somehow working with
15 the Assad regime against ISIS in the short term?

16 Secretary Carter: They haven't -- we have not worked
17 with them. They've shown no inclination to --

18 Senator Wicker: Is there a --

19 Secretary Carter: -- work with us. And we're not
20 planning --

21 Senator Wicker: -- debate within the administration?

22 Secretary Carter: We're not planning to do that.

23 Senator Wicker: Is there a debate within the
24 administration about that?

25 Secretary Carter: I've not heard that idea broached.

1 Senator Wicker: Mr. Secretary, a number of European
2 parliamentarians I've spoken with in recent months have told
3 me, in private, that they wish Europe had worked with us on
4 Syria, back in 2013. And, frankly, I wish Congress had been
5 more resolute in that regard, also, back in 2013. Senator
6 Cotton was a voice in the wilderness at that time. But, now
7 that our NATO allies in Europe face the chaos of an
8 unprecedented migrant influx, do you believe NATO could help
9 in substantive action against ISIL? And how could they be
10 helpful?

11 Secretary Carter: I do believe they could be -- I need
12 to say "more helpful," because the NATO countries, I think
13 without exception -- we mentioned Turkey already, its
14 important contributions -- are working, along with us, on
15 the same campaign plan. NATO, as NATO, has not been asked
16 yet by the European countries. We favor that. And it's --
17 and there are reasons why NATO, as NATO, is more than the
18 sum of the parts. And I'm sure you appreciate that. So, I
19 think NATO, as NATO, could make a contribution. That's
20 being discussed with the Secretary General right now.

21 I'll just say, with respect to the refugee crisis, the
22 Europeans have -- preference has been to use the European
23 Union, and not NATO, as their chosen instrument for
24 addressing the refugee crisis. That is their choice. And
25 so, they have not asked, in the main, for NATO to be a big

1 part of that effort. We did take a step to assist, when I
2 was in Brussels a few months ago, to bring the Turks, the
3 Greeks, and the Germans together to work some naval
4 operations in the Aegean Sea aimed at deterring smugglers
5 from using the Aegean to bring people from Turkey to Greece.
6 That's had some success. But, the Europeans, in the main -
7 - this is their choice -- have wanted the European Union,
8 not NATO, to address the refugee situation.

9 Senator Wicker: Thank you.

10 Chairman McCain: Senator Gillibrand.

11 Excuse me. Senator Gillibrand.

12 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 Secretary Carter, thank you for being here. Thank you
14 for all your hard work.

15 Last week, an advocacy group called Protect Our
16 Defenders released a disturbing report detailing inaccurate
17 and misleading information that was provided by the
18 Department to this committee during a hearing in 2013 and in
19 followup letters about sexual assault cases civilian
20 prosecutors allegedly refused to prosecute and that the
21 chain of command later insisted they be tried, as opposed to
22 simply approved on the recommendation of military attorneys.

23 The report by Protect Our Defenders and a follow-on indepth
24 investigation by the AP alleged that the 93 cases the
25 Department highlighted to prove the toughness of commanders

1 in handling sexual assault cases were inaccurately
2 described.

3 I'm obviously very troubled by these allegations that
4 the Department, and specifically the military, provided
5 misleading information to Congress, with the intent of
6 defeating legislation that I and others on this committee
7 introduced to address the scourge of sexual assault in the
8 military. These reports suggest an effort by the military
9 to undermine this committee and Congress's responsibilities
10 to do oversight and determine policies. And if you looked
11 at this, the testimony that was given by Admiral Winnefeld
12 was quite verbatim by several Senators. So, when you give
13 testimony, Senators listen to what is said, and they will
14 repeat it. So, if you are giving false information, then
15 Senators are left repeating false information, which is not
16 in the interest of justice or legislating. They also throw
17 into question the veracity of other testimony given by the
18 military and defense officials in front of the committee.

19 So, have you looked into these allegations yet? And if
20 not, do you plan to?

21 Secretary Carter: Thank you, Senator.

22 Two things about that. The first is, it's absolutely
23 essential and -- that we give accurate information, because
24 it's important that we use accurate information to defeat
25 this scourge. And I appreciate all that you've done and all

1 your leadership in that regard.

2 Admiral Winnefeld is an extremely honorable man, and I
3 can't imagine that he would ever give information that was
4 not accurate and complete, to the best of his knowledge. I
5 have, in answer to your question, asked my staff to confirm
6 the numbers that he gave, and we will, of course, report
7 that to you.

8 [The information referred to follows:]

9 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

10

11

12

13 Secretary Carter: And if I can just say, on a somewhat
14 different note, but since you raised it, it is Sexual
15 Assault Prevention and Response Month. And later this
16 afternoon, I will be recognizing six tremendous sexual
17 response -- assault response coordinators from around the
18 country at our bases here. I just wanted to put in a word
19 for them, because they're super. You had something to do
20 with creating that role, and I appreciate it.

21 But, I have asked my staff to confirm those numbers,
22 and it's very important that we do so.

23 Senator Gillibrand: So, it's more than just numbers to
24 be aware; it's about the characterization of what happened.

25 Secretary Carter: Under- -- yes, exactly.

1 Senator Gillibrand: And what the AP did so effectively
2 is, when the military said these cases were declined by
3 local DAs and weren't going to be prosecuted, and because
4 commanders insisted that they be done, that they were done.

5 What the AP uncovered by talking to these local DAs, one at
6 Fort Drum, in fact, that was not the case; she did not
7 decline to prosecute, and said she wouldn't have, but that
8 it was done collaboratively so that they felt the best way
9 was for the military to proceed.

10 So, it's not about numbers. It's about how what
11 happened was characterized. And I also share your faith in
12 Admiral Winnefeld, but I would like to know, Are you going
13 to investigate who gave him those numbers, how those numbers
14 were compiled, how they were characterized, how they were
15 given him in report form, and who wrote those reports and
16 provided that?

17 Secretary Carter: You're -- yes, we will confirm or
18 not confirm those facts. And, you're right, it's not just
19 the number; it's the characterization of each case. And I
20 have asked my staff to look into those numbers. It's
21 important that we get it right. You're absolutely correct.

22 Senator Gillibrand: And what do you think is the line
23 that the Department and military should draw when it comes
24 to lobbying for or against legislation?

25 Secretary Carter: Our job is not to lobby. I think

1 we're here to try to tell you the truth about what we're
2 doing, to the best of our ability, and to explain the
3 choices that are before the country, the resources that will
4 be needed for things, and our efforts. "Lobby" is not a
5 word I'd like to use with respect to our responsibilities.
6 I think our responsibilities are to report to our overseers
7 the truth, as best we understand it.

8 Senator Gillibrand: And when can I expect your
9 investigation of this issue to be complete?

10 Secretary Carter: Just as soon as it's complete. I
11 promise you.

12 Senator Gillibrand: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.
13 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 Senator Reed [presiding]: On behalf of Chairman
15 McCain, Senator Fischer, please.

16 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Mr. Secretary, what is the political end state that our
18 military efforts in Syria are trying to achieve?

19 Secretary Carter: Our military efforts in Syria are
20 intended to defeat ISIL and regain, for local forces, the
21 territory now being tyrannized by ISIL and being used by it
22 as a platform to attack America. We also have a --

23 Senator Fischer: For a -- so our military efforts,
24 though, are focused entirely on ISIL, not the chaos that is
25 happening --

1 Secretary Carter: That's correct. We --

2 Senator Fischer: -- in the entire country?

3 Secretary Carter: -- have another effort, which
4 Secretary Kerry could speak to, aimed at the political
5 transition, as we were discussing earlier.

6 Senator Fischer: Do you believe that the efforts on
7 the ground are favorable to this solution that we're going
8 to have?

9 Secretary Carter: They have had results, so far, in
10 the taking of, as I mentioned earlier, Tishrin Dam, Shadadi.
11 There are some other operations afoot, I can't speak of
12 here. And then, ultimately, the purpose -- and this is the
13 reason why we're -- and the President has given us authority
14 to increase our numbers there. Our objective, of course, is
15 to collapse ISIL's control over Raqqa.

16 Senator Fischer: I assume you're referring to the
17 deployment of another 250 --

18 Secretary Carter: Correct.

19 Senator Fischer: -- soldiers to help contribute to
20 that goal? Is that --

21 Secretary Carter: That's correct.

22 Senator Fischer: -- correct?

23 And if we have as an immediate objective to recapture
24 Raqqa -- am I correct in stating that?

25 Secretary Carter: Yes.

1 Senator Fischer: Do you believe that the deployment of
2 these 250 soldiers will specifically connect us to that
3 goal, then?

4 Secretary Carter: Let me talk to their purpose and
5 then ask the Chairman to pitch in, as well, Senator. But,
6 that is precisely the reason why we're introducing those
7 forces and -- to identify and then enable forces that are
8 local to the region and who want to expel ISIL from that
9 territory, including Raqqa. And along the lines of what
10 we've seen in Shadadi, with the Syrian Arab Coalition,
11 which, enabled by us, expelled ISIL from that important
12 town, we'd like to do that with Raqqa, as well.

13 Chairman, do you want to add anything to that?

14 Senator Fischer: If I can just clarify a point. When
15 you're talking about local forces, are you talking about
16 Sunni forces in the area?

17 Secretary Carter: Yes. Arab forces, in the main.
18 They're the ones who live there and -- in that area.

19 Senator Fischer: And either you, Mr. Secretary, or
20 General, how many Sunni forces do you believe are going to
21 be required for this operation to be successful and for us
22 to reach this goal?

23 General Dunford: Senator, just -- I just want to wrap
24 back on the purpose of the Special Operations Forces, the
25 increased U.S. forces on the ground in Syria. It's to do

1 two things. To your original question, it's to grow the
2 size of our partners on the ground and to increase their
3 effectiveness. We assess, right now, that there are about
4 6,000 Syrian Arab Coalition members. We perhaps have as
5 many as twice that number that are currently in the vetting
6 process as a result of our forces on the ground, and we
7 expect those numbers to increase.

8 With regard to forces that are going to attack Raqqa,
9 we think that'll be a combination of both Syrian Arab
10 Coalition members, but supported also by the Kurdish forces
11 that we have been supporting here over the past year. Those
12 numbers are almost 30,000 Kurdish forces there. So, a
13 combination of those forces, plus the support that we
14 provide from the coalition, will be required for Raqqa.

15 Senator Fischer: And going past just the numbers of
16 the boots on the ground that are needed, are there,
17 obviously, other capabilities that are going to be required
18 for these forces to have? For example, what kind of
19 equipment do they need? And are there any leadership or
20 chain-of-command issues that you believe need to be resolved
21 before this will be effective?

22 General Dunford: Senator, the answer is yes. There
23 are issues. And we're doing several things. One is, we're
24 assisting them in the planning effort. We're providing
25 logistical support, which includes ammunition, and, in some

1 select groups, with the authorities we have in the NDAA,
2 that's specific equipment, weapons, vehicles, communications
3 equipment, and so forth, as well as training. And those are
4 the four main areas that will be required for them to be
5 successful.

6 Senator Fischer: Are there leadership concerns, chain-
7 of-command concerns within these forces, especially when we
8 have our troops embedded with them?

9 General Dunford: We have -- you know, that's been the
10 purpose of the last few months, and that's why we felt
11 confident increasing the numbers of U.S. forces there,
12 because we believe the force-protection concerns have been
13 mitigated. We think the relationship that we have with
14 these forces is sufficient for us to put additional forces
15 there.

16 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

17 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

18 Senator Reed: Thank you.

19 On behalf of the -- Chairman McCain, let me recognize
20 Senator Donnelly.

21 Senator Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22 I'm going to yield my time to Mr. Manchin, who has a
23 pressing engagement.

24 Senator Manchin: Thank you, Senator Donnelly. I
25 appreciate that very much.

1 And thank all of you for your service.

2 And I'd like to direct this, first of all, to General
3 Dunford. General Dunford, as both of you are aware, the
4 Defense Department is forced to make hard choices in today's
5 budget constraints. We understand that, too. Recently, it
6 was announced that we're spending -- we are sending 250 of
7 our Special Operation operators into Syria, and it costs
8 approximately, I understand, 1 to 1-and-a-half million
9 dollars to train one special operator, equaling to roughly
10 375 million to train those 250.

11 On Tuesday, this committee held a hearing to discuss
12 the F-35 program, which is still estimating the cost of
13 about 108 million per unit. On Tuesday, I asked General
14 Bogdan if he thinks we're spending our money wisely with the
15 F-135s? And I understand we've -- we're on track to
16 purchase 2443 aircraft. Knowing the type of fight that we're
17 expecting you to fight right now, and to defend our country,
18 conceptually if we traded 10 -- just 10 -- F-35s, we could
19 increase the size of our Special Operation Forces by over
20 700. In the world that you see today, and -- are we -- I
21 guess, are we concerned that we're sacrificing short-term
22 needs for our long-term security strategy? And would 10
23 less F-35s make that much of a difference down the road as
24 it would make a difference today with the 700 troops on the
25 ground?

1 General Dunford: Senator, I think you bring up,
2 really, the important issue we struggled with as we put the
3 FY17 budget together, and that is that we do confront a wide
4 range of challenges, from Russia, Iran, North Korea, China,
5 as well as violent extremism. And, in fact, the kind of
6 choices that you just outlined are exactly the choices we
7 made. We did, in fact, reduce the numbers of F-35s this
8 year to balance in other area -- other capability areas to
9 make sure that, with the money that we had, the top line
10 that we had, that we did the very best we could to make sure
11 we are postured to deal with all of those challenges.

12 So, we've done exactly as you've outlined, sir.

13 Senator Manchin: But, I'm saying -- I would -- guess I
14 would ask, then -- I talked to General Milley, when he was
15 here, and asked him, basically, on troop strengths, Mr.
16 Secretary -- I think we're scheduled to go to 980, correct?
17 980,000?

18 Secretary Carter: Yes. In the Army Active and Reserve
19 component, total.

20 Senator Manchin: Right. And I asked him, point blank,
21 What does it take to defend the threats that we have? He
22 didn't hesitate. He said "one-two." That's 220,000 troops
23 short. I don't want to go back home to West Virginia and
24 tell the people we just -- we're a little bit short on this
25 one. So, we're looking at ways, knowing that we're working

1 under constraints -- that's what we're asking for, some
2 direction, here, that gives you the job to do -- the
3 wherewithal to do the best job that you have to do.

4 Secretary Carter: A couple of things.

5 Senator Manchin: Do you concur -- would you concur --

6 Secretary Carter: I'll --

7 Senator Manchin: Do you concur --

8 Secretary Carter: I'll --

9 Senator Manchin: -- with the figure --

10 Secretary Carter: I'll --

11 Senator Manchin: -- of 220,000 short?

12 Secretary Carter: No. Our number is 980,000. That's
13 the end-strength number that we and the Army are aiming for.
14 That's 450,000 Active component --

15 Senator Manchin: I know what you're aiming at, sir.
16 I'm sorry. But, I'm asking, What does it take to do the
17 job? The General --

18 Secretary Carter: That --

19 Senator Manchin: -- the General believes it's 1.2.

20 Secretary Carter: That is the number that we're
21 shooting at; namely, 980,000 is the number --

22 Senator Manchin: So, you all disagree.

23 Secretary Carter: -- that we think --

24 Senator Manchin: You and the General --

25 Secretary Carter: -- is --

1 Senator Manchin: -- are in disagreement on this.

2 Secretary Carter: -- is adequate. No, I think General
3 Milley -- General Milley's and the Army's Acting Secretary
4 of the Army's priorities are, in fact, readiness. That is
5 the principal thing that General Milley and I and General
6 Dunford have focused on in the Army, more than end strength,
7 where we're adding resources this year, is to full-spectrum
8 training and bringing the total Army back to levels of
9 readiness that are necessary.

10 And if I can loop back to your Special Forces point,
11 also, Senator, we have a lot more than 300 Special Forces.
12 It's not like we have to "make" these people. We're sending
13 them there. We have tens of thousands of Special Forces.
14 Excellent people. Yes, exquisitely trained people. But,
15 it's not like we don't have them to apply to Syria. We're
16 applying them in the number and the manner that makes sense
17 at this moment.

18 Let me ask if the Chairman wants to add anything on
19 either of those questions.

20 General Dunford: Senator, the only thing I'd say is
21 that right now, at least in this budget year, I was a lot
22 more concerned with the capability of the force than I was
23 the capacity. In other words, I wasn't satisfied that, with
24 the force structure that we currently have, we had
25 sufficient training and equipment. And that was the

1 priority this year, was to focus on the capability of the
2 forces that we have, as opposed to the force structure.

3 Senator Manchin: I'm just -- I'm concerned that,
4 basically, there's -- and the way you're explaining it, sir
5 -- I understand where you're coming from. It just doesn't
6 make sense, from my way of trying to analyze this, because
7 General Milley was very clear. He didn't hesitate. Because
8 I asked him what it would take for us to be able to defend
9 this great Nation and face the imminent threats that we had,
10 and he felt we were woefully short at 980,000 of end
11 strength. He truly did. So, if there's a difference here,
12 maybe we can talk in a more secure briefing on this to make
13 sure --

14 Secretary Carter: We can, but you're thinking --
15 absolutely right, this is a question of balancing
16 investments in force structure, readiness, modernization, as
17 the Chairman said, and that's a balance that we all struck,
18 including General Milley and the leadership of the Army. So
19 -- and I'd just repeat that the principal strategic issue
20 that we are trying to address in the Army budget is less --
21 not force structure, it is readiness. That's --

22 Senator Manchin: Well, I --

23 Secretary Carter: -- General Milley's and my principal
24 concern in the Army. I know he testified to that --

25 Senator Manchin: My time is expired. But, I would

1 just say that, basically, the dysfunction that we have, and
2 the political discourse that we have here in this body in --
3 and all on top of Capitol Hill here, shows you that we must
4 come together for the sake of our country and put our
5 country first in the defense of this country versus our
6 politics. And this is a shame that we don't get a good
7 budget that doesn't have to make these difficult choices.
8 It's really a shame. I'm sorry for that.

9 Secretary Carter: Amen to that. Thank you.

10 Chairman McCain [presiding]: Senator Cotton.

11 Senator Cotton: Thank you, gentlemen, for your
12 appearance before the committee.

13 Secretary Carter, I want to talk about how our counter-
14 ISIS policy has been made. I want to start, though, in the
15 South China Sea before we move on to that policymaking
16 process.

17 You just returned from a trip to the Philippines, where
18 you announced several new initiatives. Unfortunately, we've
19 also seen reports that China has begun some reclamation
20 activities on the Scarborough Shoal, which is 120 miles west
21 of Subic Bay. Is it the case that, if China were to both
22 reclaim and militarize Scarborough Shoal, they could
23 overwatch all flights out of northern Philippines with radar
24 systems and hold Subic Bay, Luzon Strait, and Manila Bay at
25 risk with missile systems on Scarborough Shoal?

1 Secretary Carter: Well, it's precisely because of
2 those kinds of concerns that I was working with the
3 Philippines. They're a treaty ally. We take that
4 seriously. Very seriously. That's why we are establishing
5 some new installations from which we can operate, so that we
6 strengthen our own posture there, and then that's why we're
7 doing the rebalance, in general, which is not just working
8 with the increasing number of allies and partners who are
9 coming to us, saying, "We're concerned about China." So,
10 we're getting more and more of that, including places like
11 Vietnam. But, it's also why we're sending our best
12 equipment to the Asia-Pacific, why we're doing more --

13 Senator Cotton: And -- I understand, Mr. Secretary.
14 It's also why, last week, I gather there were at least three
15 flights conducted in the vicinity of Scarborough Shoal by
16 U.S. aircraft?

17 Secretary Carter: I'd rather -- I could -- I'd prefer
18 to discuss that -- have you briefed in that in -- privately,
19 Senator, if you don't mind.

20 Senator Cotton: Media reports --

21 Secretary Carter: But, there's no question about it,
22 we will continue to, as I say, "fly, sail, and operate
23 wherever international law permits." We do that around the
24 world. And we're not going to stop.

25 Senator Cotton: Media reports indicate that those

1 flights did occur, but they did not occur within 12 miles of
2 that feature, which would have been a more assertive action
3 in contesting China's claims. Now I want to leave the South
4 China Sea, but ascend to this point about the policymaking
5 process.

6 Chairman McCain: Could I interrupt the Senator a
7 second?

8 This is the second time, Secretary Carter, that you've
9 refused to confirm what is well known in the media. That's
10 not fair to this committee. It's all been reported. There
11 were flights into the area around those islands. And why
12 you would refuse to confirm that, when it's already been in
13 the media, is, I think, not the proper deference that this
14 committee is owed.

15 Secretary Carter: I'm only refusing because I believe
16 it's classified information, Senator. But, I don't -- I
17 believe it is.

18 Senator Cotton: Actually, I'm glad this -- I'm glad
19 the Chairman pointed it out. But, I -- I think it raises
20 the point that I want to go on to now, from your two
21 predecessors, Secretary Gates and Secretary Panetta, about
22 the nature of national security decisionmaking policy.

23 Secretary Gates recently said that Obama's foreign
24 policy is, quote, "not as bad as it sounds. It's the way it
25 comes out that diminishes its effectiveness. The way things

1 get done communicates reluctance to assert American power.
2 They often end up in the right place, but a day late and a
3 dollar short. The decisions are made seriatim. It presents
4 an image that President Obama is being dragged, kicking and
5 screaming, to each new stage. And it dilutes the
6 implementation of what he's done. It becomes so incremental
7 that the message is lost. It makes them look reluctant,"
8 end quote.

9 Secretary Panetta, quote, "I think what I've seen in
10 the last 4 years is almost his cautiousness and
11 overcorrection, which makes it appear that the United States
12 is hesitant to take action. And that sends, I think, a
13 message of weakness," end quote.

14 So, both in our actions in the South China Sea, where
15 we may or may not be flying these missions, where we may or
16 may not be going inside the protected 12 mile of territorial
17 ring, but also in the most recent announcement that we're
18 going to deploy troops to Syria, but only 250 troops, what
19 would you comment on Secretary Panetta and Secretary Gates'
20 position about how this policy is being made?

21 Secretary Carter: I can't, obviously, speak for them
22 or for the time that they were Secretary. I can only speak
23 my -- from my own experience. And I'll ask the Chairman to
24 do the same.

25 I am forthright, as I told you I would be when you

1 confirmed me as Secretary of Defense, in giving the
2 President my best advice. I'm also absolutely committed to
3 making sure he gets professional military advice. That's
4 where the Chairman comes in. I've never failed to have a
5 hearing for my views. And you asked -- and I can -- you
6 raised one particular, which I already addressed in my
7 hearing, the additional SOF in Syria, their numbers and
8 their mission was precisely what the Chairman and I
9 recommended. What we announced last week was precisely what
10 the Chairman and I recommended. What he approved in -- last
11 fall, the -- what we called the "accelerants" of that time,
12 was what the Chairman and I recommended to him. Now, that
13 doesn't mean he's always going to approve our
14 recommendations. I'm just giving you those as examples. He
15 is the Commander in Chief. But, we tell it straight, to the
16 best of our ability. I can certainly speak for myself, but
17 I, in observation, can speak for the Chairman, as well. I
18 obviously can't speak for my distinguished predecessors and
19 the experience that they might --

20 Senator Cotton: Well, and I will address one final
21 question of General Dunford, here, which, again, goes back
22 to Secretary Gates' and Secretary Panetta's comments. They
23 both attribute this grudging, halting, hesitating exercise
24 of American power to the large size of the President's
25 national security staff and the micromanagement, Secretary

1 Gates saying, for example, "It was the operational
2 micromanagement that drove me nuts, of the White House and
3 NSC staffers calling senior commanders out in the field and
4 asking them questions, of second-guessing commanders."

5 General Dunford, could you comment on your experience,
6 both in your current role and in previous roles, about your
7 relationship with the national security staff?

8 General Dunford: Senator, I guess what I'd focus on is
9 my relationship and access to the President. In both my
10 previous role and this role, I have had the opportunity to
11 provide best military advice.

12 With regard to the national security staff, I didn't
13 deal with the national security staff in my previous
14 assignment and, in fact, was specifically proscribed from
15 doing that by the Secretary of Defense, which I think was
16 appropriate. I don't think I should have been dealing with
17 the national security staff in my previous assignment.

18 In my current role, I don't deal with the national
19 security staff, except the National Security Advisor and
20 the Principal Deputy National Security Advisors on a routine
21 basis. And my access is unfettered in that regard. I don't
22 go through the national security staff.

23 Senator Cotton: Thank you.

24 Chairman McCain: I don't want to belabor the point,
25 Mr. Secretary, but to classify the fact that we are sending

1 our ships and airplanes into international waters, and have
2 that classified, when it should be magnified throughout the
3 world that the United States is asserting our respect and
4 adherence to international law, is something that is
5 confusing and befuddling. Why would we want to classify the
6 fact that we are doing what every nation in the world should
7 be able to do? And that's sail or fly wherever we want to.
8 Why should that be classified information?

9 Secretary Carter: It's -- the -- it's a fair point,
10 and you -- I'll look into why -- what aspects of these
11 operations are classified. I'm just respectful of the
12 process. So, I'm not going to talk about the details of
13 operations. But, I -- there's no question that we -- and
14 I've said it a -- many, many times; I say it again today --
15 we fly, sail, and operate wherever international law
16 permits. We exercise that right routinely. The operational
17 details of a particular flight, it's a fair question why --
18 or what parts of it are classified. I'll go back and look
19 into it. But, I -- I'm careful about disclosing classified
20 information or information I believe is classified, not to
21 this committee, because you all have access to it in the
22 right setting, but not this setting. And the fact that
23 something's in the newspaper doesn't make it unclassified,
24 as we all know.

25 Chairman McCain: Obviously, we don't agree.

1 Senator Donnelly.

2 Senator Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 For just a few minutes, Mr. Secretary, I want to look a
4 little bit beyond Iraq and Syria and discuss our plan to
5 fight the threats of extremism globally. When we've asked
6 you and other witnesses to talk about our strategy against
7 ISIS, we often get a response detailing the nine lines of
8 effort that have been outlined by the President. Is it your
9 understanding that those nine lines of effort comprise the
10 strategy to defeat ISIS? And is it solely to ISIS, or is
11 that our strategy for the global efforts against terrorism?

12 Secretary Carter: Well, there's a lot of good sense to
13 the line -- nine-lines formulation that was first made 2
14 years ago. I would say that, while they're all still valid
15 -- they basically, name the parts of the campaign --
16 political, economic, military -- that need to be taken -- I
17 would also say, we've moved beyond that conceptual framework
18 now and have a more operational framework, the one it --
19 that, in Syria and Iraq, I've described.

20 But, it still remains true. If you go back to the nine
21 lines of effort, there are things like interrupting ISIL's
22 finances; we're still doing that, working with people to do
23 that. It's not the Department of Defense, but the
24 Department of Treasury, Department of State, and so forth.
25 The foreign fighter flows, we have a role in that, but a lot

1 of other countries and other parts of our government have a
2 role. So, it's still a good taxonomy of the total number of
3 efforts. But, I would say we've moved beyond that in
4 specificity in a good -- in the last couple of years.

5 Senator Donnelly: Is that the primary framework for
6 the rest of the global fight against terrorism? Those nine
7 lines?

8 Secretary Carter: Again, I -- that's a good, broad
9 framework, but it -- at -- we've gotten much more
10 operational in our approach, including in individual
11 locations, in addition to Syria --

12 Senator Donnelly: Okay. Let --

13 Secretary Carter: -- and Iraq.

14 Senator Donnelly: Let me ask you some information that
15 just came out today. So, you know, what you're not familiar
16 with, that's okay. It was reported that the truce with the
17 Russians is on the verge of collapse. Senior administration
18 officials quoted that no clear path ahead in Syria. The
19 situation on the ground is murky. We saw that there have
20 just been airstrikes in Aleppo that destroyed a hospital,
21 killing at least 14 patients and staff. We know the Syrian
22 Air Force and the Russians have stepped up raids in that
23 area against the rebel factions. They talked about
24 catastrophic deterioration in Aleppo in the last few days.
25 It seems we're further away from a workable plan in Syria

1 than in a very long time. Exactly what are we going to do
2 to try to move this forward? It appears it's heading in the
3 other direction.

4 Secretary Carter: I -- that is precisely what
5 Secretary Kerry is working on and discussing with all the
6 parties. And I can't speak to overnight developments. But,
7 he is both working on the cessation of hostilities, itself,
8 and, most importantly -- and to get back to what we were
9 discussing earlier -- on the political resolution of the
10 Syrian civil war. And I'd -- I'll leave it to him to
11 comment on that.

12 Senator Donnelly: Well, let me -- I was in Iraq about
13 a month ago, right before Hit was taken. And we were
14 working with the Sunni tribal leaders there. Do you see
15 that continuing to move in the right direction? And are we
16 leaving people behind? One of their concerns was the
17 governance in those towns, once they took them back --

18 Secretary Carter: A very good question, and it is very
19 important that the stabilization take place after the
20 recapture of these cities. That's been going on in Ramadi.

21 I'll ask the Chairman if he wants to add more to that.
22 Resettling people, getting the water back on, getting the
23 power back on, getting schools back open, clearing the IEDs,
24 which these, really, evil ISIL people wire in people's homes
25 and so forth, when they come back, takes a long time to

1 clear -- that's essential. That's go -- that -- we've
2 worked on that in Ramadi. We've worked on that in Hit. And
3 when I was talking about the necessary political and
4 economic complements -- and to get back to your nine lines
5 of effort -- we can do all we're doing, militarily, and I'm
6 confident that we're on the right track there, but that
7 victory can't be sustained unless the local people have the
8 wherewithal to resettle. And in -- with the political
9 situation in Iraq and as the -- and the economic situation,
10 owing particularly to oil prices, that's --

11 Senator Donnelly: I'm about out of time, but I just
12 want to mention again that, in Syria, you know, as we're
13 trying to move ISIS out of Raqqa, trying to accomplish that
14 at the same time that Aleppo seems to be going into deeper
15 problems, greater flames, more trouble, that whatever
16 Secretary Kerry is working on, the stage actually seems to
17 be getting -- heading in the other direction instead of
18 moving forward.

19 And then, just finally, as an aside, we still hope you
20 can make it to Crane. We know how busy you are. But, in
21 Syria, most recent developments seem to be heading more
22 against our goals than for our goals.

23 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 Chairman McCain: Senator Sullivan.

25 Senator Sullivan: Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

1 I want to begin with a compliment, Mr. Secretary, to
2 you and the President for the quality of the generals that
3 you are nominating and asking to lead our military. Many
4 have come to this -- they've all come to this committee and
5 are very impressive.

6 General Dunford, on March 19th, there was a Marine
7 Corps staff sergeant, part of BLT26 artillery -- marine who
8 was killed in Iraq. Was he killed in action, killed in
9 combat?

10 General Dunford: He was killed in combat, Senator.

11 Senator Sullivan: We had a -- in January, a staff
12 sergeant from the 19th Special Forces group was killed in
13 Afghanistan. Was he killed in combat?

14 General Dunford: Master Sergeant Wheeler was killed in
15 combat, Senator.

16 Senator Sullivan: When our JSOC troops conduct CT
17 missions in that part of the world, are they conducting
18 combat operations?

19 General Dunford: They are, Senator.

20 Senator Sullivan: How about when our F-22s, F-16s, A-
21 10s are doing bombing missions in Iraq and Syria? Are they
22 conducting combat missions?

23 General Dunford: They are, Senator.

24 Senator Sullivan: So, Mr. Secretary, my question is
25 pretty simple. It's -- the President, the White House

1 spokesman, even just this past week, whenever they talk
2 about our troops in the Middle East, they go to great
3 lengths -- and this is a quote from the President, "They
4 will not involve American combat troops fighting on foreign
5 soil." This is the White House spokesman recently, "Our
6 troops are not in a combat role."

7 Why does the administration go through these crazy
8 somersaults, that the entire country knows is not correct,
9 to say our troops are not in combat, when they're in combat?

10 The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs just stated that pretty
11 much everybody in the Middle East is in combat. So, why
12 does the President not level with the American people? Why
13 does the White House spokesman continually just say they're
14 not in combat? I think one thing -- I would like you to
15 answer that question, but I also think it diminishes the
16 sacrifice of our troops and their families to -- you know,
17 we know they're in combat. Why can't we level with the
18 American people and say they're in combat? Chairman just
19 did.

20 Secretary Carter: Yeah. I'm going to associate myself
21 with the Chairman, that these people are in combat, Senator.
22 And I think that we need to say that clearly. I can't -- I
23 don't know what statements you're quoting, but I can well
24 imagine that the point being made is to describe the
25 strategy that I described --

1 Senator Sullivan: Well, I think that --

2 Secretary Carter: -- earlier, which is to -- not to
3 try to substitute for local forces, but, to get back to
4 Senator Donnelly's point, to try to get them powerful enough
5 that they can expel ISIL, with our support. And when we
6 provide that support, we put people in harm's way, we ask
7 them to conduct combat actions. I mean, a pilot flying over
8 --

9 Senator Sullivan: Dropping bombs.

10 Secretary Carter: -- Iraq, dropping bombs, is
11 certainly in that circumstance.

12 Senator Sullivan: Well, I think it would be --

13 Secretary Carter: I think that's what's being gotten
14 at, but I --

15 Senator Sullivan: I think it be useful to maybe pass
16 on, from, you know, your two perspectives, to the White
17 House, to the President, to his spokespeople, to the people
18 who background the press. I mean, even last week, 250 new
19 Special Forces troops going to the Middle East, but they're
20 not in combat roles. Well, that's actually not true. I
21 think leveling with this committee, leveling with the
22 American people is very useful. I know the two of you are
23 doing that. But, if you can pass that message on to the
24 President and his spokespeople in the White House, I think
25 that would be useful.

1 I want to turn to a followup --

2 Secretary Carter: Can I thank you, by the way, for

3 what you've said about the --

4 Senator Sullivan: Well, it's true.

5 Secretary Carter: -- unbelievable officers that we --

6 Senator Sullivan: It's not just --

7 Secretary Carter: -- have. It's --

8 Senator Sullivan: -- General Dunford. It's --

9 Secretary Carter: It's --

10 Senator Sullivan: -- General Milley, it's the whole --

11 Secretary Carter: It's a whole bunch of them.

12 Senator Sullivan: Impressive.

13 Secretary Carter: We're -- country is blessed.

14 Senator Sullivan: I'd like to turn to -- follow up on

15 Senator Cotton's line of questionings. And, you know, I'm

16 going to hand out a document, here, that shows a little bit

17 more detail what's going on in the South China Sea, as

18 you're well aware, Mr. Secretary, Mr. Chairman. But,

19 there's a lot of concern that the Scarborough Shoal has very

20 important strategic significance with regard to what some

21 people are calling a "strategic triangle" in the South China

22 Sea. The Chinese have already established two legs of that

23 triangle. The fighters and radars are part of that radius

24 that you see around the Scarborough Shore -- Shoal. What is

25 the strategic significance if the Chinese do start to build

1 up the military capability on that island, particularly
2 being so close to the Philippines? And what are our plans if
3 they do begin that kind of militarization or even buildup of
4 the island? And do we have a plan to respond to the U.N.
5 tribunal ruling that's expected in June with regard to
6 China's excessive maritime claims? There's a lot going on
7 there, and I'd appreciate just an answer to those questions.

8 Secretary Carter: Sure. There is. And I should say,
9 also, thank you for your role and leadership in this part of
10 the world. It's a critical one. And, you know, the Middle
11 East is the headlines all the time, and justifiably so, but
12 this is the region where half of humankind lives, and half
13 of the world's economy, so it's critical.

14 And your map's absolutely accurate. And the -- to get
15 to your various questions, the United States is reacting.
16 That's what our rebalance is all about. There are many
17 things that we work with China on, but there are certain
18 aspects of Chinese behavior that are very disturbing to us.
19 They're deeply disturbing to countries in the region, which
20 has them all coming to us and is having the effect of
21 causing self-isolation by China. We are reacting,
22 ourselves, and we are being increasingly invited to work
23 with countries, longstanding allies, and strong allies, like
24 the Philippines -- and that's where the sites you see, and
25 correctly have on the map here, come in -- but also new

1 partners, like Vietnam. I was in India a week and a half
2 ago. Many of them concerned about Chinese behavior.

3 And I'll just, finally --

4 Senator Sullivan: Well, Mr. Secretary, just -- I'm
5 sorry to cut you off, here, but --

6 Secretary Carter: No.

7 Senator Sullivan: -- but the strategic significance of
8 the Scarborough Shoal right now in the South China Sea.
9 There's a lot going on there. You were just there. Can you
10 comment on that?

11 Secretary Carter: Well, it's a piece of disputed
12 territory that, like other disputes in that region, has the
13 potential to lead to military conflict. That's particularly
14 concerning to us, given its proximity to the Philippines.
15 But, we have the same view about all these disputes. And,
16 by the way, even though China is, by far and away, in the
17 recent times, the greatest reclaimer and militarization of
18 disputed features, other countries are doing it, as well.
19 I'm just -- I -- I'm not -- I don't represent our diplomatic
20 position, but our diplomatic position, to get back to what
21 you said about the tribunal, is that these disputes ought to
22 be settled peacefully. And one of the ways of doing that is
23 through the tribunal.

24 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

25 Chairman McCain: You would support lifting

1 restrictions on provision of weapons to the Vietnamese?

2 Secretary Carter: We've discussed this in the past,
3 and I appreciate your leadership in that regard, Chairman.
4 And, yes.

5 Chairman McCain: Senator Donnelly. Oh, I'm sorry.

6 Senator McCaskill.

7 Senator McCaskill: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 The funding for United States Forces Korea and the
9 rebalance to the Pacific is in the base budget?

10 Secretary Carter: It is.

11 Senator McCaskill: I support the European Reassurance
12 Initiative. I was just there and talked to the -- to many
13 of the important military commanders in European Command --
14 many of the important leaders in the European Command. I
15 support it. But, let's be clear. The only reason it's in
16 OCO is because of the budget caps. Correct?

17 Secretary Carter: Well, I think it was put into OCO
18 originally because it --

19 Senator McCaskill: I think the Chairman referenced
20 this last year, when he said it's in OCO because it's like
21 what the bank robber said. He said a bank robber --

22 Secretary Carter: It's the Willy Sutton strategic --

23 Senator McCaskill: -- I don't remember who it was --
24 right.

25 Secretary Carter: No, there's something --

1 Senator McCaskill: That's where the money is.

2 Secretary Carter: -- there's something to that. I
3 mean, to be fair, I wasn't around at the time, but when the
4 thing first came up in Crimea, urgent money was required.
5 And so, money was moved within OCO, which is easier to do
6 than in the base. But, you're right, the years go on, and
7 then you say --

8 Senator McCaskill: There's no --

9 Secretary Carter: -- why is this money in ERI?

10 Senator McCaskill: Yeah.

11 Secretary Carter: I --

12 Senator McCaskill: There's no difference between the
13 rebalance to the Pacific and the European Reassurance
14 Initiative, correct?

15 Secretary Carter: I am afraid that you're right, that
16 -- I only say I'm afraid because --

17 Senator McCaskill: So, the only difference is --

18 Secretary Carter: -- what that means is that Putin's
19 --

20 Senator McCaskill: -- an artificial --

21 Secretary Carter: -- Russia is here to stay.

22 Senator McCaskill: Let me be clear here. The only
23 reason they're in two different budgets is an artificial cap
24 put on by Congress to try to pretend to the American people
25 that we're balancing something.

1 Secretary Carter: Well, I --

2 Senator McCaskill: You don't have to comment on that.
3 I just wanted that on the record. It just is so irritating
4 to me that we can't be honest. Talking about being honest
5 with the American people, how about being honest with the
6 American people what we're doing about the base budget in
7 the military? I am so tired of so many Members of Congress
8 saying, "Oh, we want to support the -- we want to support
9 the military. We want to support the military," and then
10 we're shoving all these things in OCO that don't belong in
11 OCO. And the reason they're doing it is because they can
12 pretend they're paying for it and pretend they're balancing
13 something. It just is so irritating to me. I wanted to get
14 that on the record first.

15 Chairman McCain: We feel -- do you feel better now?

16 Senator McCaskill: I do.

17 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

18 Senator McCaskill: And I know you relate.

19 Chairman McCain: I do.

20 Senator McCaskill: In fact, I think --

21 Secretary Carter: Can I get in this, too?

22 Chairman McCain: I totally agree.

23 Secretary Carter: I feel better, also.

24 [Laughter.]

25 Senator McCaskill: I actually think --

1 Chairman McCain: Totally agree.

2 Senator McCaskill: -- I think the Chairman totally
3 agrees with me.

4 Chairman McCain: Absolutely.

5 Senator McCaskill: We just need more people to quit
6 being hypocrites about balancing a budget, and be honest
7 about what it takes to be fiscally responsible as it relates
8 to our budget military.

9 Sinai Peninsula, General Dunford. I know that you were
10 just with Sisi. I am worried about other international
11 peacekeeping initiative on the Sinai that's there, but -- to
12 enforce the agreements, back in the late '70s, between
13 Israel and Egypt. And I -- there have been incidents.
14 There have been Americans hurt. Tell me what you can about
15 your sense of Egypt being capable of continuing to sustain
16 and protect this peacekeeping mission.

17 General Dunford: Senator, a couple of points.

18 First, I have looked at this very closely over the last
19 few months. And, while absolutely committed to remaining in
20 the Sinai Peninsula to enforce the Camp David Accords, we,
21 of course, are concerned about the protection of our forces.
22 And we've already taken a number of steps, to include
23 providing them additional equipment and adjusting their
24 posture to increase their force protection level.

25 I am not satisfied we're where we need to be right now.

1 And so, we're working very closely with the Israelis,
2 working very closely with the Egyptians to take some steps
3 that will further enhance our force protection. And if I'm
4 not satisfied that we can properly address our force
5 protection, which really includes two things, Senator -- it
6 includes adjusting our posture as well as addressing the
7 terrorists that are in that environment and making sure that
8 we have an effective counterterrorism plan in the Sinai, as
9 well, in conjunction with the Egyptians -- if those two
10 conditions aren't met, then I'll have some recommendations
11 to the Secretary and the President about what we do, moving
12 forward.

13 But, it is very sensitive right now, the discussions.
14 I'd like to talk to you in private about --

15 Senator McCaskill: Sure.

16 General Dunford: -- my conversation with Egyptians
17 over the weekend, and the number of conversations with the
18 Egyptians and the Israelis over the last couple of months.
19 But, we're working very closely -- because it is a
20 trilateral issue, we're working very closely to address
21 those two issues. You know, number one, the immediate
22 posture of our force, but, as importantly, I think, both of
23 these things are necessary for us to be satisfied that we've
24 done all we can do for our men and women that are there.
25 The second piece is to have an effective plan to deal with

1 the terrorists in the region. There is clearly a strong
2 presence of the Islamic State in the Sinai as well as an
3 insurgency that has been going on in the Sinai for some
4 time.

5 Senator McCaskill: Thank you, General. I'll look
6 forward to that and learning more. I'm very concerned about
7 it.

8 Finally, assistance to Jordan. I don't think people
9 realize -- in America, there has been a hue and cry about
10 10,000 Syrian refugees. There's 1.4 million in Jordan.
11 Makes up 13 percent of their population. They closed the
12 border last year because of it, because of the imbalance
13 that was occurring within their country. I had an
14 opportunity to be in Jordan a few weeks ago, visited with
15 both our military, our terrific military leaders there, and
16 also with the Jordanian military. I am worried about the
17 15,000 people along that border that are now sitting there
18 because they're not being allowed to come into Jordan. And
19 I -- as you all focus on northern Syria, I'm wondering what,
20 if anything, you can tell me, in this setting -- and maybe
21 this is also for a closed setting, because most of what I've
22 learned would be appropriate in a closed setting -- about
23 the drifting of ISIS and ISIL to the southern region along
24 this border, where we now have 15,000 people just on the
25 other side of the border from Jordan.

1 Secretary Carter: Thanks. I'll say a few things about
2 it. We can talk more in another setting. I'll ask the
3 Chairman to chime in.

4 But, first of all, thanks for going there and seeing
5 our guys and gals, and also the -- our fantastic partners in
6 the Jordanians. And, you're right, that for -- on a per
7 capita basis, they have absorbed this enormous refugee
8 situation. And yes, we've -- we were actually talking a lot
9 about the northern parts of both Iraq and Syria, but we're
10 very mindful of the -- of both southern Iraq and southern
11 Syria, and the possibility that, as we apply pressure to the
12 north in both Mosul and Raqqa, that ISIL will, as the
13 expression goes, "squirt out" toward the south. We've
14 talked to the Jordanians about that, talked to the Iraqis
15 about that, and we've talked to the Israelis, by the way,
16 about that, as well, and work with them. And we do have
17 operations that we're facilitating with Iraq, for example,
18 in the direction of Rutbah, to the southwest, even as we
19 help them move up the Tigris Valley to the north.

20 And, Chairman, do you want to add anything to that?

21 General Dunford: Senator, Jordan is clearly one of our
22 more important partners in the region, and we have a strong
23 military-to-military relationship with Jordan. So, part of
24 what we're doing is increasing their capacity and supporting
25 them. And then, the 1209 program that we spoke about

1 earlier, which is -- from the NDAA -- which is designed to
2 allow us to grow effective indigenous ground forces to take
3 the fight to the enemy -- in this case, from Jordan into
4 Syria -- we're all -- we also have an active 1209 program
5 down in the Jordan-Syrian border area that I think is -- you
6 were probably briefed on during --

7 Senator McCaskill: Correct. Thank you very much.

8 Thank you both. Thank you for your service. And we're
9 very proud of you. And we're going to do everything -- I'm
10 going to do everything I can to get what you need in the
11 base budget, where it belongs.

12 Chairman McCain: In Senator McCaskill's shy and
13 retiring manner, she will do that.

14 We thank you for your passion, Senator McCaskill. And
15 I --

16 Senator McCaskill: Takes one to know one.

17 Chairman McCain: -- and I totally agree with your
18 dissatisfaction. And I agree with you, we are deceiving the
19 American people, and that's not good.

20 Thank you.

21 Senator McCaskill: Thank you.

22 Chairman McCain: Senator Lee.

23 Senator Lee: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 Thank you both for appearing again in front of this
25 committee to discuss the Department of Defense's Middle East

1 policy. And thank you also for the brave young and men --
2 young men and women you represent, stationed in the United
3 States and all across the world.

4 This debate in our committee is a difficult one,
5 because many of our concerns have to do with broad strategic
6 decisions being made outside the Department of Defense.
7 However, until the administration reforms its strategy to
8 acknowledge the unpleasant realities of the Middle East, and
9 recognize that America's security interests are, and -- what
10 exactly the United States strategies are, and are not, in
11 these conflicts, I think Congress needs to be very cautious
12 as we contemplate any further funding requests from the
13 Department of Defense or any other national security agency.

14 General Dunford, as President Obama reiterated in his
15 meetings with European leaders this week, the United States
16 counter-ISIS strategy ultimately relies on peaceful transfer
17 of power in Syria from Assad's regime to an inclusive
18 government there. Now, while certainly admirable, it's far
19 from realistic. As Middle East journalist Thanassis
20 Cambanis wrote in the New York Times 2 weeks ago, quote,
21 "Syria, one of the most important states in the Arab world,
22 has cracked up, and no peace settlement can put it back
23 together," close quote. In your professional opinion,
24 General Dunford, what do you think the chances are that the
25 sort of reconciliation and political unity sought by the

1 Obama administration can happen in Syria, just given the
2 amount of violence that we've seen there over the last 4
3 years, the competing outside interests, and the sectarian
4 context of this fight? And what does the intelligence that
5 we're collecting tend to indicate about the possible
6 willingness of these groups to come together to form some
7 sort of government?

8 General Dunford: Senator, I think the most difficult
9 challenge in forming a new government is dealing with the
10 role of Assad. And I can tell you -- you asked about the
11 opposition groups -- that they are absolutely adamant -- and
12 that's what the intelligence tells us -- they're absolutely
13 adamant that Assad have no future role in Syria. And so,
14 until or unless the grievances of the civil war are
15 addressed by these opposition forces, then I'd find it hard
16 to imagine a successful political transition.

17 Senator Lee: If a political solution to the Syrian
18 conflict continues to elude diplomats in Geneva, there will
19 not be a political sovereign to unite the various rebels who
20 we know, through previous testimony, often have competing or
21 conflicting, perhaps mutually inconsistent, long-term goals
22 as well as ideals.

23 Secretary Carter, what will become of the weapons and
24 the equipment that we've provided to these rebel groups if a
25 peaceful resolution of this conflict remains out of reach?

1 And will we simply have dumped hundreds of millions of
2 dollars' worth of equipment and worth of weapons and -- into
3 an already volatile situation?

4 Secretary Carter: I'll answer the general question,
5 then we go into more specifics. But, I can't answer the
6 general --

7 In everything we do in -- there, as elsewhere, we
8 always think ahead when we're providing weaponry to a group
9 about, sort of, What's the future and what's the next step?
10 So, we certainly have thought about that in that region, as
11 well.

12 To your bigger question, which is, What is the role of
13 -- I think what you're saying is what we would call the
14 Moderate Opposition -- in the future of Syria? Our strategy
15 -- political strategy, and the one that Secretary Kerry is
16 pursuing, is that Assad leaves, the structures of the
17 government remain in place, but without Assad, and that the
18 Moderate Opposition becomes part of the government, and
19 there is a government that can give the Syrian people what
20 they deserve, which is a country that runs and a country
21 that's moderate and a country that treats its people
22 decently. We're a long way from that now, but that's the
23 vision for Syria.

24 Senator Lee: And --

25 Secretary Carter: So, these people have a role, is the

1 point.

2 Senator Lee: And you think that's a realistic vision,
3 one that we could realistically achieve within the necessary
4 time?

5 Secretary Carter: I think it's a necessary one to
6 achieve, because I think Assad can't be part of the future
7 of that country --

8 Senator Lee: But, what --

9 Secretary Carter: -- and that is the right --

10 Senator Lee: -- if he doesn't go? What if he doesn't
11 leave?

12 Secretary Carter: The -- this is why it's so important
13 that the Russians keep their commitment, which is to a
14 political transition there. They're the ones that have the
15 most leverage over Assad right now. It's very important
16 that they do that, because, as the Chairman indicated,
17 there's no resolution of the Syrian civil war until that
18 occurs.

19 Senator Lee: Thank you.

20 Chairman McCain: Senator Shaheen.

21 Senator Shaheen: Well, thank you both for being here,
22 Secretary Carter and General Dunford, and for your service,
23 and for dealing with what is a very big challenge for this
24 country and for most of the civilized world.

25 I want to follow up on Senator McCaskill's comments

1 about Jordan and the number of refugees that they have taken
2 in, because Lebanon is another country in the Middle East
3 that has taken in a significant number of refugees. I think
4 about a quarter of their population now are refugees. And I
5 noticed there was a story in this morning's news about the
6 Lebanese army killing an ISIS leader who was operating out
7 of Lebanon along the border with Syria. Can you talk about
8 the importance of the military contribution that some of our
9 partners in the Middle East are making to the fight against
10 ISIS?

11 Secretary Carter: I can. You've mentioned the
12 Jordanians. The Jordanians are great partners, in every
13 respect. And the Lebanese Armed Forces, as well. We've had
14 a longstanding role in supporting them. I believe General
15 Dunford knows that much better than I do, and perhaps you
16 can speak to that. I can't speak to overnight developments
17 in that regard, but let me ask the Chairman if he wants to
18 add anything about our support for the LAF over -- Lebanese
19 Armed Forces -- over time.

20 General Dunford: Senator, we've had, for years -- and
21 I was the component commander in the United States Central
22 Command, working with the Lebanese Armed Forces -- we've
23 had, for years, a strong military-to-military relationship
24 with the Lebanese Armed Forces. And I think, particularly
25 today, it's important that we continue that. And they have

1 been, you know, partners in the fight against ISIL right
2 now, and it's important we continue to support them.

3 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. I would also just like to
4 point out something that, as we're talking about refugees
5 and the humanitarian situation, we had an interesting
6 hearing before the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the
7 Appropriations Committee with Bono, who connected
8 humanitarian aid to our national security. And I think
9 that's an important connection that we too often don't
10 recognize, that if we are supporting refugees who are in
11 Jordan or in Lebanon, and we can keep them in the Middle
12 East so they can go home to Syria once the fighting ends,
13 it's a lot better for us, and it's better for them, than not
14 supporting those efforts and continuing to support the
15 conflict.

16 Let me ask you -- and I know there's been some
17 discussion about what Russia is doing. And, of course, they
18 had a very well publicized announcement about their
19 withdrawal from Syria last month, but there remains a
20 significant Russian ground and air force in Syria. Do we
21 know what they're doing? Can you tell us? Are they -- are
22 there any indications that they intend to depart, in whole,
23 anytime soon?

24 Secretary Carter: We do watch them. We do know what
25 we're doing. You are right that it was far from a complete

1 withdrawal, despite how it was ballyhooed initially. And
2 with respect to their specific operations, we obviously keep
3 very close eye on that, know it extremely well.

4 Let me see if the Chairman wants to add anything to
5 that.

6 General Dunford: The only thing I'd say, Senator, is,
7 I have not seen a significant reduction in forces by the
8 Russians, nor have I seen less support for the regime than
9 there was before they announced that reduction. So, you
10 know, as I look at it, despite some rotation of forces and
11 so forth, it seems to me pretty much status quo today,
12 relative to before the announcement.

13 Senator Shaheen: And, given the cease-fires really
14 ending in Syria, and the increased conflict, is there any
15 reason to believe that we can work with Russia to try and
16 get people back to the negotiating table, to try and get
17 back to a real cease-fire again, and to make any progress on
18 a transition in Syria?

19 Secretary Carter: That's the aim and the path that
20 Secretary Kerry is on. He's the authority on that and has
21 been managing that. But, that's precisely what he's trying
22 to accomplish.

23 Senator Shaheen: Well, I appreciate that he's managing
24 that, but obviously one of the significant factors in
25 encouraging Syria to do that is the success of the military

1 efforts there, and Assad being able to see that he's --
2 doesn't have a path to continue staying in power.

3 Secretary Carter: Well, I -- I'd -- I'll just repeat
4 what I said before. That's why, when Russia -- that's why
5 there's such a difference between what Russia said it was
6 going to do and what it did. They said they were going to
7 contribute to the ending of the Syrian civil war, and that
8 -- propping up Assad militarily is not doing that, and has
9 not done that. And they also said they were going to fight
10 ISIL, but they were mostly propping up --

11 Senator Shaheen: Right.

12 Secretary Carter: -- Assad. No doubt about it.

13 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

14 Thank you both.

15 Chairman McCain: Senator Graham.

16 Senator Graham: Thank you all.

17 Secretary Carter, have you ever heard of the PYD?

18 Secretary Carter: I have, yes.

19 Senator Graham: Who are they?

20 Secretary Carter: They're a Kurdish group, one of
21 several -- a number of --

22 Senator Graham: Have you heard of the P- -- YPG?

23 Secretary Carter: I have heard of them, also.

24 Senator Graham: Who are they?

25 Secretary Carter: Another Kurdish group.

1 Senator Graham: Aren't they the military wing of the
2 Y- -- PYD?

3 Secretary Carter: They are, yes.

4 Senator Graham: Is that right, General Dunford?

5 General Dunford: That is correct.

6 Senator Graham: They're a leftist Syrian Kurdish
7 political party founded in 2003. Reports indicate that they
8 are aligned or at least have substantial ties to the PKK.
9 Is that true?

10 Secretary Carter: Yes. We have --

11 Senator Graham: Is the PKK a terrorist organization,
12 in the eyes of the Turkish government?

13 Secretary Carter: The PKK is a terrorist organization,
14 not only in the eyes of the Turkish government, but in the
15 eyes of the U.S. Government, as well, Senator.

16 Senator Graham: Is it a -- surprising to you that the
17 Turks may be upset with us by arming the YPG in Syria, since
18 they're so closely aligned with the PKK --

19 Secretary Carter: No, it's not --

20 Senator Graham: -- a terrorist organization?

21 Secretary Carter: No, it's not at all, Senator. We
22 have -- let me just clarify. Let me just say that -- and
23 the Chairman's been involved in this, as well. This is --
24 we have extensive consultations with the Turks about --

25 Senator Graham: So, Turkey is --

1 Secretary Carter: -- this precise --

2 Senator Graham: -- okay with this?

3 Secretary Carter: Let -- they're not okay with that,
4 but --

5 Senator Graham: I just got back from Turkey. They're
6 not okay with this. They think this is the dumbest idea in
7 the world. And I agree with them.

8 How many of the Syrian Democratic Forces, or whatever
9 we're talking about, are Kurds versus Arabs, General
10 Dunford?

11 General Dunford: There's about 6,000 Arabs, Senator.

12 Senator Graham: Well, what percentage of the force is
13 that?

14 General Dunford: That's about 20 percent.

15 Senator Graham: Okay. So, if you're wondering why
16 Turkey's a little upset, we're arming people inside of Syria
17 aligned with a terrorist group that's fighting the Turkish
18 government. Turkey could do more, but I think this whole
19 concept is, quite frankly, absurd.

20 I just got back from Saudi Arabia. They believe that
21 -- they're not going into Syria as long as they think
22 Assad's going to win and Damascus will be controlled by the
23 Iranians. Have they ever expressed to you their displeasure
24 with our policies toward Assad?

25 Secretary Carter: Oh, I'll take that, but I want to --

1 I do want to get back to the Turks, though. They -- thanks
2 for going there, and thanks for talking to them. They're a
3 NATO ally. It's real important. And we do discuss with
4 them our effort to -- which is an important effort, and one
5 that's important to protecting --

6 Senator Graham: Secretary Carter --

7 Secretary Carter: -- ourselves --

8 Senator Graham: -- I've got 2 minutes left. I'm not
9 asking you to tell me what they told me. I know what they
10 told me. They may have told you something different.

11 Secretary Carter: Well, then let me --

12 Senator Graham: I know what --

13 Secretary Carter: -- then let me go on to the Saudis

14 --

15 Senator Graham: The Saudis, yes.

16 Secretary Carter: -- because --

17 Senator Graham: Did they have --

18 Secretary Carter: -- I was just there, and they --

19 Senator Graham: -- a real problem with our policy
20 toward Assad?

21 Secretary Carter: I think they -- the Saudis, having
22 been there just last week, have the same problem we do,
23 which is that Assad is still there.

24 Senator Graham: Is it fair to say that the Saudis in
25 every Gulf Arab state believes that Assad is firmly

1 entrenched because of the Russian-Iranian backing?

2 Secretary Carter: Again, that's an observation that we

3 --

4 Senator Graham: Okay.

5 Secretary Carter: -- would make --

6 Senator Graham: It --

7 Secretary Carter: -- and did make with the Saudis. We
8 agree with that.

9 Senator Graham: Did --

10 Secretary Carter: That's where the Russians --

11 Senator Graham: Did we ever suggest to --

12 Secretary Carter: -- seemed to change their tune.

13 Senator Graham: Our goal is to destroy ISIL and to
14 replace Assad. On the Assad side, he's more firmly in power
15 than ever. January the 20th, 2017, President Obama will
16 leave office. Is it likely that Assad will be in power?

17 Secretary Carter: I hope not.

18 Senator Graham: Okay. I think it's likely he will be,
19 because hope's not a strategy.

20 Plan B. Secretary Kerry says there's a Plan B if the
21 cease-fire falls apart, that he's let the Russians know
22 we're going to try it nice, but if the cease-fire falls
23 apart, there's a Plan B. Do you have a Plan B for Assad?

24 Secretary Carter: I -- I'm going to let Secretary
25 Kerry speak to the -- to his --

1 Senator Graham: Well, but, I mean, he --

2 Secretary Carter: -- his diplomacy --

3 Senator Graham: -- he has the State Department. The
4 State Department's not going to go take Assad out. Is there
5 a military component to Plan B?

6 Secretary Carter: I think what the -- again, I don't
7 --

8 Senator Graham: Or is Plan B just BS?

9 Secretary Carter: I don't -- I am sure that it's not
10 BS. I --

11 Senator Graham: Well, have you been talk -- have you
12 talked to the Secretary of State --

13 Secretary Carter: Of course. I --

14 Senator Graham: -- about a military --

15 Secretary Carter: Yes. Yes.

16 Senator Graham: -- change in strategy --

17 Secretary Carter: Yes, of course. And without
18 speaking for him, Senator, I think what he's saying is that
19 the United States --

20 Senator Graham: No, my question is, Have you had a
21 discussion with the Secretary of State about a change in
22 military strategy if the cease-fire falls apart regarding
23 Assad in Russia? Have you had that discussion?

24 Secretary Carter: We have had a change -- many
25 discussions about changes of --

1 Senator Graham: Is there a Plan B?

2 Secretary Carter: -- changes of strategy.

3 Senator Graham: Is there a Plan B?

4 Secretary Carter: I wouldn't call it a Plan B, but I'm
5 going to let him speak for --

6 Senator Graham: Outline the change --

7 Secretary Carter: -- for his --

8 Senator Graham: -- in military strategy.

9 Secretary Carter: We have discussed alternative
10 strategies --

11 Senator Graham: What are they?

12 Secretary Carter: -- with respect to --

13 Senator Graham: What are they?

14 Secretary Carter: -- Syria. Some of them I'm prepared
15 to discuss here, some of them I'm not.

16 Senator Graham: Well, let's have a classified --

17 Secretary Carter: As you well know --

18 Senator Graham: -- hearing, Mr. Chairman, about this.

19 Secretary Carter: -- as you well know, the entirety of
20 what goes on in Syria is not something we can discuss here,
21 as --

22 Senator Graham: Okay. I don't --

23 Secretary Carter: -- you well know.

24 Senator Graham: -- want to put you -- I like you, I'm
25 not --

1 Finally, General Dunford, is this the Dunford plan to
2 destroy ISIL or is this the plan that General Dunford came
3 up with, given that -- the constraints put on him by the
4 White House?

5 General Dunford: Senator, when I came in, last
6 October, there was a strategy. We made some recommendations
7 last October to accelerate our progress against ISIL. Those
8 recommendations were accepted by the President. And I would
9 say, I'm in my job 7 months, so I own it.

10 Senator Graham: Okay, good. So, I just wanted the
11 whole country to know this, that the President's goal is to
12 destroy ISIL. I share that goal. I know you do, too. The
13 military strategy that we're embarked on in is the best way
14 to destroy ISIL, and it's what you recommended. Or is it
15 limited by conditions put on you by the White House?

16 General Dunford: Senator, if I -- to clarify. So, if
17 I say --

18 Senator Graham: Would you do more if you could?

19 General Dunford: I would do more if I could, but the
20 limitation is not just a political limitation. Part of is
21 our partners on the ground.

22 Senator Graham: Right.

23 General Dunford: But, I just want to clarify. If what
24 you're saying is the strategy, meaning a "by, with, and
25 through indigenous partners on the ground" being the

1 methodology for securing territory and defeating ISIL, I
2 support that.

3 Senator Graham: So, you think the YPG are going to
4 liberate -- a 80-percent Kurdish ground force is going to
5 take ISIL -- Raqqa away from ISIL and hold it?

6 General Dunford: The YPG have secured a large
7 predominantly Kurdish area --

8 Senator Graham: That's not --

9 General Dunford: -- north of --

10 Senator Graham: -- my question.

11 General Dunford: -- Syria.

12 Senator Graham: Are they going to be able to take
13 Raqqa, Syria, away from ISIL and hold it?

14 General Dunford: They --

15 Senator Graham: 80-percent Kurdish.

16 General Dunford: They will not, in and of themselves
17 --

18 Senator Graham: Thank you.

19 General Dunford: -- Senator.

20 Senator Reed [presiding]: On behalf of the Chairman,
21 let me recognize Senator Kaine.

22 Senator Kaine: Mr. Chair, could I defer to Senator
23 King and trade places?

24 Senator Reed: Absolutely.

25 Senator King, please.

1 Senator King: Thank you.

2 Several observations, based upon this excellent
3 hearing.

4 Number one, I want to associate myself with the
5 Chairman's comments about Afghanistan. I think I -- and the
6 concern is that a decision has to be made in the next
7 several months. I don't think we're going to learn anything
8 in the next several months that we don't know now, because
9 the drawdown, the scheduled drawdown has -- it's going to
10 have start late this summer or early fall to make the
11 January deadline. I sincerely hope that, given where we
12 are, given the level of violence, given the, really, I
13 think, surprising -- or, shouldn't say surprising, but the
14 effectiveness of the Afghan forces, we ought to provide the
15 support necessary, including the authorities, to maintain
16 what we've gained there, which has been considerable.
17 That's number one.

18 Number two, a lot of talk here today about end
19 strength. I've learned, from talking to senior military
20 officials, particularly in the Army, that readiness is as
21 important as end strength, that you can have a big number,
22 but if you've got 50-percent readiness, or 30 percent or 60
23 percent, that's really important. So, I think that's an
24 important consideration.

25 Finally, on the Law of the Sea -- I mean, I'm sorry, on

1 China and the chart that we saw, it would really help, in my
2 view, if we were members of the Law of the Sea Treaty so we
3 could be at the tribunal that's making these decisions.

4 On the last point, Mr. Secretary, do you agree?

5 Secretary Carter: I do, yes. I mean, a long line of
6 defense officials who have -- and Navy officers -- who have
7 supported that agreement were not party to it, but we do
8 respect its provisions.

9 Senator King: But, it's not in our national interest
10 to not be at the table, it seems to me.

11 Secretary Carter: I -- again, people have sat in this
12 chair and testified for many years in favor of that treaty,
13 but that has not carried the day.

14 Senator King: Secretary Carter, the most disturbing
15 thing you've said today that, in my view, is -- you -- and
16 you sort of touched on it and then we went by in the hearing
17 and never got back to it -- you suggested there's been a
18 rise of ethnosectarianism in Baghdad. If that's the case,
19 number one, that's a disaster, because that laid -- that was
20 what -- the Maliki policy is what laid the groundwork for
21 what happened with ISIL. Number two, what can we do about
22 it? And are we trying to do something about it? And I'm
23 not talking about just jawboning. Are we talking specific,
24 direct pressure, if you will, on the Iraqi government?
25 Because if Baghdad isn't inclusive, then this whole

1 enterprise is just not going to be successful.

2 Secretary Carter: Yeah, well, what I was referring to
3 is the turbulence in Baghdad, or -- just over the last
4 couple of weeks, in which the Prime Minister and -- has been
5 contending with a variety of the opposition parties. That's
6 a serious concern to us, because the integrity of the Iraqi
7 state is an important part of the end state our strategy
8 seeks. We support the -- Prime Minister Abadi in his
9 overall approach to -- which is a multisectarian, as he says
10 --

11 Senator King: Is he backsliding on that?

12 Secretary Carter: He --

13 Senator King: Because I've --

14 Secretary Carter: He --

15 Senator King: -- in several hearings, I've been told
16 he's doing the right thing, he wants to do the right thing.
17 Is that -- are we losing ground on that?

18 Secretary Carter: I had a conversation, just a week
19 and a half, and we're completely aligned on what we're
20 trying to do there with respect to our campaign. But, it's
21 also true that he is contending with a very complicated mix
22 there. And, with your respect -- with respect to your
23 question, "What are we doing about it?" -- in addition to
24 providing political support, I want to reiterate the
25 importance of the economic support. And that's not just by

1 the United States, but by its others -- by others, as well.
2 So, when I was with the President in Riyadh last week, we
3 were urging the Gulf states -- that's a place that they
4 could contribute -- "Don't cede Baghdad to Iran. Get in the
5 game, support a multisectarian approach." That's what Abadi
6 is trying to stand for. That's what Maliki didn't stand
7 for. And it's important to support him, both politically
8 and economically. And the economic situation is
9 particularly important today, in view of the low oil prices.

10 Senator King: Concern about the Mosul dam. Are you
11 satisfied that the Italian contractor and the arrangement
12 that's been made by the government in Iraq is sufficient and
13 is going to be timely? I -- it would be an absolute
14 catastrophe if that dam went out.

15 Secretary Carter: It is. They are -- it is the best-
16 practices outfit to do grouting at the dam. And with
17 respect to the timing question, that is the concern we all
18 have, to get that grouting done as soon as possible to
19 mitigate the risk that there are failures in the dam before
20 the grouting is complete and this dam can be shored up.

21 Senator King: One more quick question.

22 General Dunford, we talked about how ISIL has been
23 degraded. And that seems to be the consensus that I'm
24 hearing in the last few weeks, in terms of briefings from --
25 in various settings. Are they being degraded in terms of

1 equipment as well as finances, manpower, foreign fighters?

2 Where are they getting their equipment?

3 General Dunford: Senator, there is -- as you can
4 imagine in Iraq, in particular, there's no lack of AK-47s
5 and weapons that have been left behind as a result of years
6 at war. And I think, primarily, they got them from the
7 former -- you know, former Iraqi soldiers brought their
8 weapons with them, and large ammunition stores that they
9 seized in the early days of the war. You'll recall they had
10 pretty significant progress 2 years ago in grabbing ground
11 and territory, and part of that ground was ammunition depots
12 and weapon storage areas and so forth from the Iraqis.

13 Senator King: Are they -- is -- are they being
14 squeezed now on that front, though?

15 General Dunford: Very much so, Senator. I mean, I
16 would say that their freedom of movement has been reduced.
17 Their ability to resupply with foreign fighters and
18 equipment has been reduced, in addition to the resources
19 that you spoke about. And so, I would say that their
20 military capability has been degraded, to include their
21 equipment.

22 Senator King: Do we have any information that their
23 morale is declining?

24 General Dunford: We do. We do, Senator. And that's
25 an important point. In fact, my observations on my recent

1 trip and really over the last few months, I think one of the
2 more significant things I see is the relative morale of the
3 Iraqi Security Forces and the Peshmerga versus ISIL. And we
4 see, in the intelligence and anecdotally from our
5 commanders, that the morale and the spirit of ISIL has
6 eroded over time as a result of their battlefield losses and
7 as a result of the fact that their pay has been cut
8 significantly because they -- because of the resources that
9 -- constraints that the leadership has.

10 Senator King: Always a negative effect on morale.

11 General Dunford: Has a negative effect on moral.

12 Senator King: Thank you very much, gentlemen.

13 Senator Reed: Thank you.

14 On behalf of Chairman McCain, Senator Tillis, please.

15 Senator Tillis: Thank you, Senator Reed.

16 Secretary Carter and General Dunford, thank you for
17 being here.

18 I went on a CODEL during the recess, and was in Israel,
19 Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. And one of the feelings
20 that I got, in speaking with a number of the leaders there,
21 was a sense that -- I think everyone recognizes, at some
22 point, if we take advantage of, maybe, some of the degraded
23 status of ISIS, at least in that region, that, ultimately,
24 once we take ground, we're going to have to hold it. And,
25 for us to hold it, we're going to have to have people

1 present there that are, hopefully, not men and women in
2 American uniforms. And it's going to come from the
3 coalition, the partners in the Middle East. But, the sense
4 I got is, they're not -- I mean, they want to be prepared to
5 do it, but they are not necessarily prepared to take the
6 kind of fight and have the kind of presence in Syria that
7 we're going to need. Do you agree with that assessment,
8 General Dunford or Secretary Carter? And what specific
9 actions are we taking to prepare the Saudis, for example, to
10 be able to play a role in that, along with the Iraqis and
11 the other partners in the region?

12 Secretary Carter: I'll start off, having just been in
13 Saudi Arabia. I can speak to the Saudis and then ask the
14 Chairman to jump in.

15 I think that -- I won't speak for them, but I -- from
16 our conversations, they have the -- some of the same view we
17 do, which is, in the end, it can't be them or us, it has to
18 be local people. But, they want to join the campaign and
19 play a role. The only thing I'd say is, we always have to
20 remember, this is a two-way street, so the people who --
21 whom you think you're helping have to welcome your help.
22 And that can be an issue. That's why it's so important to
23 navigate the complex shoals of Baghdad politics that we were
24 discussing earlier, because we do everything with the
25 permission and through the Iraqi government.

1 And, in Syria, there obviously is no government with
2 which we can cooperate, but we still need local forces who
3 live there, and want to live there. That's why -- to get
4 back to Senator Graham's point, he's absolutely right, Kurds
5 are not the right people to take and govern Raqqa. We know
6 that. We are looking to identify and then enable Syrian
7 Arab forces that would be the appropriate people to take and
8 govern Raqqa. Because the people have to be -- have to
9 accept their liberators, and the -- you can't just come in
10 and say you're the liberator, you have -- they have to
11 believe that, or you'll get the kind of violent backlash.

12 So, the Saudis and the -- and others that -- in the
13 region understand that dynamic.

14 We're looking for their help, finally, it -- not only
15 in terms of military help, but this is where their economic
16 and stabilization assistance can be so important. So, if
17 the Gulf states would help the Sunni lands being taken back
18 by the Iraqi Security Forces, that would be -- that --
19 that's a -- it would help the state of Iraq. As I mentioned
20 earlier, it's a counterweight to what is clearly Iranian
21 influence in Iraq. And we think Iraq ought to be a
22 multisectarian place, not an Iranian place or anything else.

23 Senator Tillis: Your response lets me, maybe, further
24 refine the question. What I -- what I'm more concerned
25 with, General, is -- you, as a warfighter -- is the level of

1 capability -- you know, the Saudis -- we'll use the Saudis
2 as an example, since I was there -- they seem to have very
3 good capabilities in the air, not really that good
4 capabilities, by our standards, on the ground. So, to put
5 them in a situation where they're partners with Iraq or to
6 put them in a situation where, when we finally gain the
7 momentum to try and eradicate ISIS from Syria, I'm wondering
8 if their level of readiness is approaching anything that
9 would make that possible with them as a key partner. And in
10 Iraq, for that matter.

11 General Dunford: Senator, I think each of our partners
12 in the Gulf states have certain capabilities that could be
13 employed to good effect in Syria, where they'd have the will
14 to do that.

15 Senator Tillis: And the -- I guess the final question
16 is -- in my time in Egypt, you know, I was aware of the
17 presence of ISIS, or, as they prefer to call them, Daesh, in
18 Sinai is growing in -- kind of as a hub in that area. It
19 seems to me a part of the mission that we have to conclude
20 successfully in Syria is to make sure they are either
21 captured or killed in Syria, and do not regroup and
22 refortify somewhere else. I assume that's a part of the
23 strategy. Is there anything specifically you can talk about
24 here?

25 Secretary Carter: It is. And I -- let me ask the

1 Chairman to specifically talk about Sinai, because he's been
2 working so intently upon that. But, I -- your point is
3 absolutely right about the Gulf states, in the sense that
4 their capabilities to operate, particularly against
5 asymmetric threats in the region, is an area where we think
6 they could improve. And we want to help them. That was one
7 of the themes of the meeting the President had. I'm sorry,
8 I knew that -- now I understand that's what you were getting
9 at, and it's -- that's absolutely right.

10 Let me ask the Chairman on the MFO or Sinai.

11 General Dunford: Senator, I agree with your assessment
12 on ISIS in the Sinai. It is a critical note, and it has to
13 be a part of our strategy, and is a part of our strategy.
14 In fact, I just came back from a visit to Cairo over the
15 weekend to talk to our Egyptian partners about improving our
16 cooperation in dealing with ISIS, not only in the Sinai, but
17 across North Africa.

18 Senator Tillis: Thank you.

19 And, Mr. Chair, you weren't here when I started. I
20 wanted to thank you for your leadership on the veterans
21 bill. I had to step out for a press conference for veterans
22 affairs, but -- Chair is trying to take care of you all that
23 are serving now and everybody that's served in the past.
24 And I thank you for your leadership.

25 Chairman McCain [presiding]: Thank you, Senator

1 Tillis.

2 Vice President Kaine.

3 [Laughter.]

4 Senator Kaine: The Vice President of your fan club.

5 [Laughter.]

6 Senator Kaine: And I'm sure there's a lot of
7 competition for that role.

8 [Laughter.]

9 Senator Kaine: Let me thank the witnesses for your
10 testimony.

11 And I also just want to compliment you on some tactical
12 successes that you've described in the earlier testimony.
13 The battlefield space of ISIL is shrinking, but it creates
14 new challenges, because, as they feel that shrinking, they
15 want to do other things that are more asymmetric in other
16 cities around the world to maintain relevance. So, that's
17 going to pose all kinds of challenges for us.

18 While I do applaud you for tactical successes, I'm
19 going to just repeat a refrain with the announcement of the
20 escalation of troop presence in Syria. I am deeply
21 concerned about the legal basis for this war, both domestic
22 and international legal basis.

23 On the domestic side, I am in a minority in this body,
24 in Congress, in believing that the 2001 authorization does
25 not provide a legal justification for this war. And I think

1 that there isn't a domestic legal justification unless and
2 until we do an authorization for military force.

3 General Mattis, the former head of CENTCOM, spoke last
4 Friday at the Center for Strategic and International Studies
5 and was partially critical of Congress for not passing an
6 authorization. And he said, quote, "Worth more than ten
7 battleships or five armored divisions is a sense of American
8 political resolve." I just worry that we haven't sent that
9 sense, and, on Congress's shoulders, we haven't sent that
10 sense.

11 General Dunford, you testified, about a year ago, in
12 the -- as Commandant of the Marine Corps, for this
13 committee, and I asked you about an authorization and what
14 it might do. And you said -- and this is almost a direct
15 quote -- "What our men and women need, and it's virtually
16 all that they need, is a sense that what they're doing has
17 meaning, has value, and has the support of the American
18 public." I don't think we've given them that. I don't
19 think we've sent a message of political resolve as the
20 political leadership, as the decisionmakers contemplated in
21 Article 1 of the Constitution. We've not sent a message of
22 resolve to our troops, we haven't sent them -- that message
23 to our allies, we haven't sent that message to our
24 adversaries. And so, I continue to believe that the
25 domestic legal authorization for this war is highly

1 problematic.

2 Want to turn my attention to a second legal issue,
3 which I usually haven't talked about, and that -- that
4 there's got to be international legal basis for war, as
5 well. If you are fighting a war on your own soil, and
6 you're not invading anybody else's sovereignty, you don't
7 need separate international legal justification for fighting
8 that war. But, if you're into the sovereign space of
9 another nation, there not only has to be a domestic legal
10 justification, there's got to be an international legal
11 justification.

12 Now, a common legal justification, one of the most
13 common on the international side, is that you have been
14 invited in by the sovereign nation that wants your help.
15 U.S. action against ISIL in Iraq right now is at the
16 invitation of the Iraqi government, so there is clear
17 international legal justification for all of our activities
18 in Iraq, setting aside the domestic question.

19 I'm sorry to say this, but there is also international
20 legal justification for Russian military activity in Syria,
21 because Russia has been invited in by the sovereign
22 Government of Syria. We may like it, or we may not. We may
23 think it's a bad idea. But, in terms of the international
24 legal justification for Russian activity in Syria, they've
25 been invited in by a sovereign government.

1 Russia, through proxies, and even through their own
2 forces, is carrying out military operations in Ukraine.
3 That's a violation of international law. It's a clear
4 violation of international law, because Ukraine has not
5 invited them in. They are carrying out military operations
6 in a sovereign nation without the support of that sovereign
7 nation, contrary to the wishes of the sovereign nation.

8 But, what I struggle with is, How can we criticize the
9 Russian incursion into Ukrainian sovereignty when we are
10 carrying out now escalating military operations in Syria
11 without the permission, and really even against the will, of
12 the sovereign of that nation? I am correct, am I not, that
13 Syria has not invited us to conduct military operations
14 within the nation of Syria?

15 Secretary Carter: You're correct. And, just to
16 address a couple of points that you've made. First of all,
17 I want to hasten to say I'm no lawyer, but we do have
18 lawyers. And with respect to the AUMF, Authorization for
19 the Use of Military Force, I agree with you. I testified in
20 favor of there being such an AUMF for -- importantly,
21 because it would signify to the troops that the country's
22 behind them. Now, I think they feel like they're behind
23 them. And the Chairman and I try to attest to that. Your
24 visits to the region attest to that. So, I think they feel
25 that, but that would have been another way of attesting to

1 that.

2 I am told by the lawyers -- and I believe this -- that
3 the legal basis for what we're doing exists in both domestic
4 law and international law for everything we're doing. But,
5 again, I'm not the expert on that, and couldn't explain to
6 you the ins and outs of it.

7 I -- you know, I also will say that the -- if --
8 there's a difference between what we're doing in Syria and
9 what the Russians did in Ukraine. And we're trying to fight
10 real terrorists, we're not trying to destabilize a stable
11 situation. So, we're trying to return order and decency,
12 not the other way around.

13 So, I don't know what a lawyer would say, but, as a --
14 Senator Kaine: Yeah.

15 Secretary Carter: -- a commonsense answer --

16 Senator Kaine: Can I --

17 Secretary Carter: -- is, there's a big difference.

18 Senator Kaine: Of course there is. And I completely
19 agree with you. I completely agree with you. But, if I had
20 Russian witnesses on the stand, they would talk about why
21 they're doing what they're doing in the Ukraine. I mean, I
22 -- and I'll just conclude with this, Mr. Chair. At the end
23 of this administration, as a strong friend and supporter of
24 this President and as a strong friend of everybody around
25 this table, I think we've made a complete hash of the -- and

1 that's a diplomatic phrase -- of the doctrines of war, both
2 domestic and international. We are in -- we are engaged in
3 an incursion into the sovereign nation of Syria without
4 their permission, against their will. We are trying to
5 criticize Russia for engaging into an incursion into another
6 nation against their will. And we're asserting, as the
7 difference, that we're doing something good and they're
8 doing something bad. I agree that we're doing something
9 good. I agree that they're doing something bad. But,
10 that's not a limiting principle, because everybody's going
11 to say what they're doing is good.

12 And so, at the end of this administration, with the
13 complicity of this Congress, I think we've basically come up
14 with a war doctrine that says "wherever and whenever," as
15 long as the President feels that it's a good idea, without
16 Congress even needing to do anything about it. The problem
17 is, if that is the rule -- and I think that's become the
18 rule -- that's a rule that I think will haunt us,
19 domestically, under future Presidents and Congresses that I
20 could see, and I also think it's a rule that can easily be
21 seized by any other nation to, basically, justify all kinds
22 of things that are horrible.

23 And so, I -- you know, we're only 6 months before the
24 end of the administration, an administration that promised,
25 3 years ago, March of 2013, that they would try to work with

1 Congress to revise the 2001 authorization that is currently
2 being used as a justification for actions, not only in Iraq
3 and Syria, but Yemen and Africa and these -- Arabian
4 Peninsula. There has been virtually no work done to put any
5 limiting principle on that, certainly not in any kind of a
6 negotiation with Congress that I'm aware of.

7 And so, we're going to, basically, be in a position
8 where we've turned a 60-word authorization from 2001, with a
9 lot of administrative gloss that wasn't even in the
10 authorization, into an all-purpose wherever-whenever
11 domestic justification.

12 And then we've taken common international principles of
13 law and, basically, we've decided that, if our motives are
14 okay, we can incur into the sovereignty of another nation
15 because we're doing the right thing. But, then that takes
16 away our ability to effectively criticize other nations that
17 get into the sovereignty of other nations, as Russia is
18 doing in the Ukraine.

19 So, Mr. Chair, this is not a subject that we're going
20 to resolve today, but I just -- as we reach these new
21 milestones of escalation, I'm just going to keep putting on
22 the record a deep concern about the precedent that we're
23 setting for this Nation, but also the example that we're
24 setting for other nations.

25 Thank you.

1 Senator Reed [presiding]: Thank you, Senator Kaine.

2 On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me recognize Senator
3 Blumenthal.

4 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 And I want to thank Senator Kaine for that very
6 powerful and compelling summary of concerns that I share.
7 And I won't give my own version of them, because he stated
8 them very well and you've been here for a long time. And I
9 thank you for being here so patiently and so informatively
10 to this committee.

11 I noted, Mr. Secretary, that there was a note of pride
12 in your voice when you said you were not a lawyer --

13 [Laughter.]

14 Senator Blumenthal: -- for which I forgive you.

15 Secretary Carter: I only meant that I was a physicist.

16 [Laughter.]

17 Senator Blumenthal: There are many days that I wish I
18 were a physicist, and there's no way I could be.

19 So, thank you both for your service.

20 I want to explore an issue that I think is extremely
21 important, the evolving military cooperation between Russia
22 and Iran. It may have been mentioned here, but not in
23 depth. There have been reports in recent weeks that have
24 highlighted Russia's shipment of parts, the S-300 Air
25 Defense System, I believe, to Iran. In addition, Russia and

1 Iran are supposedly in talks over the Sukhoi fighter jet and
2 possible shipment of that weapons platform. If these
3 systems are delivered, clearly there has been a violation of
4 U.N. Security Council 2231. I'm not an international
5 lawyer, but seems pretty clear that would be a violation,
6 which requires Security Council approval for the sale of any
7 major combat systems to Iran for the next 5 years.

8 Supplying weapons to Iran is particularly dangerous
9 because it's not done in a vacuum. Supplying weapons
10 reflects a growing partnership that has far-reaching
11 ramifications for Hezbollah, because that is Iran's
12 terrorist proxy. It also benefits, at least indirectly,
13 from Russian arms and military operational experience in
14 Syria.

15 So, my question to both of you -- may I begin with
16 General Dunford -- is, What are the implications for Israel
17 if Iran continues to receive military equipment in Russia?
18 And what would the United States have to do to counter it?

19 General Dunford: Senator, thanks. And I think clearly
20 there are implications for Israel. I've visited, now, a
21 couple of times, here, over the last few months, and the
22 Israelis view the developments in Iran with great concern.
23 And that has a lot to do with our continued commitment to
24 make -- to ensuring that Israel maintains a qualitative
25 military edge in the theater. And so, the implications are

1 that we will continue to work very closely with the Israelis
2 to make sure that they have the capabilities and the
3 capacities. As you know, they now talk about QME-2, meaning
4 not just the capability, but also the capacity, to deal with
5 threats in the region. And so, I think our commitment to
6 what the Israelis now call QME-2 is really the most
7 appropriate response to the developments in Iran.

8 But, I do share your concern, and I know the Israelis
9 do, as well.

10 Senator Blumenthal: Secretary Carter, what can be done
11 to stem the flow of arms in this way? Obviously, there are
12 potential diplomatic steps. Are there also military steps
13 that can be taken?

14 Secretary Carter: First of all, let me associate
15 myself, what the Chairman just said. But, there are both
16 diplomatic and military steps. I don't mean military steps
17 in the sense of attacking, but I mean in posture. The
18 diplomatic ones, I can't speak to, but there is a body of
19 U.N. Security Council resolutions. There's not just one,
20 there are a number of them. I'm not an expert on that, but
21 I know they do apply. And they should constrain countries
22 that are supplying Iran with dangerous arms because of
23 Iran's other activities, in terms of supporting terrorism,
24 in terms of ballistic missile threats, and so forth, for
25 which they have been sanctioned and which are -- and which

1 sanctions were not a part of the Iran nuclear deal.

2 To the military provisions, I'd just say this. This is
3 one of the reasons that I was in the Gulf, when the
4 President asked me to go there before him last week, is to
5 talk to our Gulf partners about fortifying themselves. Now,
6 that wasn't a conversation with Israel, but I've had
7 conversations with Israel, as well. Also, to strengthen
8 their capabilities. We do that in missile defense, lots of
9 other areas, committed to their qualitative military edge,
10 as the Chairman indicated. And, of course, they have
11 broader concerns than Iran, but Iran is their principal
12 concern.

13 That's the reason -- one of the -- we have our -- a
14 huge posture in the Middle East -- military posture -- U.S.
15 military posture. Part of that is ISIL, but the other one
16 is "I" -- is the other "I" -- ISIL, and then there's Iran.
17 And that's why we're there. And to underscore deterrence,
18 to support our friends and allies, especially including
19 Israel, against Iranian aggression and malign influence.
20 So, it's a -- very important.

21 Senator Blumenthal: I take it that this continuing
22 flow of arms -- and I would appreciate your views and
23 commitment in this regard -- will be taken into account in
24 the negotiations on the memorandum of understanding that are
25 ongoing right now as we speak.

1 Secretary Carter: At -- yes, those discussions are
2 conducted by the White House, but, obviously, completely
3 informed by the views of myself and the Chairman on the
4 military dimensions of it. And extensive discussions that I
5 have with my colleagues, including my good friend, the
6 Defense Minister of Israel, Bogie Ya'alonin, and that the
7 Chairman has with his counterpart there.

8 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you.

9 Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

10 Senator Reed: Thank you, Senator Blumenthal.

11 Gentlemen, on behalf of the Chairman, let me thank you
12 for your testimony, for your service, and declare that the
13 hearing is adjourned.

14 Thank you very much.

15 [Whereupon, at 12:13 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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