

**OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR JIM INHOFE  
RANKING MEMBER, SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**ROOM SD-G50  
DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING**

**Tuesday, March 15, 2022**

*To receive testimony on the posture of United States Central Command and United States  
Africa Command*

(As prepared for Delivery)

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I join you in welcoming witnesses and thank them for their decades of service.

When our witnesses testified last year, they painted a grim picture of the security threats in their theaters. Things have only gotten worse since then.

I see three challenges in CENTCOM: Iran's terrorist proxies acting more aggressively, our partners increasingly doubt America's resolve, and Russia and China trying to fill the void.

These challenges are a direct result of President Biden's misguided policies: He downgraded support to our partners against Iran and its proxies. He reversed President Trump's terrorist designation of the Houthis. He offered Iran massive sanctions relief to rejoin the failed 2015 Iran deal, even as Iran increases its aggression against us.

Iran is the foremost threat in the region. Yet our partners see the administration's appeasement of Iran and ask themselves: Are we on our own? Is America abandoning us?

Last summer's disastrous drawdown from Afghanistan, which culminated with the killing of 13 service members, only reinforced those questions.

We also face significant challenges in Africa, including the growing presence and capability of jihadi groups across the continent. China and Russia are exploiting Africa to destabilize our partners, project their military power, and expand their influence at our expense.

I've always viewed Africa as critical to our national security, which is why I pushed for its creation in 2007, and why 15 years later, the role of AFRICOM is more important than ever.

Despite this, AFRICOM has never been given the resources it needs to do its job. We need to be realistic about the level of resources needed to address these challenges.

We can't effectively compete with China and Russia and sustain our counterterrorism efforts without real growth in our defense budget, including for AFRICOM.

Gen. Townsend, I'll speak more about the issue of Western Sahara during my questions, but I'm pleased the Secretary provided guidance to assess alternative locations and hosts for DOD exercises in Africa, including the annual AFRICAN LION exercise.

This will be crucial to ensuring we grow better relationships in Africa, and help reverse the tide in our strategic competition with China and Russia.

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