



Congressional Hearing
May 14, 2026

Committee on Armed Services

Job No. 1709835-001

1 TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE POSTURE OF UNITED STATES
2 CENTRAL COMMAND AND UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND IN REVIEW
3 OF THE DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION REQUEST FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027
4 AND THE FUTURE YEARS DEFENSE PROGRAM

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Thursday, May 14, 2026

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:00 a.m., in Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Roger Wicker, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Senators Wicker, Fischer, Cotton, Ernst, Scott, Banks, Moody, Reed, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, King, Peters, Duckworth, Rosen, Kelly, and Slotkin.

1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER WICKER, U.S. SENATOR
2 FROM MISSISSIPPI

3 Chairman Wicker: We convene publicly after a
4 classified session on the posture of U.S., Central Command
5 and U.S. Africa Command. At the outset, I want to thank
6 Admiral Cooper and General Anderson for their distinguished
7 service to their country as well for their candid testimony
8 during the closed session.

9 Let me start by addressing the situation in the Middle
10 East. Throughout Operation Epic Fury, Admiral Cooper
11 commanded our highly trained and courageous men and women
12 in uniform as they executed an exceptional military
13 campaign. That campaign has rendered the Islamic Republic
14 of Iran a shadow of its former self. The effort has not
15 been without significant losses, though. And certainly, we
16 continue to honor the memory of the 14 servicemembers who
17 lost their lives in this campaign, as well as the
18 approximately 300 servicemembers who have been injured.

19 Since 1979, Iran's clerical regime has chosen to make
20 the United States its number one enemy. The motto of
21 Iran's ayatollahs has never been "God Bless Iran" or "Long
22 Live Iran." They have chanted "Death to America, Death to
23 Israel." The regime states its murderous goals plainly.
24 The entire foreign policy of Iran revolves around killing
25 others rather than building for its people.

1 As part of Iran's war of choice against the United
2 States, the regime has directed its terrorist proxies to
3 kill hundreds of American servicemembers, take dozens of
4 Americans hostage, and assassinate senior American
5 officials, including attempts on the life of President
6 Trump. It has also developed a nuclear and ballistic
7 missile program that aimed to hold multiple continents, and
8 dozens of U.S. partners, at risk.

9 Every American President since Carter has had to deal
10 with the consequences of Iran's war on the United States.
11 Yet rather than dealing with the problem, successive
12 Democrat and Republican administrations sought so-called
13 "de-escalation" with Iran. This often afforded Iran the
14 time and resources to develop its nuclear program, the
15 ballistic missile program, and global terrorist
16 infrastructure.

17 I commend President Trump for recognizing that the
18 Iranian regime cannot be appeased and for directing action
19 to defeat this threat. Doing so will not be easy. The
20 Iranian regime is deeply ideological and insists that it is
21 winning even when it is losing by every conceivable metric.
22 I look forward to Admiral Cooper sharing his assessment of
23 how close we are to destroying Iran's military
24 capabilities. I would also like to hear what he needs from
25 Congress to ensure our men and women in uniform have what

1 they need to finish the job.

2 Failing to complete the Iran mission would send our
3 adversaries a dangerous signal about our nation's
4 wherewithal and resolve. It would send it that erroneous
5 message to Iran and other adversaries around the globe.

6 As we have seen, the nature and scope of the threats
7 we face transcend geographic boundaries. This is
8 particularly true as we look to Africa. That is where
9 General Anderson comes in. The continent is not a distant
10 concern for American national security. Rather, it is an
11 arena of growing strategic consequence, defined by
12 converging threats from adversarial nation states like
13 China and Russia, radical Islamist terrorism, and
14 instability driven by weak governance.

15 China and Russia recognize the strategic importance of
16 Africa. China is leveraging economic coercion, debt
17 diplomacy, and military basing to support President Xi's
18 global ambitions. Through its mercenaries and other
19 proxies, Russia is destabilizing fragile states and
20 extracting resources in order to bankroll its malign
21 activities in Ukraine and elsewhere around the world. I
22 look to General Anderson to provide his assessment of
23 Chinese and Russian objectives in Africa and to update the
24 Committee on how Africa Command is addressing the threat
25 posed by these nefarious actors.

1 The terrorist threats across Africa remain persistent,
2 adaptive, and dangerous. Increasingly, Africa is becoming
3 the epicenter of global terrorism. Al Qaeda and ISIS
4 senior leadership now reside in Africa, and their terrorist
5 affiliates are expanding in size, capability, and
6 geographic reach, from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa.
7 Their murderous ambitions are not confined to that
8 continent. These groups remain intent on killing Americans
9 around the world. Yet, significant shortfalls in key
10 military capabilities, including intelligence,
11 surveillance, and reconnaissance, complicate our ability to
12 track these groups and the threat they pose.

13 So we look to General Anderson to let the Committee
14 know how these resource shortfalls are impacting his
15 ability to combat the terrorist threat, and where this
16 Committee can be helpful.

17 I have noted in my remarks, Africa is of increasing
18 strategic importance to American national security
19 interests. This is precisely why a dedicated combatant
20 command for Africa is indispensable. Africa Command was
21 established in 2007 because the United States recognized
22 that these challenges require sustained and dedicated
23 focus. This Committee remains committed to ensuring Africa
24 Command has the authorities, resources, and strategic
25 support necessary to protect American interests across the

1 continent.

2 With that I turn to my partner and colleague, Ranking

3 Member Reed.

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

3 Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and
4 Admiral Cooper, General Anderson, thank you for your
5 dedication and service with great distinction over many
6 years. Thank you. And also I express the concerns of all
7 of us, or the hopes of all of us, that you convey our
8 congratulations and appreciation to the men and women that
9 you lead in your areas.

10 I want to also begin by expressing my deepest
11 condolences to the families of the servicemembers who we
12 recently lost in the Middle East and Africa. We owe them
13 our greatest respect and gratitude.

14 Admiral Cooper, we are 75 days into this war with
15 Iran, and I am concerned the President does not have a
16 credible strategy to win. Every member of this Committee
17 shares the goal of preventing Iran from having a nuclear
18 weapon, but there is no purely military solution to this
19 problem. Instead, every President over the past 50 years
20 has used diplomacy, sanctions, and international
21 cooperation to, to this point, successfully prevent Iran
22 from obtaining a nuclear weapon. President Trump tore up
23 the Iran nuclear deal and instead of negotiating a new deal
24 unilaterally took our nation to war.

25 More than a dozen servicemembers have lost their lives

1 and hundreds more have been wounded. We have suffered
2 significant damages to our bases, dramatically expended our
3 munitions stockpiles, and sustained billions of dollars of
4 damaged equipment. The Strait of Hormuz is still closed,
5 despite attempts to escort commercial ships.

6 While Secretaries Hegseth and Rubio have said
7 Operation Epic Fury is concluded, it is unclear what
8 objectives have been accomplished. Iran's regime is
9 intact, its nuclear material remains in place, the majority
10 of missiles and launchers have reportedly been recovered,
11 Iran has demonstrated its ability to shut down the Strait,
12 and most importantly, or certainly of equal weight,
13 American families are bearing real costs at the gas pumps
14 and the grocery store for a war that they did not want and
15 Congress has not authorized.

16 Admiral Cooper, the military forces under your command
17 have performed with exception skill and bravery, and that
18 is attributable to your leadership and your chain of
19 command. The firepower that we have brought to bear in
20 Iran has been formidable, but we have not yet, I think,
21 articulated a clear strategy going forward, and this is
22 continuing to hamper our objectives.

23 I think everyone on this Committee would love to see
24 these peace negotiations succeed, and I would be the first
25 one to applaud significant results achieved through

1 diplomacy. But one of the issues we are facing, and we
2 have talked about it in the closed session, is at every
3 turn we are not receiving the information that we are
4 legally entitled to. We have not seen the legal
5 justification for this operation, nor the execute orders,
6 and the Administration's explanations for cost and the path
7 forward have shifted constantly.

8 This week, the President said that the ceasefire is on
9 life support, and it leaves us with the fundamental
10 question: where are we and where are we going, and I hope
11 you can touch on that, Admiral Cooper.

12 There are two other concerns at CENTCOM I would like
13 to address. First, we withdrew all of our troops from
14 Syria, and this has created some adverse consequences, in
15 my view. Our modest military footprint there produced
16 significant returns, including a very reliable partner in
17 the Syrian Democratic Forces, a sustained counter-ISIS
18 mission, which we conducted, and a degree of leverage in a
19 strategically important area of the world. And we gave
20 that up very quickly when we withdrew, and if you could
21 provide some understanding of the current situation I would
22 appreciate it.

23 Second, the ceasefire in Lebanon is fragile, and
24 Israel's continued air strikes and demolition operations to
25 the south are eroding it. The Lebanese Armed Forces are

1 one of the few genuine stabilizing instruments we have left
2 in the region, and we should be seriously investing in it.
3 And again, Admiral, I would like to know what resources you
4 need to make this partnership successful, our partnership
5 with the Lebanese military, in displacing Hezbollah and
6 establishing a reliable government.

7 General Anderson, I am concerned by discussions about
8 whether AFRICOM should be maintained as an independent
9 combatant command, the same concerns, I believe, that the
10 Chairman has. That fight should be not necessary, and it
11 really, I think, reveals a misunderstanding of the
12 continuing importance of Africa, in so many different ways.
13 If we were to merge AFRICOM with EUCOM I think that would
14 be a mistake. It would signal to our allies and
15 adversaries that Africa is not a priority for the United
16 States. Russia and China are not making that mistake.
17 Russia's Africa Corps has expanded steadily across numerous
18 countries, and China continues to build ports,
19 infrastructure, and relationships across the continent.
20 Both nations are filling a space that America has created
21 for them, by our disengagement. And General, I would ask
22 you to share your views on the current security situation
23 and how you are working with allies and partners to address
24 the political and economic instability in Africa.

25 Finally, I would note that the dismantling of USAID

1 has made this situation worse. More than \$12 billion in
2 annual assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa is largely gone.
3 This has translated directly into instability,
4 radicalization, and openings for our adversaries. The
5 Administration's "From Aid to Trade" slogan in Africa may
6 be a reasonable, long-term aspiration, but it is not a
7 near-term substitute for what has been lost, and our
8 partners on the ground know it. I would like to know what
9 authorities and support you need from this Committee to
10 effectively partner with vulnerable nations in Africa to
11 keep us from losing more ground to China and Russia.

12 Admiral Cooper, General Anderson, thank you for your
13 leadership, your outstanding service, and I look forward to
14 your testimonies. Thank you.

15 Chairman Wicker: Admiral Cooper, you are now
16 recognized for your opening statement, sir.

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1 STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL CHARLES B. COOPER II, USN,
2 COMMANDER, UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND

3 Admiral Cooper: Thank you very much. Chairman
4 Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, members of this Committee,
5 thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today
6 and thank you all in this Committee for your very steadfast
7 support to the United States military and to our men and
8 women deployed today.

9 I am pleased to be sitting here today with my good
10 friend, the Commander of U.S. Africa Command, General Dag
11 Anderson, and I am joined by Fleet Command Master Chief
12 Lateef Compton, our Senior Enlisted Leader at Central
13 Command.

14 Events in the Central Region have shown how quickly
15 the course of history can change. In just the last few
16 years, decades-old features of the strategic landscape,
17 once thought immutable, have been upended, bringing both
18 challenges and opportunities. I strongly believe that
19 every success that we have starts and ends with our people.
20 In just the last 7 months, America's sons and daughters
21 serving in CENTCOM have played key roles in world events,
22 implementing the President's 20-point peace plan in Gaza,
23 degrading the ISIS threat in Syria, preventing what I would
24 characterize as an ISIS crisis by conducting a historic
25 prisoner transfer to Iraq, creating the most integrated and

1 effective air defense architecture ever seen, which was
2 decades in the making, and most recently, addressing the
3 Iranian threat.

4 The performance of our warfighters and Combined Joint
5 Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve, often referred to as
6 CJTF-OIR, is particularly noteworthy. In January,
7 responding to a rapidly deteriorating security situation,
8 they have executed an extraordinary transfer of more than
9 5,700 ISIS prisoners, all terrorists, from Syria to Iraqi
10 custody. Their effort prevented a mass prison break that
11 risked large-scale ISIS reconstitution and acute risk to
12 the American homeland.

13 In parallel, OIR has maintained relentless pressure on
14 ISIS remnants in Syria, most recent Operation Hawkeye
15 Strike, removed over 50 ISIS terrorists, and 100 terror
16 infrastructure targets from the battlefield.

17 U.S. Central Command was created in direct response to
18 the threats posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, and I am
19 the 16th CENTCOM Commander to deal with the Iranian problem
20 set. For 47 years, the Iranian regime has terrorized the
21 region and made hostility to the United States a core tenet
22 of its rule. Their hostile, lethal track record against
23 the United States is well documented, but I do not know
24 that it is always well understood.

25 Here is a datapoint. In just the last 30 months prior

1 to the commencement of Epic Fury, Iranian-supported terror
2 groups have attacked U.S. troops and diplomats more than
3 350 times, the equivalent of an attack more than every
4 third day, killing 4 U.S. servicemembers and wounding
5 nearly 200 more.

6 After more than 2 years of Iranian attempts to
7 leverage October 7, 2023, to tear the region apart, at the
8 direction of the President United States Central Command
9 initiated Operation Epic Fury. In less than 40 days,
10 CENTCOM forces achieved our military objectives. Most
11 notably, we degraded Iran's ability to project power
12 outside its borders and threaten the region and threaten
13 our interests.

14 As an example, we can all remember April and October
15 of 2024, hundreds of Iranian ballistic missiles and drones
16 raining down in the Middle East. Today, Iran can no longer
17 attack with that mass and scale, and further, with 90
18 percent of its defense industrial base destroyed, Iran will
19 not be able to reconstitute those weapons for years.

20 We also all watched Iran spend decades and billions
21 and billions of dollars arming proxies. Today, Hamas,
22 Hezbollah, and the Houthis are all cut off from Iran's
23 weapons supply and support. This result was not
24 foreordained, nor was it brought by chance. It is the
25 culmination of months of careful planning, built upon

1 decades of experience.

2 These results also do not come without cost. We honor
3 the memories of the 14 servicemembers who paid the ultimate
4 sacrifice during Operation Epic Fury and the 2 soldiers and
5 the 1 civilian killed in Palmyra, Syria. They represent
6 truly the very best of all of us.

7 As I sit here we are clear-eyed. The situation in
8 front of us is very complex. High-stakes negotiations
9 continue. Our job is to be ready, and we are. I testify
10 today on behalf of the 50,000-plus service men and women
11 deployed to the Central Region. It is a great honor and
12 privilege of a lifetime to serve as their Commander, and
13 thank you very much, and I look forward to your questions.

14 [The prepared statement of Admiral Cooper follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. General
2 Anderson.
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1 STATEMENT OF GENERAL DAGVIN R.M. ANDERSON, USAF,
2 COMMANDER, UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND

3 General Anderson: Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member
4 Reed, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you
5 for the opportunity to provide you an update on U.S. Africa
6 Command. I am joined today by Command Sergeant Major
7 Garric Banfield, our Senior Enlisted Leader, and I am proud
8 to sit beside my friend from U.S. Central Command, Admiral
9 Brad Cooper. We both appreciate your unwavering support to
10 our nation's warfighters.

11 Before I start I would like to recognize the service
12 of First Lieutenant Kendrick Lamont Key Jr., and Specialist
13 Mariyah Collington, who lost their lives in a tragic
14 accident during African Lion, and are returning home today.
15 I would also like to express my appreciate to our allies
16 and partners, particularly Morocco, who stepped forward
17 when it mattered most.

18 Africa sits at the crossroads of global commerce and
19 security, bringing the strategic terrain between the
20 Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific. It is the world's supplier
21 of critical minerals for advanced defense systems and home
22 to 12 of the world's 20 fastest-growing economies. By
23 2050, it will account for a third of the global working age
24 population.

25 Today, the epicenter of global terrorism is in Africa.

1 ISIS leadership is African. Al Qaeda's economic engine is
2 in Africa. Both of these groups share the will and intent
3 to strike our homeland. Their affiliates, once isolated
4 nodes, now show increased connectivity. Just as concerning
5 is the nexus between Al Qaeda's Al Shabaab and the Iranian-
6 sponsored Houthis.

7 AFRICOM is prioritizing willing and capable partners.
8 We support partners with capabilities that only the U.S.
9 can bring -- ISR, targeting, precision strike. These
10 efforts have driven ISIS leaders in Somalia underground,
11 disrupting their command and control of the global ISIS
12 network. In West Africa, Al Qaeda affiliate JNIM has
13 demonstrated increased capacity to control key terrain in
14 the Sahel, most notably by strangling fuel supplies around
15 population centers. The capture of a capital city would
16 provide Al Qaeda with all the trappings of a nation state
17 to sponsor global terrorism.

18 With a 75 percent reduction in our regional posture
19 over the past decade, compounded by the drawdown of our
20 allies, we struggle with an intelligence black hole, and
21 without sufficient indicators and warnings we risk being
22 blind to the gathering dangers and threats in the region.
23 AFRICOM's lack of expeditionary capabilities and diminished
24 force posture compromise our crisis response. In a crisis
25 we can always surge assets, but you cannot surge trust.

1 Our reduced presence on the continent also allows
2 disruptive actors to drive the agenda, undercutting
3 American interests. China views Africa as its second
4 continent, securing control over critical minerals and
5 infrastructure, potentially boxing us out of resources that
6 energize our industrial base. Africa also serves as
7 Putin's purse, where Russia exploits instability to extract
8 resources, to include human lives, to fuel its war machine.

9 To contend with these threats, AFRICOM must think and
10 operate differently. With less than 1/10th of 1 percent of
11 the Department's budget, we must maximize every taxpayer
12 dollar to deliver an outsized return on investment.
13 AFRICOM continues to leverage low-cost, high-yield
14 activities to amplify our impact on the continent.

15 Programs like the International Military Education and
16 Training and the State Partnership Program are reliable
17 force multipliers that forge enduring relationships with
18 African militaries and are proven models for cost-effective
19 burden sharing.

20 The AFRICOM exercise program is emerging as a battle
21 lab to test and validate new technologies on behalf of both
22 the Joint Force and our African partners.

23 And finally, AFRICOM is focused on the critical
24 convergence of security and economics. Our efforts span
25 all elements of national power as we coordinate closely

1 with State, Commerce, Energy, and Treasury. The
2 Department's new Economic Defense Unit has been an
3 invaluable partner.

4 To defend the homeland and promote U.S. interests and
5 ensure effective crisis response, AFRICOM needs targeted
6 investments in layered, non-traditional ISR, innovative
7 force protection, programs that are able to enable willing
8 and capable partners, the opportunity to conduct
9 experimentation of emerging technologies, and the ability
10 to respond to crisis at the time and point of need.

11 Africa is a continent of opportunities, not only
12 crises. With the continued support of this Committee, I
13 can assure you that every dollar you authorize for AFRICOM
14 will contribute directly to the security, safety, and
15 prosperity of the United States.

16 Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

17 [The prepared statement of General Anderson follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Well, thank you very much. Let's
2 get right into Iran, Admiral Cooper. And I think one of
3 the basic questions is, was this exercise of ours, was this
4 operation of ours a war of choice or a war of necessity.
5 Let me get your military perspective. Did Iran have
6 enriched uranium up to 60 percent prior to Operation
7 Midnight Hammer?

8 Admiral Cooper: Yes, sir, they did.

9 Chairman Wicker: And is there a civilian use at all
10 for uranium that is enriched to 60 percent?

11 Admiral Cooper: There is not, Senator.

12 Chairman Wicker: Is it fair to say that Iran's
13 nuclear breakout time has been set back then, thanks to
14 Operation Midnight Hammer and Operation Epic Fury?

15 Admiral Cooper: Without talking specifics, that is
16 accurate, Senator.

17 Chairman Wicker: All right. And has Iran ever been
18 willing to curtail its ballistic missile programs, through
19 negotiations?

20 Admiral Cooper: They have not, sir.

21 Chairman Wicker: And then perhaps you can explain in
22 some detail to what extent Operation Epic Fury has set back
23 Iran's ballistic missile program. To what extent you can
24 tell us in this open setting.

25 Admiral Cooper: Yes, sir, Senator. Thank you very

1 much for that question. Our military mission in Operation
2 Epic Fury was crystal clear from the very outset and
3 remained steady through. The mission was to degrade Iran's
4 ability to project power on its neighbors and U.S.
5 interests. It had three key components -- degrade Iran's
6 ballistic missiles and the defense industrial base that
7 supports it; degrade Iran's drones and the defense
8 industrial base that supports that; and degrade their Navy
9 and the defense industrial base that supports that. In
10 each of those categories we met all of the achievements.
11 Each of those systems were significantly degraded.

12 If I gave you just a couple of examples, the defense
13 industrial base for their drones and their missiles and
14 their Navy were degraded by 90 percent. They have about 10
15 percent left. For the Navy, my military assessment would
16 be that the Navy will not begin to rebuild for 5 to 10
17 years. Many of you serve in states that build ships. It
18 is complex. It is particularly complex when you do not
19 have an industrial base to build it.

20 My professional perspective on this also is that Iran
21 would not return to the same level of Navy that it had for
22 a generation.

23 Chairman Wicker: Now this 10 percent of drones left,
24 are they exquisite, or are they sort of relatively
25 inexpensive drones we have been hearing about?

1 Admiral Cooper: Senator, thank you for this question.
2 I would like to use the opportunity to mythbust on drones.

3 Chairman Wicker: Okay.

4 Admiral Cooper: The days of \$3,500 drones that we saw
5 in the last couple of years, particularly in the fight
6 against the Houthis in Yemen, those days are behind us.
7 Today we face an increased threat from drones that are
8 highly sophisticated. They are jet-powered. They have
9 high-end sensors. They have electronic warfare. They have
10 signals intelligence. So those days of using high-value
11 defense that shoot down cheap targets are behind us.

12 Quite the contrary, what we have been doing lately is
13 using our own low-cost, one-way attack drones, attacking
14 Iran, making them use higher-end, more expensive weapons.

15 So I can confidently tell you we have flipped the cost
16 curve in many ways. Always work to be done, but I like
17 where we are in this regard.

18 Chairman Wicker: Okay. And, you know, there has been
19 a lot of talk about part of the negotiations being giving
20 up the nuclear ambitions. But almost as important to me is
21 the support of terrorist proxies. So has Iran ever been
22 willing to end its support for the terrorist proxies --
23 Hamas, Houthis, Hezbollah?

24 Admiral Cooper: They have not, Senator.

25 Chairman Wicker: So to what extent has this exercise,

1 this operation, denied Iran resources for funding
2 terrorism?

3 Admiral Cooper: Senator, this has been a significant
4 priority from the outset, and as we sit here today there
5 are no resources and equipment that are flowing from Iran
6 to Hamas, Hezbollah, or the Houthis. Those transfer paths
7 and methods have been cut off.

8 Chairman Wicker: To the extent that that source of
9 support has been cut off, what are the other sources of
10 support that these terrorist groups can look to?

11 Admiral Cooper: I think some of those pieces are best
12 discussed in a more classified environment. But I think
13 the key element of this is the main supplier of resources
14 and training, for decades and billions of dollars, and we
15 have seen all this before our very eyes, those pieces have
16 been completely cut off today.

17 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. We will take
18 another round, but at this point I recognize the Ranking
19 Member.

20 Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.
21 Admiral Cooper, is Iran militarily still able to inflict
22 significant damage on infrastructure of the surrounding
23 countries in the Persian Gulf?

24 Admiral Cooper: Senator, in this environment what I
25 would tell you is their capabilities have been dramatically

1 degraded. That certainly does not mean that they do not
2 have anything left. But the large-scale volleys that we
3 have seen over the last couple of years, Iran is no longer
4 capable of executing those.

5 Senator Reed: This would be less large-scale volleys
6 than directed attacks on critical infrastructure, which
7 would set back petroleum production, or petroleum
8 distribution, I would say, even if the Strait of Hormuz is
9 opened. Does that capability still exist?

10 Admiral Cooper: Capabilities across the board inside
11 Iran still exist at a degraded scale. We have also planned
12 accordingly for each of these scenarios, if necessary, to
13 deal with them from a defensive perspective.

14 Senator Reed: So would you characterize Iran as no
15 longer a threat?

16 Admiral Cooper: Iran has a significantly degraded
17 threat, and they no longer threaten regional partners or
18 the United States in ways that they were able to do before.
19 Across every domain they have been significantly degraded.

20 Senator Reed: But they can still threaten their
21 partners?

22 Admiral Cooper: It is a very large country. They
23 retain some mineral capability. That is correct and that
24 is accurate.

25 Senator Reed: Thank you, sir.

1 Admiral Cooper: We have accounted for that from the
2 defensive perspective.

3 Senator Reed: General Anderson, what has happened is
4 that the Administration recalled over 30 career Ambassadors
5 overall, 12 in Africa. The United States has only 14
6 confirmed Ambassadors. In other words, 40 ambassadorial
7 posts in Africa are vacant or filled by charge d'affaires.
8 Is it essential to your work to have fully functioning
9 embassies with Ambassadors?

10 General Anderson: Senator, we work very closely with
11 all the embassies across the continent to pursue and
12 further American interests, so that relationship with these
13 embassies is critical for AFRICOM's effective engagement.

14 Chairman Wicker: But what about the Ambassadors?

15 General Anderson: Yes, sir. So the Ambassadors do
16 enjoy access. I think that is important to have
17 Ambassadors in place because the hierarchical nature of
18 many of the African countries is that if you are not an
19 Ambassador you do not always get access. So there is
20 obviously benefit to that. And we coordinate with them
21 quite closely when we engage.

22 Senator Reed: Thank you very much, sir. You are
23 combatting one of the most sophisticated information
24 warfare operations we have seen in a long time, from
25 Russia. What can we do to improve your ability to

1 withstand this information operation and also to engage in
2 something on the same level by the United States?

3 General Anderson: Yes, sir. I appreciate the
4 recognition of this concern because our adversaries are
5 very active in the information domain, as you highlighted
6 Russia. I also say China is also very active in these
7 domains. They use this to undercut not only our interests
8 but undercut and disrupt the democracies that are in
9 Africa. And this is an area that I have talked to several
10 of the leaders across especially Coastal West Africa. They
11 are very concerned about the Russian propaganda that is
12 destabilizing their democracies.

13 For me, we have a limited budget that we are mostly in
14 a reactive mode to respond to issues. What would be
15 beneficial, as one of the few entities that looks across
16 the entirety of the continent, is a consistent budget that
17 would allow us to campaign in the information space. We
18 coordinate very closely with the State Department and
19 others on this and work with the embassies, but our ability
20 to look across the continent and highlight these things I
21 think is an area where we could be of benefit to the
22 American interests.

23 Senator Reed: Thank you, sir. Admiral Cooper, one
24 more question. Do we still maintain a relationship with
25 the Syrian Democratic Forces?

1 Admiral Cooper: Senator, we do have a nascent
2 relationship with them, in the context of evacuating the
3 more than 5,700 ISIS prisoners from predominantly northeast
4 Syria to Iraq. A small number of prisoners, mostly
5 chronically ill, and with multiple amputees stayed in the
6 primary prison known as Hasaka, and SDF today is serving as
7 the guards.

8 Senator Reed: Just a follow-on question, do you
9 detect any kind of resentment to our rapid departure from
10 the SDF?

11 Admiral Cooper: Senator, we have had a longstanding
12 relationship with the SDF. The ceasefire that they have in
13 place today with the Syrian government remains in effect,
14 and we remain engaged.

15 Senator Reed: Thank you very much, sir. Thank you.

16 Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Senator Fischer.

17 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome,
18 Admiral. General, thank you for your service.

19 Admiral, what did the Iranians attempted missile
20 attack on the island of Diego Garcia tell us about the
21 ballistic missile program and their intent to use it? Did
22 it come as a surprise?

23 Admiral Cooper: Senator, appropriate to talk in this
24 forum, because there is clearly a classified component to
25 this, I think we have all heard publicly what Iran

1 described as their self-imposed limitations on their
2 missile force. The execution of that particular attempted
3 strike, which failed, was twice the distance of what they
4 previously advertised that they said they would self-
5 constrain themselves to.

6 Senator Fischer: Thank you. And as you look at the
7 total operation, the conflict there, what lessons have you
8 learned from that, and how have you used those lessons thus
9 far to ensure that your command is prepared for the fight
10 that we have today?

11 Admiral Cooper: Yes, Senator. Thank you very much
12 for this. It is fair to say that we have captured
13 thousands of lessons, mostly tactical. I think there is no
14 military in the world that makes adjustments as well as the
15 United States military does. And whether they were in
16 stride tactically with a lot of support from organizations
17 back in the United States or they were more at the
18 operational level, we took a very hard look inward to see
19 where can we improve our defenses.

20 Force protection and protecting our people is my
21 number one priority. We focused on that first. We made a
22 significant number of adjustments to enhance what was
23 already a very effective air defense umbrella. And that is
24 where we are predominantly focused, as well as putting
25 ourselves in the position to meet a wide range of

1 contingencies going forward.

2 Senator Fischer: Thank you, sir. General Anderson,
3 ISIS is on the rise in Africa, and you have been very, very
4 clear about that. How is your command working with our
5 partners in order to address that?

6 General Anderson: Senator, you are correct. ISIS is
7 putting a concerted effort into its establishment on the
8 continent. We have been working very closely with willing
9 partners who have been willing to address this threat.

10 Two examples of that. In northern Somalia, working
11 with the Somali and the Puntland forces there to go up into
12 those mountains. What has been key there to putting
13 pressure and isolating the ISIS leadership there is the
14 partner's ability to stay in those mountains. So our
15 partnership provides them the intelligence, some training,
16 and some limited logistics that allow them to stay is
17 helping isolate that leadership node in Somalia.

18 We have also been working very closely with Nigeria,
19 who has, in the last few months, opened up with a very
20 positive engagement, with intel sharing and ability to go
21 after and target some of these terrorist threats that are
22 in northern Nigeria. So that has been a positive area that
23 we have seen, as well.

24 We would like to reestablish some pragmatic
25 relationships in the Sahel, where ISIS also has a strong

1 hold, where they are currently holding an American hostage,
2 in order to gain better access. And that is an area we
3 need to continue to improve, to work with those partners
4 for intel sharing and an understanding of what that threat
5 is there.

6 But we are working very deliberately with our partners
7 to address these common threats.

8 Senator Fischer: Do you feel that you are
9 appropriately resourced to address these threats?

10 General Anderson: We have the minimum necessary
11 resources in order to address the threats. In order to do
12 this, because of the size of the continent and the
13 complexity of those threats, in order to thwart these we
14 have to shift resources and that entails taking some risk
15 in those other areas in order to address the primary
16 efforts.

17 Senator Fischer: I would like to have you address
18 some of the connections that we see with the drug cartels,
19 with the terror groups. Can you elaborate on those,
20 especially with regards to the Central and South American
21 cartels?

22 General Anderson: Yes, Senator. That is an area that
23 is emerging that is causing us great concern. Two points
24 to that. Recently there was an interdiction based on some
25 intelligence that we were able to provide, that the Spanish

1 interdicted a shipment of cocaine that was 35 tons of
2 cocaine. That is about a billion dollars of street value.
3 We believe that is the largest interdiction in history.
4 That came out of South America. It was transiting along
5 the west coast of Africa towards another location that I
6 could talk about in a classified environment.

7 And so we are seeing more of that drug trafficking
8 coming in, and the terrorist organizations are helping
9 transit that. They are getting payments through that, and
10 there is a symbiotic relationship that that money then
11 comes back to our hemisphere, to those drug cartels, but
12 also helps provide fuel for those terrorists.

13 Another area that I think is important to highlight is
14 that in the last 18 to 24 months we have assisted, or at
15 least tipped off, many partner nations to drug activities
16 and labs in their country. In this time, 11 of the 12 drug
17 labs that have been interdicted have had Mexican cartel
18 members on site, to include the largest drug lab that had
19 ever been disrupted in South Africa. There were Sinaloa
20 Cartel members on site. So they are actually doing
21 production now in Africa as well as the transit of that
22 across the continent.

23 So we are watching this develop, and it is of concern
24 as this fuels both the terrorists and the cartels.

25 Senator Fischer: What is the destination of those

1 drugs?

2 General Anderson: Those drugs are destined for the
3 Middle East, for Europe, but we are also seeing them then
4 come in through the northern route, back into America. As
5 we have applied pressure on the southern border they are
6 finding other means to bring those drugs into our nation.

7 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

8 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Senator
9 Blumenthal.

10 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank
11 you both for being here. Thank you for your extraordinary
12 service in a difficult time. General Anderson, I want to
13 express my condolences to you and your team and the
14 families of First Lieutenant Kendrick Lamont and Specialist
15 Mariyah Collington. The Army has lost two young patriots,
16 a dedicated man and woman, and I am certain that the
17 recovery mission was difficult. And I want to commend your
18 team for bringing closure to their families.

19 Admiral, there has been public reporting that Iran
20 continues to have as much as 70 to 75 percent of its
21 missiles and launchers available to threaten shipping in
22 the Strait of Hormuz. Does that reporting conform roughly
23 with your estimate as to Iran's continuing strength?

24 Admiral Cooper: Senator, thank you for the question,
25 and first thank you for your time these past few days. It

1 has been meaningful and very much appreciated.

2 I think it is appropriate in this forum not to discuss
3 specific intelligence assessments. What I would say, from
4 my perspective, is the numbers that I have seen in open
5 source are not accurate. I think what also is not taken
6 into consideration, it is more than just the numbers. It
7 is the command and control that has been shattered, it is
8 the significant degradation and capability, and it is the
9 lack of any ability to then produce any missiles or drones
10 on the back end. I think we have to take a holistic look
11 at that, and that is what we have done.

12 Senator Blumenthal: But regardless of what the
13 numbers are, Iran continues to pose a significant threat to
14 shipping because it has missiles and fast boats and other
15 assets that are available to attack shipping in the area.
16 Correct?

17 Admiral Cooper: Senator, in each of those cases their
18 capabilities have been significantly degraded. If I just
19 use my own professional experience, in 100 transits through
20 the Strait of Hormuz you would typically see 20 to 40 fast
21 boats, and lately we have seen 2 or 3. So the degradation
22 means it has been significant, but some residual capability
23 does exist.

24 Senator Blumenthal: With respect to the threat that
25 remains, your forces were successful in Project Freedom in

1 enabling ships to go through the Strait. Correct?

2 Admiral Cooper: That is correct, sir.

3 Senator Blumenthal: And Project Freedom was stopped
4 for what reason?

5 Admiral Cooper: Sir, I think I will look back a
6 couple of days ago on the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs'
7 testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee. I
8 think he characterized it well. The situation in the
9 Strait of Hormuz is rather complex these days, and I would
10 offer just these quick points.

11 First and foremost, the United States controls, via
12 our blockade, which I would be happy to talk about, the
13 overall flow of commerce going into and out of Iran. The
14 Iranian capability to stop commerce has been dramatically
15 degraded through the Strait, but their voice is very loud,
16 and those threats are clearly heard by the merchant
17 industry and the insurance industry. Those are factors.
18 There are certainly factors in energy. And on top of all
19 that --

20 Senator Blumenthal: And I apologize for interrupting
21 but I am going to run out of time, as you understand. I
22 think the point that I want to make here is that Project
23 Freedom could be started again, and the voices of the
24 Iranians, large as they are, could be contradicted or
25 reduced in impact if Project Freedom were ongoing and the

1 world could see that shipping was going through the Strait.
2 Am I off-base in that view?

3 Admiral Cooper: Senator, there is a wide range of
4 contingencies that we are prepared to execute, and I would
5 defer to the policymakers on anything having to do
6 specifically with the Strait of Hormuz, particularly during
7 this time of sensitive negotiations, where it is front and
8 center in the negotiations.

9 Senator Blumenthal: And have you seen any progress in
10 those negotiations?

11 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I would refer to the
12 diplomats and the team engaged in the negotiations.

13 Senator Blumenthal: Let me ask you, in the time that
14 I have left, one of the objectives that President Trump
15 articulated at the beginning of this war, which, in my
16 view, could not be accomplished with bombing, was to secure
17 the enriched uranium. Would you agree that taking
18 possession of that uranium would require boots on the
19 ground and significant casualties for United States forces?

20 Admiral Cooper: Senator, in this particular forum I
21 think it would be highly inappropriate, given the
22 classified nature of any contingencies, to talk about the
23 nuclear program.

24 Senator Blumenthal: Well, let me just finish by
25 making the observation that you have, I think, sought to be

1 forthcoming to the Committee, in the classified setting
2 where we had an earlier conversation with questions and
3 answers. My view is that the vast majority of what you
4 told us should also be told to the American people. They
5 deserve to know. And our adversaries know a lot of what we
6 know. The ones who really do not know are the American
7 people, and they deserve more information, which is not a
8 criticism of you. It is of the system which causes the
9 withholding of this information, and the Administration,
10 which has refused to provide figures as to the cost of the
11 war and other details that are relevant and important for
12 the American people to know. So I am hopeful that we can
13 have a way to make more information available to the
14 American people. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 Chairman Wicker: Admiral Cooper, during the brief
16 time Project Freedom, before it was closed off again, can
17 you say in this setting whether or not our services were
18 able to open the Strait?

19 Admiral Cooper: Senator, thank you for this. Very
20 much appreciated. As has been publicly highlighted, the
21 first two ships to flow from the Arabian Gulf, from the
22 western part, into the east through the Strait of Hormuz
23 were U.S.-flagged vessels. That was successfully executed.
24 And U.S. Navy destroyers then came into the Arabian Gulf,
25 operated for a number of days, and then as you subsequently

1 saw, float out of the Arabian Gulf.

2 Chairman Wicker: Okay. Senator Blumenthal's question
3 presumed that you could give, in public, your judgment as
4 to whether the United States is capable of doing that
5 again.

6 Admiral Cooper: Senator, there is a military
7 component of this and there is also a policy component that
8 I believe to the policymakers --

9 Chairman Wicker: From a military standpoint, we could
10 do that again, could we not?

11 Admiral Cooper: We just did it last week.

12 Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Senator Ernst, I
13 believe.

14 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and gentlemen,
15 thank you for being here today and to your teams, as well.
16 We truly appreciate your service and dedication to our
17 nation. And I also want to acknowledge the loss of the two
18 individuals in Morocco, and thank our Moroccan partners, as
19 well, for their contribution in the recovery efforts.

20 I do want to recognize, Admiral Cooper, those that we
21 have lost during this current operation, or the former
22 operation, Epic Fury, as well as the two Iowa National
23 Guardsmen that we lost in Syria this last December. We
24 have also more than 380 who have been wounded in this
25 fight. So for all of those servicemembers that have given

1 so much and to their families, they will not be forgotten.

2 The operations that have been conducted against Iran
3 and its proxies across the Central Command AOR would not
4 have been possible without some really tremendous partners
5 in that region. And we have seen a large burden borne by
6 Israel and Jordan. We have seen assistance coming from
7 Bahrain and UAE, who has taken a significant amount of
8 incoming fire, Saudia Arabia, Qatar. They have not all
9 been passive bystanders. They have been actively engaged.
10 They have contributed to every line of effort, and we
11 appreciate them contributing to our successes. We cannot
12 overstate what their basing access logistics, their
13 networks, and intelligence cooperation have meant
14 operationally to us.

15 So, Admiral Cooper, what is the one, maybe two, things
16 that you want all of us to understand as we walk out of
17 this hearing knowing about what our allies have assisted
18 with in this fight?

19 Admiral Cooper: Senator, first thank you for the
20 question and thank you for your leadership, and thank you
21 for all that has been done by the great men and women from
22 your state. They have played an outsized role, so thank
23 you for that.

24 Senator Ernst: Thank you.

25 Admiral Cooper: In terms of our partners, I think a

1 key feature is we have enhanced mil-to-mil relationships
2 across the board in the Middle East. As we sit here right
3 now we have five specific partner nations who are not just
4 conceptually side-by-side by literally side-by-side with
5 the United States in defense -- the United Arab Emirates,
6 Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. Over the course
7 of Epic Fury they defended themselves and they defended
8 Americans.

9 In addition to those key allies, everything that we
10 have accomplished would have been impossible without the
11 Kingdom of Jordan, and clearly we were operating very
12 closely with the State of Israel. I think that group, in
13 particular, should be commended. They did not just execute
14 missions. They served side-by-side with Americans and
15 protected Americans.

16 Senator Ernst: Thank you. And this takes years to
17 develop those friendships, those relationships, the mil-to-
18 mil work that you do. Is that correct?

19 Admiral Cooper: It does. There is the mil-to-mil
20 work. There is the friendships. It is all about bringing
21 these together. And the air defense umbrella that has been
22 created has been in concept for the better part of a decade
23 and a half, now fully realized.

24 Senator Ernst: And again, I just want to reiterate
25 that we have such tremendous partnerships with so many of

1 those nations, and we thank them for that.

2 I will move to AFRICOM now, General Anderson. Over
3 the past couple of years the U.S. has been withdrawing
4 forces from a number of countries, including Niger, Mali,
5 and Chad. And Russian's African Corps has moved in to fill
6 that vacuum. Where we do not exist, others will. But just
7 a few weeks ago they retreated from Kidal, Mali under fire.
8 They had surrendered to the very militants that they were
9 sent to defeat.

10 So we have some really interesting dynamics going on
11 in that region, and AFRICOM is left with the responsibility
12 for a lot more high-risk, high-threat posts than any other
13 combatant command in the world. So walk us through, just
14 very briefly, what AFRICOM cannot do today that it could 5
15 years ago.

16 General Anderson: Senator, I think there is one very
17 poignant example that I can use very quickly, is that 5
18 years ago I was the Commander of Special Operations Command
19 in Africa. Philip Walton was taken hostage in Niger and
20 transported by bandits, being prepared to be sold to
21 terrorist organizations. We were able to identify him in
22 24 hours. We were able to pinpoint his location within 48.
23 He was rescued in less than 96. That was largely due to
24 the access that we had, also the partnerships and the
25 relationships that we enjoyed.

1 Today, Kevin Rideout is on day 205 of captivity,
2 largely because we do not have the access that we had
3 before and the relationships that are necessary, and that
4 posture reduction has been difficult. And he was also
5 taken out of Niamey. Unfortunately, he was then sold by
6 the bandits to ISIS and is being held there today.

7 Senator Ernst: Thank you for that. And Mr. Chairman,
8 I just want folks to understand the lack of presence that
9 we have in AFRICOM and that exact difference. So thank
10 you, General Anderson, for a very, very specific example of
11 what a lack of presence has meant. Thank you.

12 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Ernst. There is
13 a proposal for substantially more funding for your command.
14 Is that right, General Anderson?

15 General Anderson: Senator, that is correct. The
16 presidential budget significantly increases our budget and
17 addresses some of these key concerns.

18 Chairman Wicker: Well, that one example you just
19 gave, would that be addressed by these proposed additional
20 funds?

21 General Anderson: Not entirely, Senator, because the
22 access and relationships are what were key there. But we
23 do, because of this, because of that lack of posture, we
24 need more investment in expeditionary capabilities, and
25 that is being addressed in the proposed budget. But those

1 relationships that the Senator highlights and maintaining
2 those relationships are absolutely critical because you
3 cannot surge trust in a time of need.

4 Chairman Wicker: Okay. Well, you and I have gone
5 back and forth about unfunded requirements. So I guess
6 your testimony is that that is not a matter of funding. It
7 is just a matter of relationships.

8 General Anderson: Senator, that is a matter of
9 relationships. The funding that we would ask for that
10 would help us is the contingency of response ability,
11 expeditionary, but also some targeted programs to work with
12 key partners who are willing and able to address the
13 threat, to increase their capability and capacity to do
14 that. So those are the investments. Those are all
15 included in the proposed budget. So right now I do not
16 have many needs.

17 Chairman Wicker: Very well. Very well. Senator
18 Kaine.

19 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to our
20 witnesses, President Trump's decision to unilaterally take
21 the United States into a war with Iran is deeply unpopular
22 in Virginia. We are a very pro-military state, a very pro-
23 military state. And as I have traveled around Virginia and
24 talked to Virginians the unpopularity sort of gets
25 crystalized into have we learned nothing from 25 years of

1 war in the region. Fourteen thousand American troops and
2 contractors died in the war on terror in Iraq and
3 Afghanistan, more than 65,000 injured, \$8 trillion spent.
4 And Virginians who have watched their friends and family
5 repeatedly deployed over the last quarter century have
6 grave concerns about what was accomplished, and was the
7 sacrifice worth it.

8 Our troops sacrifice so bravely. Chief Warrant
9 Officer Robert Marzan, one of the 14 who have died in Epic
10 Fury, Spotsylvania County, Virginia. Our forward carrier
11 strike group just returned, longest post-Vietnam deployment
12 of any carrier. Our folks sacrifice. They want civilian
13 leaders to make the right decisions about whether and when
14 and how they should sacrifice, and there is deep concern
15 that in this instance the decision is a wrong one.

16 Part of it is a failure to really grapple with
17 history. In the hearings in this Committee I have heard
18 over and over again, and I have heard the President and
19 Secretary of Defense talk about Iran's bad actions since
20 1979. And everything that has been said about Iran's bad
21 actions are true.

22 But there is a lot of the story that folks do not talk
23 about. History did not begin in 1979. Iran and the United
24 States were allies in World War II. One of the pivotal
25 events in World War II is the Tehran Conference, where

1 President Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin
2 met in Tehran to guarantee Iran independence, stable
3 borders, and sovereignty. Iran loved the United States.

4 The United States led a coup to topple the
5 democratically elected government of Iran in 1953, during
6 the Eisenhower administration. The United States propped
7 up a dictatorship, the Shah of Iran, trained the secret
8 police, the SAVAK, that tortured, exiled, imprisoned,
9 killed Iranians by the thousands. And 26 years after that
10 there was a revolution, in 1979, and yes, then it was
11 "Death to America." The U.S. funding a dictatorship and
12 toppling a democratically elected government led to an Iran
13 that has been very hostile, and all the events my
14 colleagues have talked about since then are accurate.

15 But just as Iran seized our Embassy in violation of
16 international law, then the United States funded Saddam
17 Hussein for Iraq to wage war against Iran in the 1980s,
18 killing hundreds of thousands of Iranians. And just as
19 Iran funded proxies that bombed a Marine barracks on our
20 Embassy in Beirut, the U.S. Navy shot down an Iranian
21 civilian aircraft in 1989, killing 290 civilians. And the
22 U.S. invaded Iran's next-door neighbors to topple their
23 government, and then, yes, Iranians attacked U.S. troops, a
24 raid near their border, and we have attacked and killed
25 their leadership.

1 I am not saying that Iran is good. Iran is horrible,
2 horrible to its neighbors, horrible to people outside its
3 borders, and even worse to its own people. But if you
4 ignore the history of the back-and-forth between the U.S.
5 and Iran, you will not get this right. If more war between
6 U.S. and Iran were the answer, we would have found the
7 answer sometime between 1953 and now.

8 Here is something I think it is important for my
9 colleagues to know. We did look for a path, a diplomatic
10 path, to end this hostility that has been going on since
11 1953, and President Trump tore up a diplomatic deal, over
12 the advice of his Secretary of Defense and Secretary of
13 State, and many of us said at the time, if you do this, it
14 is likely to lead to Americans dying. If you make
15 diplomacy impossible, you will make war inevitable. And I
16 believe the troops who have been killed in Epic Fury would
17 be alive today if the United States had not decided to
18 abandon the diplomatic deal.

19 Admiral Cooper, and to my colleagues on the Committee,
20 here is something that is pretty amazing, that we should
21 not settle for. The Administration is refusing to allow
22 members of this Committee to see the OLC opinion stating
23 the legal case for war. We have always had the ability.
24 We are Armed Services members. We are being asked to fund
25 a \$1.5 trillion budget, but our request to the DOJ to see

1 the OLC opinion justifying this war, they have refused to
2 allow members of the Armed Services Committee to see it.
3 U.S. Senators, appropriators, we are not allowed to see it.
4 What are they hiding? If they will not allow us to see the
5 legal rationale for the war, what are they hiding?

6 And Mr. Cooper, I will just conclude and say I hope we
7 might, as a Committee, whatever our agreements about the
8 wisdom or the legality of the war, I hope we might, as a
9 Committee, agree that we should at least, in a classified
10 setting, be able to read the legal opinion upon which this
11 entire 76-day war is based. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

12 Chairman Wicker: Yes. Thank you, Senator. You have
13 made a statement that raises questions that these two
14 witnesses are unable to answer, because you have raised
15 policy questions. So just for the benefit of those
16 listening in, we have had the civilian leadership before
17 this Committee to answer questions like that, and these two
18 gentlemen would have to decline. If you had stated that in
19 the form of a question they would have to decline to
20 answer, because that is a matter of policy.

21 Who is next? Senator Moody, you are recognized.

22 Senator Moody: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you
23 for being here today, Admiral Cooper, General Anderson.
24 Thank you for your leadership to the men and women of
25 CENTCOM and AFRICOM. Thank you for everything that you

1 have done over the course of your careers and are
2 continuing to do to serve our country. And I see there are
3 so many men and women with you, behind you, to support
4 these efforts today, to speak with us, to meet with us, to
5 answer our questions. I know a lot of preparation goes
6 into that, so I thank you, as well.

7 Admiral Cooper, the fight you are leading certainly,
8 with CENTCOM under your command, I am always proud to say
9 that that is based in my home county in Florida,
10 Hillsborough County, Florida. That is where I was born and
11 raised. It has been there since 1983, 43 years of
12 commanding operations, like we are involved in today. So I
13 am proud to have you here, sir.

14 Florida is so involved, from SOCOM, Space Forces
15 Centra, Patrick Space Force Base, Cape Canaveral. We are
16 both the command hub and launchpad for most all conflicts.
17 We are proud to be that, proud to be a stakeholder in
18 everything that is done within the military. So on behalf
19 of all the servicemembers in Florida, civilian and their
20 families, we want to say thank you to them.

21 You know, I am the newest member of this Committee.
22 It is always interesting to me to hear the different
23 perspectives from other members on this Committee. You
24 would think, from some of the questioning previously, that
25 the United States willy-nilly abandoned all diplomatic

1 efforts, did not think through that, there was no
2 justification. I am wondering if you could tell me,
3 Admiral Cooper, what is your background working with
4 CENTCOM in all of the leadership positions you have held?

5 Admiral Cooper: Senator, first thank you for the
6 question and thanks for your time yesterday, and thanks for
7 your leadership. Thousands of Floridians are serving in
8 the Middle East today, and they are serving honorably and
9 well.

10 Senator Moody: But what specifically has been your
11 roles with CENTCOM?

12 Admiral Cooper: I have been focused on the Middle
13 East for the last 5 years, 3 years of which were serving in
14 Bahrain as the Fleet Commander, and then about 16 months as
15 the Deputy Commander prior to my current position.

16 Senator Moody: And how long have you been familiar
17 with Iran and its leadership and its attacks against the
18 United States?

19 Admiral Cooper: I have studied it or been a part of
20 it for the better part of three decades, and particularly,
21 acutely in the last 5 years.

22 Senator Moody: And leading up to February 28th,
23 months prior to that, what was jarring to you that you saw
24 different than what it had been for those many decades that
25 you have been involved?

1 Admiral Cooper: I think it is important to note just
2 in the 30 months before Epic Fury commenced, Iran and its
3 proxies had been attacking U.S. servicemembers and
4 diplomats about 350 times.

5 Senator Moody: Can you repeat that?

6 Admiral Cooper: About every third day, Iran and its
7 proxies attacked American servicemembers 350 times in the
8 Middle East.

9 Senator Moody: I do not think that Americans were
10 aware of that, in the 30 months, that they had attacked
11 Americans or their servicemembers 350 times. Does it
12 surprise you that I would say that, that I do not believe
13 an everyday American going to work knew that?

14 Admiral Cooper: It is disappointing, but between the
15 actions of proxies in Iraq and Syria as well as the
16 Houthis, that is simply the fact of what happened.

17 Senator Moody: And in the months leading up to that
18 decision, that very serious decision on February 28th, what
19 were your concerns regarding the proliferation of missiles
20 or the ability of the United States to do anything if that
21 nuclear threat escalated?

22 Admiral Cooper: Senator, in this venue what I would
23 say is since our number one priority is to prevent a
24 nuclear-capable Iran, I have always, every day, focused on
25 that problem. But what we saw in the weeks and months

1 leading up to Epic Fury was an increase in the production
2 capability of ballistic missiles, which presented a very
3 significant risk, both to the partners and ourselves, and
4 this is why it was part of our military objectives, to
5 eliminate those missiles and equally, if not more
6 importantly, eliminate the ability for Iran to generate any
7 more --

8 Senator Moody: In those couple of months leading
9 right up until that you saw a dramatic escalation in that
10 ability on Iran's part?

11 Admiral Cooper: That is correct. Starting in about
12 November and December you started to see an increase in
13 Iran's capability and intent to produce more ballistic
14 missiles.

15 Senator Moody: And if we could not have neutralized
16 that threat diplomatically, does there come a point where
17 that is not an option anymore, where there may be a
18 slippery slope where we cannot get back to our ability to
19 be effective to quell that threat?

20 Admiral Cooper: Without crossing into classified
21 lanes, the short answer is yes. Iran had a large-scale
22 capability to produce ballistic missiles, beyond which
23 could potentially be defended. I think that is a very
24 important point. The second point is that capability has
25 been virtually eliminated.

1 Senator Moody: And I believe I heard you say at this
2 point you believe Epic Fury has satisfied its mission?

3 Admiral Cooper: Senator, we met every military
4 objective for Epic Fury.

5 Senator Moody: And what is the difference between
6 where we were on the 28th of February and right now?

7 Admiral Cooper: If I used a couple of examples, the
8 Iranian Navy went from harassing throughout the region and
9 being a regional power to having no Navy.

10 Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Thank you, Senator
11 Moody. Senator King.

12 Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral, you
13 used the word "mythbusting" a few minutes ago, and I have
14 to do a little mythbusting. It is sort of common rhetoric
15 today that no administration prior to this one has
16 confronted the threats of Iran. In fact, the most
17 effective confrontation with the threat from Iran, the
18 nuclear threat, was during President Obama's
19 administration, with the JCPOA. I would point out that at
20 the time that President Trump tore up, unilaterally tore up
21 the nuclear agreement with Iran, Iran had zero highly
22 enriched uranium.

23 As you know, today one of the focuses of this whole
24 enterprise is 400 kilograms of highly enriched uranium that
25 is in place in Iran, that was produced since the unilateral

1 dissolution of the JCPOA. The idea that nobody ever
2 confronted this problem is just not true. And we are now
3 confronting a problem that was created by the abandonment
4 of the JCPOA, which is the most comprehensive nuclear
5 control agreement ever and the most highly inspected by the
6 International Atomic Energy agency in world history. So we
7 are confronted with a problem now that, in many ways, this
8 Administration created in 2018, by abandoning this
9 agreement.

10 Let me move on. Do we have any clarity now as to who
11 is in charge in Iran? Do we know who has the power to
12 negotiate and make agreements?

13 Admiral Cooper: Senator, the negotiations themselves
14 are held via diplomatic channels, and I would really refer
15 to the diplomats to address that. But clearly from a
16 military perspective their command control was
17 significantly fractured as a result of our strikes in
18 Operation Epic Fury.

19 Senator King: And command and control is another way
20 of saying their leadership. There is a communications
21 difficulty. Is the IRGC in charge at this point?

22 Admiral Cooper: The IRGC is exercising significant
23 authority.

24 Senator King: General Anderson, talk to me about the
25 loss of soft power in Africa, our abandonment of USAID and

1 what has happened with the Chinese and the Russians that,
2 my understanding is, are now filling that gap in addition
3 to the other aggressive actions that they are taking.

4 General Anderson: Senator, I would say that we look
5 at all facets of national power and how to bring those to
6 bear on the continent in order to provide security
7 outcomes.

8 Senator King: Taking one facet of our national power
9 off the table, unilaterally, for no apparent reason, at the
10 whim of Elon Musk.

11 General Anderson: Senator, we work very closely with
12 State, with Commerce, and with Energy in order to look at
13 the security requirements on the continent. I have a
14 Foreign Service Commercial Officer joining my staff this
15 summer, along with a liaison from the Department of Energy,
16 in order to look at economic opportunities --

17 Senator King: But it is fact, is it not, that we have
18 essentially left all of the role that USAID played on the
19 continent, that is gone. That is a yes-or-no question.

20 General Anderson: Senator, there are still aid
21 programs that are active on the continent. They are much
22 reduced from what they were before.

23 Senator King: Much reduced. That is a fair way of
24 stating it. You mentioned earlier that Al Qaeda and ISIS
25 have resurged in Africa, and the term "epicenter" has been

1 used several times, of world terrorism. You said they have
2 the will and intent to attack the homeland. My question
3 is, do they have the capacity? Are they developing
4 weapons, strategies, other ways to take that will and
5 intent and turn it into something of imminent danger to the
6 American people?

7 General Anderson: Senator, that is the exact issue
8 that is my top concern, is to have the assets necessary to
9 provide the indication warnings to know and to be able to
10 identify when they shift that will and intent to having the
11 capacity and capability. That is something that is very
12 difficult for us to ascertain in the Sahel right now, given
13 our limited posture.

14 Senator King: That was going to be my follow-up
15 question is do we have the capacity to determine their
16 capacity, and it sounds like you just said we do not have
17 the capacity that we should have or need.

18 General Anderson: Senator, that is why, in the
19 President's budget, we have asked for additional
20 intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities
21 and why we are also looking at a layered approach to look
22 at everything from surface to space, to look at commercial
23 assets, to look at emerging technologies, open source as
24 well, and use these technologies, especially artificial
25 intelligence, in order to fuse these multiple different

1 types of layered ISR in order to gain that understanding
2 and illuminate this black hole of intelligence in the
3 Sahel.

4 We cannot sustainably afford to do that solely with
5 airborne ISR, so we have to look at a multifaceted
6 approach. There are some very promising emerging
7 technologies that we are looking into, that are affordable
8 and sustainable and that also can work with our partners.
9 Because one of the key points to this is this is not
10 necessarily ours to action, so having the intelligence that
11 we can share with partners, so they can then action those
12 on a mutual threat is going to be key to our future. But
13 being able to understand that is number one priority of the
14 command and we are looking at investing with emerging
15 technologies.

16 Senator King: And I think as you have testified, if
17 they take over the capital of Mali, that is a very
18 dangerous moment.

19 General Anderson: That would be a game-changer, I
20 believe, in how they would be viewed internationally and
21 what traction they would bring to other adherents.

22 Senator King: Thank you.

23 Chairman Wicker: How would that affect Americans,
24 General?

25 General Anderson: Well, I think that would then give

1 momentum to these terrorist organizations to have the will
2 and intent, and it would allow them to then start moving
3 towards the capability and capacities that Senator King
4 just mentioned. So that, then, I think poses a threat in
5 the long term to the United States as they continue to
6 develop this. We know that they have not given up this
7 intent, and it is just a matter of having the time and
8 space to develop them.

9 Chairman Wicker: And it would be Vladimir Putin that
10 would be happiest about this. Is that correct?

11 General Anderson: What, sir?

12 Chairman Wicker: It would be President Vladimir Putin
13 who would rejoice at such a contingency. Or would it be Xi
14 Jinping?

15 General Anderson: I cannot speak for what either one
16 of those leaders would believe, but I would think that they
17 would be able to parlay that to their interests.

18 Chairman Wicker: Well, who is financing this
19 contingency, if it were to happen?

20 General Anderson: The terrorists?

21 Chairman Wicker: Yes.

22 General Anderson: Through lots of illicit materials.
23 So it is not necessarily directly from a state actor. They
24 are working with, as I mentioned earlier, the
25 narcoterrorists trafficking. They are doing this through

1 kidnap for ransom. They are doing this through other
2 illegal smuggling. They even have their own taxation
3 networks in the territories that they control, where they
4 generate millions of dollars.

5 Chairman Wicker: And before I turn to Senator Scott,
6 with regard to the funds that we are not spending anymore
7 on USAID, but have been supplemented elsewhere, in terms of
8 dollars, let's talk in terms of U.S. dollar equivalence,
9 how does the food aid, health aid, and development aid that
10 we are currently delivering in your jurisdiction compare to
11 what China and Russia are doing?

12 General Anderson: Senator, I do not have those exact
13 numbers. I would have to get back to you on those, as
14 those are often in other departments, other agencies within
15 the government. But we can look into that for you and look
16 at what that comparison is.

17 Chairman Wicker: Okay. Well, if you would then
18 supplement that on the record for us, because I do not know
19 the answer either. Senator Scott.

20 Senator Scott: Thank you, Chairman. I thank both of
21 you for your service and all the men and women that work
22 for you.

23 Admiral Cooper, I know this is not a classified
24 setting, but can you talk a little bit about what other
25 countries have done to help us either with intelligence or

1 with military capabilities, and I do not know whether you
2 want to do this or not, something that you would have liked
3 to have done more?

4 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I think the most prominent
5 seven countries that have been most helpful and served
6 side-by-side are five of the six GCC countries -- UAE,
7 Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Also
8 indispensable in our efforts has been the Kingdom of Jordan
9 and clearly Israel, with whom we conducted the strikes. We
10 are always eager to expand partnerships. There are a
11 couple that I think I could address in a classified setting
12 that were less than stellar.

13 Senator Scott: Okay. And do you feel like we have
14 been a great partner to them in helping build up their
15 capabilities over the last 20 years or so?

16 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I think it has been an
17 excellent two-way street, and if I look at mil-to-mil
18 relationships it has been very strong. I would simply
19 highlight the result of years of effort and collaboration
20 and partnership, but our partners, literally side-by-side
21 with patriot defenses, with our partners defending
22 Americans, I think that sends a good signal and says a lot.

23 Senator Scott: I think Senator Wicker asked you some
24 questions about drones. We had a meeting the other day and
25 an individual came in and said that Ukraine is building

1 five million drones a year. And so they probably are ahead
2 of most people because they have had to, because of the war
3 they are in.

4 Can you talk about are we where we need to be with
5 drone technology? Are we using it everywhere we can? Are
6 we where we need to be with regard to drone defense
7 capabilities? Can you just talk a little bit more about
8 that?

9 Admiral Cooper: Yes, Senator. First I would say that
10 the Secretary's and the Department's focus on drone
11 domination, drone dominance, has really kickstarted our
12 capabilities and flowed more capabilities into the region
13 much faster than we had seen before, and many of those
14 capabilities have now been proven in combat. I think in a
15 classified setting I would like to tell you what that
16 looked like. But as we sit here today we have drone
17 capabilities in the air, on the sea, and under the sea, as
18 a result of this initiative.

19 Senator Scott: Do you have any feel for whether the
20 impact you have had on Iran is impacting their ability to
21 help Russia in their war against Ukraine?

22 Admiral Cooper: I think it is best to discuss that in
23 a classified setting. Clearly Iran and Russia have had a
24 years-long relationship, particularly when it comes to
25 drones.

1 Senator Scott: So what are you most proud of? What
2 are you most proud of that you have accomplished since you
3 have had this role?

4 Admiral Cooper: Absolutely number one, two, and
5 three, I am most proud of the men and women who executed an
6 extraordinarily complex mission, the first major combat
7 operations that the United States has seen in a generation,
8 establishing, in my mind, the latest, greatest generation
9 of American warriors.

10 Senator Scott: Same question, General Anderson. What
11 are you most proud of that you have accomplished so far?

12 General Anderson: Senator, I think I would agree with
13 Admiral Cooper that it is the men and women with a very
14 small footprint with a very small amount of resources
15 punched way above their weight class and have outsized
16 impacts on the continent. What we just did in African Lion
17 in Morocco was significant, in our largest exercise on the
18 continent, of bringing over 40 nations together, to include
19 over three dozen African countries and nations as far away
20 as Brazil and Japan. That ability to convene is one of the
21 great powers of the United States, and it differentiates us
22 from many others.

23 So I am proud of the fact that we can do that and that
24 we cannot just pursue our own readiness but actually bring
25 multiple nations together to address common threats.

1 Senator Scott: Thanks to both of you, and thanks to
2 all of the men and women that work for you.

3 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Senator. We
4 have Shaheen and then Hirono.

5 Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and again,
6 thank you to both of you for being here and for your
7 service.

8 I wanted to pick up on Senator King's questions about
9 the closing of so much of our foreign assistance in Africa,
10 General Anderson. Senator Wicker asked what we are seeing
11 in terms of China. I have a couple of examples that I
12 think are worth pointing out how much that has meant in
13 terms of China's ability to make inroads. Because China
14 has actually eclipsed Russia as the largest weapons
15 exporter to sub-Saharan Africa, which I am sure you are
16 aware of, and 70 percent of all African armies now operate
17 vehicles from the PRC, as opposed to the United States.
18 Beijing is looking to expand military grants, training, and
19 joint exercises between the PRC and African countries, and
20 we do not have the kind of foreign assistance soft power
21 that we did before the elimination of USAID.

22 But you mentioned, General Anderson, that you have
23 taken on a Foreign Commercial Service Officer, which I
24 think is a really interesting idea, and as you are aware, I
25 am sure, at INDOPACOM, Admiral Paparo has really used this

1 to good advantage, coordinating with the State Department,
2 with the Development Finance Corporation, with the U.S.
3 Trade Development Agency, and the Millennium Challenge
4 Corporation, to identify potential projects to work on in
5 that AOR.

6 So can you talk a little bit more about how you are
7 identifying development projects and whether you need any
8 other authorizations from Congress or support for this
9 effort from us so that you can help implement the kind of
10 coordination that is going on in INDOPACOM.

11 General Anderson: Senator, yes, I very much
12 appreciate your interest here, because this is an area I
13 think is emerging on the continent. With the demographics
14 on the continent and the growing economies, being able to
15 identify the intersection of security and economics is
16 absolutely vital. All of the agencies you mentioned are
17 ones that we are coordinating with to make sure that those
18 investments go into the continent and have the greatest
19 effect, but they are also informed by what are the security
20 implications.

21 Sometimes it may not have the same economic return,
22 but that return may come in security, and that is where we
23 come in, is being able to convene some of these different
24 agencies as well as private industry to be able to
25 articulate what those security concerns are, what those

1 implications are. And then also the fact that we are able
2 to execute exercises and other things around the continent
3 helps go into the calculus of those investments and buy
4 down some of that risk. So that is what we are looking to
5 develop.

6 Senator Shaheen: Do those agencies routinely check
7 with you if there is a major project that they are looking
8 to fund in Africa?

9 General Anderson: Historically, no, and that is why
10 we are standing up a very small unit within the
11 headquarters in order to have that point where they can
12 help facilitate these discussions, because often they did
13 not know where to have them.

14 Senator Shaheen: And is that something that Congress
15 can be helpful with in terms of trying to encourage that
16 sort of coordination?

17 General Anderson: I think there are ways that
18 encouraging that coordination would be very helpful in
19 being able to articulate this across the committees that
20 oversee these various agencies and understanding how that
21 interrelation of national power can come together, that it
22 is not always the military lever that produces a security
23 outcome, but being able to have that dialogue I think would
24 be critical.

25 The other area that I think would be very helpful also

1 is incentive structures that help energize our industrial
2 base, to help produce the equipment that our partners want.
3 They would much prefer to buy U.S. equipment, but often our
4 systems take so long and are so long to deliver, because
5 often the incentive structures are not there, that they
6 turn to China out of necessity, not because of desire.
7 They often see that as inferior equipment, and they would
8 much prefer to buy American. We need to incentivize our
9 industrial base to meet that demand.

10 Senator Shaheen: Yeah, I agree, and as you know it is
11 an issue, not just in that respect but in a whole lot of
12 other areas in terms of the challenges with the industrial
13 base.

14 Admiral Cooper, one of the things that has gotten a
15 fair amount of attention in recent weeks have been
16 President Zelensky's working with some of our allies and
17 partners in the Middle East in response to the war in Iran
18 on the expertise that the Ukrainians have developed to
19 address counter-drone responses. Can you talk a little bit
20 about what you are seeing with respect to that and whether
21 our allies and partners find that kind of support helpful
22 from the Ukrainians?

23 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I think most significantly
24 adopted a large number of tactics, techniques, and
25 procedures that Ukrainians have passed to us, that have

1 help us defend Americans, and all of our partners are
2 working with Ukraine in some way, shape, or form. I would
3 really defer to them to talk about it. But are they more
4 effective as a result? Yes.

5 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 Chairman Wicker: Senator Hirono.

7 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I
8 give my questions I want to again take a moment to
9 highlight the true cost, both for the military and everyday
10 Americans, of the President's illegal war with Iran and
11 summarize how we got here.

12 Thirteen brave U.S. soldiers have been killed, and
13 more than 400 have been wounded. The DoD is now estimating
14 that this war has cost over \$29 billion and costing more
15 every single day. The continued closure of the Strait of
16 Hormuz, which somehow caught the President by surprise, is
17 historically contributing to the growing affordability
18 crisis that Americans are facing. And negotiations are at
19 a stalemate, but it is becoming clear this President's plan
20 is to attempt to secure an agreement that looks very
21 similar to the 2015 JCPOA, which my colleague, Senator
22 King, referred to, which this President recklessly tore up
23 in 2018.

24 As you recall, the JCPOA, which was an agreement that
25 also included countries -- not just us -- it included

1 France, the U.K., Germany, China, and Russia, and the JCPOA
2 put limits on Iran's nuclear program with a rigorous
3 inspection and monetary program run by the IAEA, all of
4 which was tossed out by President Trump.

5 And while that agreement did have a sunset clause,
6 what we should have done was work diplomatically with our
7 allies to extend it. Instead, here we are, engaged in
8 another endless war in the Middle East, no end in sight,
9 that is driving up costs, undermining military readiness,
10 and alienating our allies, with neither a clear rationale
11 for starting the conflict, which the President originally
12 said, "Oh well, maybe there will be reduced regime change,"
13 and now he seems to have landed on preventing a nuclear
14 capable Iran, which is exactly what the JCPOA was intended
15 to do.

16 Admiral Cooper, did the President ever explain to you
17 why he tore up the JCPOA?

18 Admiral Cooper: Senator, that is a policy matter that
19 I would not have expected anyone to discuss with me.

20 Senator Hirono: He never explained to you why he tore
21 up the JCPOA? He either explained it to you or he said --
22 I am not asking you for the actual conversation, but did he
23 happen to explain to you why he did something which led to
24 the very nuclear crisis that we are now confronting,
25 regarding Iran and their enriched uranium?

1 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I was in a completely
2 different assignment when this occurred 8 years ago.

3 Senator Hirono: So apparently the President did not
4 have a discussion with anybody. In fact, it was a
5 unilateral decision that he made.

6 Now, you have vast experience, Admiral, in the Navy,
7 et cetera, and before we attacked Iran did it cross your
8 mind that Iran may close the Strait of Hormuz?

9 Admiral Cooper: Senator, as you know, one of my
10 responsibilities as the combatant commander is to generate
11 a wide range of options with associated risks and
12 opportunities, and present those to the Secretary and to
13 the President. I think it would be inappropriate to talk
14 about what those specifically are.

15 Senator Hirono: Well, I am just asking --

16 Admiral Cooper: Although we always make them very
17 comprehensively.

18 Senator Hirono: Excuse me. I am asking whether with
19 your experience the thought that should we attack that they
20 would close the Strait of Hormuz, did that cross your mind?

21 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I have transited through the
22 Strait about 100 times. I think of the Strait of Hormuz
23 virtually every day.

24 Senator Hirono: So is that a yes, that you are very
25 aware that the Strait of Hormuz -- the very thing that

1 happened, that that was something that you contemplated
2 happening. I hope that is the case, because with your
3 experience I have to conclude that you contemplated that
4 possibility.

5 So you did mention that our diplomats are engaged in
6 the negotiations. Who are those diplomats?

7 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I really would refer to the
8 White House with who specifically is engaged.

9 Senator Hirono: Well, apparently the diplomats are
10 Jared Kushner, who I do not think even works for our
11 country, and Mr. Steve Whitlock, who happens to be, I don't
12 know, I don't think he has a lot of experience engaging in
13 these kinds of negotiations. So here we are. The JCPOA,
14 which was a very intense, the results of very intense
15 negotiations among many countries, and for us to act as
16 though the idea of a nuclear Iran is just something that
17 occurred to President Trump and not to his predecessors is
18 pretty ridiculous. And, in fact, we had in place a regime
19 that was intended to do that very thing, which was to
20 prevent a nuclear Iran. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

21 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Hirono. Senator
22 Cotton.

23 Senator Cotton: Gentlemen, thank you for your
24 appearance and your service to our nation and many thanks
25 to all of the troops that you represent.

1 Admiral Cooper, some critics of Operation Epic Fury
2 have referred to it as another "forever war." In your
3 opening statement, in the third sentence, in fact, you say,
4 "Since 1979, the Iranian regime has terrorized the region."
5 Is it fair to say the only forever war here is the war of
6 terror that Iran has waged against the United States and
7 the civilized world for 47 years?

8 Admiral Cooper: I would agree that that was a
9 sustained effort by Iran.

10 Senator Cotton: Okay. Let's take a look in context,
11 since my Democratic friends have wanted to talk so much
12 about the JCPOA, about not just Epic Fury but about
13 Midnight Hammer, as well. So where we stand today, in mid-
14 May, versus where we were not even a year ago, 11 months
15 ago. Based on your extensive military experience, do you
16 believe that Iran posed a significant threat to the United
17 States 11 months ago, before Operation Midnight Hammer and
18 Epic Fury?

19 Admiral Cooper: Senator, they attacked U.S. forces
20 350 times in the 30 months preceding Epic Fury.

21 Senator Cotton: Do you believe that absent Midnight
22 Hammer and Epic Fury, do you believe that threat was likely
23 to continue to grow?

24 Admiral Cooper: Yes, sir, I do.

25 Senator Cotton: Is Iran now less of a threat than it

1 was 11 months ago?

2 Admiral Cooper: They are significantly less of a
3 threat.

4 Senator Cotton: Is it fair to say that the Iranian
5 regime is still a revolutionary terrorist regime, even
6 after all the deaths of their senior leaders?

7 Admiral Cooper: They are.

8 Senator Cotton: Yeah. Is it fair to say the
9 revolutionary terrorist regime no longer has nearly as much
10 military capability to act on its revolutionary terrorist
11 intentions?

12 Admiral Cooper: That is fair, and I think it is also
13 fair to say across every element of national power they
14 have been significantly degraded.

15 Senator Cotton: You state in your opening statement
16 that "CENTCOM forces systematically dismantled what Iran
17 spent four decades and tens of billions of dollars
18 building." How long do you assess that it will take them
19 to get back to where they were in terms of their military
20 and other capabilities, just 11 months ago, before CENTCOM
21 dismantled it all?

22 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I would assess that the
23 drone and missile force will take years to reconstitute.
24 The Navy likely will not get back to its previous size for
25 a full generation.

1 Senator Cotton: Is that why you say in your opening
2 statement that "CENTCOM assess Iran can no longer project
3 power across the region nor pose a persistent threat to the
4 United States or our partners than it did prior to
5 Operation Epic Fury"?

6 Admiral Cooper: They certainly cannot do it at the
7 level mass that we all saw, with hundreds of missiles and
8 drones raining across the Middle East. That does not mean
9 they do not have any capability, but that broad power
10 projection capability no longer exists.

11 Senator Cotton: And the whole world saw that just in
12 a number of days, after the beginning of your operation.
13 Correct? And I think it was a near 90 percent decline in
14 Iran's attacks on the United States and its neighbors in
15 the region.

16 Admiral Cooper: That is correct. Early on the
17 attacks were in the hundreds, and they went to the teens.

18 Senator Cotton: Okay. I know that there has been a
19 lot of questions about the Strait of Hormuz. To be clear,
20 the Strait of Hormuz was never part of our objectives, but
21 we knew, as anyone who looks at a map would know, that Iran
22 has the power to temporarily close the Strait of Hormuz.
23 Is that correct?

24 Admiral Cooper: That is accurate, Senator.

25 Senator Cotton: Is it fair to say that the United

1 States and our partners have the power to permanently open
2 the Strait?

3 Admiral Cooper: Without getting into specifics, we
4 have the military power, yes.

5 Senator Cotton: Could you talk to us a little bit
6 about what the blockade, in the meantime, has done to Iran?

7 Admiral Cooper: Yes, sir. The blockade was
8 implemented within 24 hours of presidential direction,
9 based on a plan that we had on the shelf. The blockade
10 itself is designed to prevent any commerce from leaving
11 Iranian ports, going to global distribution, and any
12 commerce from coming around the world going back into Iran.
13 There has been zero trade going into or out of Iran in the
14 last month.

15 Senator Cotton: And just finally, what is Iran's
16 current ability, since it retains its revolutionary
17 terrorist ambitions, to support its terror proxy network in
18 the region versus where it was just 11 months ago?

19 Admiral Cooper: As we sit here today, they are unable
20 to resource and supply Hezbollah, Hamas, or the Houthis.
21 Chapter to be seen of what that looks like in Iraq. The
22 new Prime Minister wants to distance himself from Iran, but
23 we will see. That is what he is committed to. We will see
24 what that looks like.

25 Senator Cotton: So they cannot support their

1 terrorist proxies. They are years and years away from
2 reconstituting, if at all, their missile and drone forces
3 and their nuclear program, and they are a generation away
4 from rebuilding their Navy. It seems to me like a little
5 bit better position than we were relative to Iran under
6 Barack Obama and Joe Biden's disastrous nuclear deal.

7 Thank you.

8 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Cotton. Senator
9 Slotkin.

10 Senator Slotkin: Thank you, gentlemen, for being
11 here, and thank you for what you are doing. I am going to
12 direct my questions to General Cooper -- I am sorry,
13 Admiral Cooper, excuse me -- and I am going to give a good
14 pass to my fellow Michigander, from Ypsi, Michigan. We are
15 happy to see you in service. Thank you for what you are
16 doing, and you are always welcome back home when you
17 retire.

18 I feel like whatever feelings I have about the
19 imminence of the threat from Iran, or not, we want our
20 military to come through this war as successfully and
21 safely as possible. I am interested in making sure we get
22 out of this quickly and safely. And I have actually no
23 doubt that with all the firepower we have used in this war
24 that we have degraded their nuclear capability, their
25 ballistic missile capability, their terrorism capability,

1 and as someone who served three tours in Iraq I saw that
2 terrorism up close and personal.

3 But it is hard to say sitting here, with the Strait of
4 Hormuz closed, and every American feeling a deep, deep
5 spike in the price of gas, and that we are only in the
6 beginning of that, that we cannot say we are overall better
7 off until that Strait is opened.

8 And while I believe we could, militarily, open the
9 Strait, it seems to me that the Iranians have strategic
10 geography. They have the ability, even though it is
11 degraded, to project power onto things like the oil
12 infrastructure in places like Saudi Arabia or Kuwait or
13 anywhere they want, further hurting the world economy, the
14 United States.

15 Is that correct that while militarily we may be able
16 to physically open the Strait, that they still retain the
17 ability to affect infrastructure in the region, and
18 therefore kind of have a veto power over the world economy
19 right now?

20 Admiral Cooper: Senator, from a military perspective
21 I would characterize Iran as having a remnant capability
22 across multiple domains. In terms of veto power I would
23 defer to policymakers for that characterization.

24 Senator Slotkin: Sorry. Can they strike oil
25 infrastructure across the Persian Gulf?

1 Admiral Cooper: They have a very moderate, if not
2 small, capability to continue strikes. And we, of course,
3 accordingly, have prepared for such a contingency.

4 Senator Slotkin: Okay. But if we have the power to
5 militarily open the Strait and their threat is, quote,
6 "moderate or small," why wouldn't we just do it?

7 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I really would defer to
8 policymakers in this particular matter. The Strait clearly
9 is in the middle of the negotiation being undertaken now.

10 Senator Slotkin: Yeah. It just seems to me that they
11 still certainly have, it may be diminished power, but if
12 the United States military is not physically opening the
13 Strait right now it is because the Iranians do have the
14 real capability to effect strikes, or drone strikes, into
15 the Gulf countries, affecting their oil infrastructure and
16 sending the price of oil worldwide even higher. So it may
17 be diminished but it is a real capability, unless I am
18 missing something.

19 You know, I am very sensitive about the way that
20 countries like Russia or China may be enabling the Iranians
21 to target and kill American forces or to provide
22 intelligence on their locations in real or near-real time.
23 Is it fair to say that the Chinese are providing
24 intelligence to the Iranians to help them target U.S.
25 forces?

1 Admiral Cooper: I think it is best to talk about
2 anything regarding intelligence in a classified manner.
3 What I can say is the Iranian military is largely made up
4 of Russian and Chinese equipment.

5 Senator Slotkin: Okay. It feels like either Chinese
6 government and/or Chinese companies are helping and aiding
7 and abetting the Iranians in providing that information. I
8 understand we do not want to go into the details, but some
9 of this is out in open press.

10 I would just say I personally feel like that crosses a
11 Rubicon. Any time we have another country providing that
12 kind of intelligence to an adversary, I think that should
13 play very heavily in our calculus, in our conversations. I
14 know the President is with the Chinese government right
15 now, but I hope that no matter what party we are from, that
16 is just a Rubicon. We all believe once you cross it we are
17 in a very different conversation. I hope that is playing
18 out in Beijing. I yield back, Chairman.

19 Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Senator Banks.

20 Senator Banks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral
21 Cooper, any update at all on activities in Afghanistan,
22 increased activity from ISIS or any other groups that
23 concern you? Anything at all that you can tell us?

24 Admiral Cooper: Senator, thank you for the question.
25 Afghanistan remains on the forefront of what we are

1 watching in terms of terrorist activity. I think best to
2 address that in a classified forum. For right now our
3 partnership in the region are suppressing that threat.

4 Senator Banks: Can you give any update at all, for
5 the record?

6 Admiral Cooper: No.

7 Senator Banks: It remains an area of concern for
8 CENTCOM? You are tracking, paying attention to it? We are
9 not completely ignoring Afghanistan.

10 Admiral Cooper: It remains an area of concern. We
11 are paying close attention to a variety of partnerships.
12 We are suppressing any threat.

13 Senator Banks: Thanks. Thank you for your
14 leadership. I mean, I think this is an incredible moment.
15 You are doing an incredible job when it comes to Iran and
16 degrading their military, their defense industrial base.
17 You cite in your testimony that the U.S. has, quote,
18 "delivered a long-term rollback of Iran's ability to
19 project power in the region and beyond," end quote,
20 damaging or destroying over 85 percent of its ballistic
21 missile, drone, and naval defense industrial base and 82
22 percent of its air defense missile systems. That is pretty
23 damn good. That is a strong statement, and I am proud of
24 your efforts.

25 The NDS talks about the concept of simultaneity, in

1 which our adversaries could undertake simultaneous
2 aggression across multiple theaters. Does Operation Epic
3 Fury's degradation of the Iranian military and defense
4 industrial base reduce the problem of simultaneity?

5 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I think it remains to be
6 seen what happens going forward with Iran, but what I think
7 we have seen is a combination of ability for the United
8 States to project power and influence and defeat an
9 adversary very quickly, 38 days. The effects on other
10 theaters, I think I would really refer to U.S. European
11 Commander and the Pacific Commander. But clearly the
12 United States is agile, and we can move from theater to
13 theater, very quickly.

14 Senator Banks: Can you unpack this concept of
15 simultaneity, explain it to us?

16 Admiral Cooper: The United States has significant
17 capacity. We have forces deployed around the world,
18 addressing a variety of issues. We are focused today
19 largely on Iran, but clearly General Anderson is actioning
20 key and critical matters in Africa. We are doing it in
21 Europe, we are doing it in Asia, and we are doing it in
22 South America, all at the same time.

23 Senator Banks: And we are able to do that at the same
24 time, effectively.

25 Admiral Cooper: That is how the United States

1 military rolls.

2 Senator Banks: You also write in your testimony that
3 Iran's ability to reconstitute its military capability
4 will, quote, "depend in large part on decisions we and our
5 partners make." What should we be doing to press our
6 advantage?

7 Admiral Cooper: I think there is a policy component
8 to this, Senator, and potentially a legislative component.
9 There are a restricted number of countries -- there is a
10 finite number of countries that historically had trade with
11 Iran. Addressing those countries and what they are
12 trading, how they are doing it and what that looks like I
13 think is something we should take a look at. Because if
14 they do not have the parts, they are not going to build the
15 weapons.

16 Senator Banks: Well put. I was very proud to see the
17 LUCAS drones deployed and used in CENTCOM. The Indiana
18 National Guard played a really important role in testing
19 the LUCAS drone at Camp Atterbury in my state. What, if
20 anything, can we extrapolate from the performance of our
21 LUCAS drones in other conflicts?

22 Admiral Cooper: Yes, Senator. The LUCAS drones were
23 the United States' first opportunity to use our own one-way
24 attack drones against an adversary. I remember well the
25 training that happened at Camp Atterbury. I was watching

1 it like a hawk. That training has produced additional
2 capability that we have now employed against an adversary,
3 very effectively.

4 Senator Banks: What else can we learn from it?

5 Admiral Cooper: Well, there is a lot more to be
6 learned from it. I would love to take it in a classified
7 setting, and particularly where we are right now, vis-à-vis
8 Iran. I think I would just like to keep that in a
9 classified setting.

10 Senator Banks: For more than a month our warfighters
11 in the Middle East were hammered by small drones. How can
12 we ensure that does not happen again if combat operations
13 resume?

14 Admiral Cooper: Yes, Senator. A little bit of a
15 mythbuster on this. Iranian drones are significantly
16 capable in the days of \$35,000 Walmart-like drones. Those
17 things are behind us. Iran has a very capable drone force.
18 We have very capably defeated it.

19 Senator Banks: Good. Well put. Thank you very much.
20 That is all I have. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

21 Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Senator Kelly, and then
22 Senator Gillibrand.

23 Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral
24 Cooper, General Anderson, thank you both for being here
25 today. Admiral Cooper, I want to start with you. I have

1 got questions for both of you, but I want to talk a little
2 bit about the civilian harm mitigation team at CENTCOM. My
3 understanding is that you have gone from ten down to one as
4 part of a Department-wide reduction in CHMR, that their
5 role is to try to minimize harm to civilians when we are
6 conducting combat operations. Is that correct, you have
7 gone from ten to one?

8 Admiral Cooper: Yes, sir. That is the billet but
9 there is a larger component to this. Over a course of
10 years, we have gone from a compliance to civilian
11 casualties in risk mitigation being just part of the
12 culture. There are dozens, if not hundreds, of people who
13 are involved in this process.

14 Senator Kelly: What did those nine individuals do who
15 were removed from their jobs?

16 Admiral Cooper: They are now integrated in other
17 capacities. They are retained in other capacities in the
18 joint, what we would call joint --

19 Senator Kelly: But what were they doing when they
20 were part of the civilian harm mitigation team?

21 Admiral Cooper: They were playing a key role in
22 helping us move from compliance to culture on CIVCAS,
23 focusing on it every day, which they continue to do.

24 Senator Kelly: So by your estimates how many
25 civilians have been killed or injured over the course of

1 this war?

2 Admiral Cooper: The investigation on the one incident
3 that we have had after more than 13,000 strikes is still
4 underway. We will certainly be transparent, and we will
5 get that when we can. This is a matter that I am
6 passionate about. I would like to use the occasion to
7 invite you, other members of the Committee and your staffs
8 to Tampa to take a look at what our targeting process looks
9 like.

10 Senator Kelly: If you were to find out that there was
11 an error in the targeting process, would you reinstate some
12 of those people that were removed from that team?

13 Admiral Cooper: Sir, that is a hypothetical. I am
14 always looking to organize to purpose, and we will just see
15 what the investigations show.

16 Senator Kelly: Are you taking any additional steps
17 now because of the civilian casualties to date?

18 Admiral Cooper: We have taken additional steps. Our
19 additional steps have been very proactive throughout Epic
20 Fury. Our staff specifically warned the Iranian people
21 more than 100 times about the threat of them being used as
22 human shields. I personally warned the Iranian people on
23 March 8th, 11th, and the 23rd that they had the potential
24 to be human shields, and that communication was very
25 effective. So again, we are moving not just targeting, but

1 a proactive measures to minimize.

2 Senator Kelly: All right. Thank you for doing that.
3 General Anderson, so China and Russia continue to expand
4 their influence across Africa, we discussed this, with
5 misinformation, disinformation, across many African
6 countries. You requested \$94 million for information
7 operation activities. You were promised -- and this is in
8 fiscal year 2026 -- you were promised \$25 million from the
9 Department. You ultimately received only \$19 million.

10 Can you talk about the difference between having \$19
11 million to do that job and \$94 million, like, what are you
12 able to do if you were fully funded? General Anderson, I
13 get it. I mean, we see this stuff all the time. The
14 amount of misinformation that comes from the Chinese and
15 the Russians, it is a huge problem. But if you could just
16 explain to us a little bit about what you could do if you
17 had the full request.

18 General Anderson: Senator, I think the key point
19 there is right now we are in a reactionary mode to
20 propaganda and to other information operations, to what we
21 can do at the moment. What the fuller funding would do,
22 especially if it is consistent over time, would allow us to
23 build an information campaign and address these issues
24 across the continent. We are one of the few organizations
25 that looks across the entirety of the continent, and can

1 understand how these propaganda and misinformation play
2 across borders.

3 We work very closely with the State Department, U.S.
4 embassies on this to make sure our messaging is key, but
5 what this would allow us to do is help coordinate that
6 messaging across regions and across the continent to
7 highlight the issues that come with this misinformation,
8 especially as much of it is destabilizing the democracies
9 across the region.

10 Senator Kelly: Do you ever feel like we should be
11 countering some of their disinformation with disinformation
12 of our own?

13 General Anderson: Sir, I think the most powerful tool
14 we have is the truth. What America brings is very unique.
15 We are still a beacon of hope and light in the world, and I
16 think we should be willing to talk about who we are. This
17 is America's 250th anniversary. There is a long history on
18 the continent that is, I mean, it is good and bad, but
19 there is a lot of good that we can talk about, of what
20 America brings.

21 The fact that John C. Robinson founded the Tuskegee
22 Airmen, 2 years later founded the Ethiopian Air Force, and
23 then went on to found Ethiopian Airlines, which is now the
24 pride not only of Ethiopia, but Africa, it is not a story
25 that is well known, but that is a tie that we have had

1 between the aviation communities for years. There are
2 multiple stories like that across the continent that we
3 need to propagate and talk about.

4 So I would say we should focus on the goodness and the
5 positivity of engaging with America and worry less about
6 the disinformation that our partners put out. But we have
7 to engage in this environment. We have to be active in the
8 information space.

9 Senator Kelly: So you got about 25 percent of the
10 requests. So if you got the full amount you could put more
11 out there, positive stuff that the United States is doing.
12 And I know these are challenging times with resources even
13 beyond what DoD has, USAID, and others. But do you think
14 that that would be sufficient to counter Chinese and
15 Russian misinformation?

16 General Anderson: Senator, I think information
17 operations is one of the lower cost investments that we can
18 make that have outsized return and help amplify the limited
19 resources we have in the military side and highlight the
20 benefits that those provide, and being able to talk about
21 that broadly, I do think has outside proportion. So, small
22 investments can have large impact. And this is an area of
23 information where I think we can make a lot of gains, even
24 despite our smaller physical presence, that can highlight
25 the totality of what the United States brings.

1 Senator Kelly: I 100 percent agree with you, General,
2 and we should really look into get you the resources you
3 need to do this job. Thank you.

4 Chairman Wicker: General Anderson, I 100 percent
5 agree with you. Senator Gillibrand.

6 Senator Gillibrand: Admiral Cooper, we had Secretary
7 Hegseth here a week or so ago, and we did not get
8 satisfactory answers about Iran. So what is your mission
9 in Iran right now?

10 Admiral Cooper: Senator, with Epic Fury now formally
11 ended per the President's notification, we shifted our
12 mission to a blockade mission the following day, and we are
13 implementing that mission in accordance with international
14 armed conflict. That is our main mission today, as well as
15 to be ready for a broad range of contingencies.

16 Senator Gillibrand: And do you feel that President
17 Trump's declaration that we have obliterated all of Iran's
18 capabilities and their nuclear program, is that accurate?

19 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I speak from a military
20 perspective. We have significantly degraded their drone,
21 missile, and naval capabilities. We have fractured their
22 command and control. We have eliminated the large
23 preponderance of their space program. They, by every
24 measure, are degraded significantly across all measures of
25 national power.

1 Senator Gillibrand: So what is your exit strategy to
2 end the conflict with Iran?

3 Admiral Cooper: Senator, that is a policy decision.

4 Senator Gillibrand: And don't you have to offer the
5 President various exit strategies so he knows how to get
6 from A to B?

7 Admiral Cooper: Senator, consistent with my statutory
8 obligations I have provided a broad range of options, along
9 with risks and mitigations to the Secretary and the
10 President.

11 Senator Gillibrand: So given your current mission,
12 how many more days, weeks, months, years are we going to be
13 at war with Iran?

14 Admiral Cooper: As we sit here today we are in a
15 ceasefire, and the way ahead will be determined by our
16 policymakers.

17 Senator Gillibrand: Well, currently we are still
18 spending a billion dollars a day on this war with Iran, and
19 I can tell you, from my New York constituents, they are
20 furious about it, because a billion dollars a day could be
21 lowering their housing costs, lowering their food costs,
22 lowering their health care costs, lowering the cost of
23 everyday expenses that continue to go up because of the war
24 in Iran. With the price of gas as high as it is, the price
25 of diesel as high as it is, it means everything that they

1 have to buy for their families is more expensive.

2 So we expect from our military leaders a plan about
3 why and how long we are going to be spending a billion
4 dollars a day, and I have not seen that plan or the why
5 from President Trump or Secretary Hegseth. So I am hoping,
6 as the military person in charge of operations, that you
7 have a plan to end this war and to stop spending a billion
8 a day.

9 Admiral Cooper: Senator, we have a broad range of
10 plans and contingencies, consistent with my obligation to
11 provide that advice, both to the Secretary and the
12 President. We have done so. Decisions will need to be
13 made by our civilian leadership, and my job will be to
14 execute them.

15 Senator Gillibrand: The second concern I have,
16 Admiral Cooper, is how we have prosecuted this war to date.
17 We have data and information publicly available in
18 publications like The New York Times that 22 schools have
19 been hit, hospitals, dozens of hospitals have been hit. We
20 have regulations, we have the law of war, we have human
21 rights obligations, we have our own targeting requirements
22 to avoid civilian harm and death. Have you been
23 implementing all the laws that are required under current
24 law to minimize civilian death?

25 Admiral Cooper: Senator, we have executed every

1 operation consistent with the law of armed conflict. The
2 subject of civilian casualties is a particular passion of
3 mine. We pay attention to it. We follow all the
4 procedures and have gone above and beyond to, in my case,
5 personally warn the Iranian people of several instances
6 during conflict where they were being potentially used as
7 human targets.

8 Senator Gillibrand: If they have been warned, how did
9 we then bomb 22 schools?

10 Admiral Cooper: There is no indication that we have
11 that that has been corroborated. Zero.

12 Senator Gillibrand: How many schools have we bombed?

13 Admiral Cooper: There is one active civilian casualty
14 investigation from the 13,629 munitions.

15 Senator Gillibrand: So how do you explain the
16 publicly available information that 22 schools have been
17 hit and multiple hospitals?

18 Admiral Cooper: There is no way that we can
19 corroborate that, no indication of that whatsoever,
20 Senator.

21 Senator Gillibrand: There is no way you can
22 corroborate or no indication of it? Which one?

23 Admiral Cooper: No indication.

24 Senator Gillibrand: Well, the indication is what is
25 publicly available. There is an indication. Have you

1 investigated those claims?

2 Admiral Cooper: We have not.

3 Senator Gillibrand: Why have you not? If this is a
4 passion of yours, if you believe that civilian casualties
5 are not consistent with the law of war and not consistent
6 with human rights obligations that our military regularly
7 follows with great pride and great diligence, why have you
8 not investigated those allegations when they publicly being
9 made on the cover of The New York Times?

10 Admiral Cooper: I will be happy to take a look at
11 each instance. Our team will be able to do that.

12 Senator Gillibrand: I would like a report from you,
13 from your team, about whether there have been attacks that
14 have resulted in the destruction of schools and hospitals,
15 and if so, why? And how then, last, have you managed the
16 90 percent cut to the personnel who are supposed to avoid
17 civilian targets?

18 Admiral Cooper: I am happy to provide any report, and
19 I would invite you and every staff member here to come to
20 Tampa to look at the process to see exactly how it works.

21 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you. Thank you, Admiral.

22 Chairman Wicker: Senator Duckworth.

23 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank
24 you, gentlemen, for being here. Admiral Cooper, the Senate
25 received a letter from President Trump on Friday, May 1st,

1 stating that hostilities with Iran have ended, and you just
2 stated here that we are no longer operating under Operation
3 Urgent [sic] Fury. Would you say that we are still engaged
4 in hostilities with Iran, or have they ended?

5 Admiral Cooper: Consistent with the President's
6 letter, Epic Fury is complete. We are operating under
7 international armed conflict rules in the implementation of
8 the blockade.

9 Senator Duckworth: So are we engaged in hostilities
10 with Iran? Yes or no.

11 Admiral Cooper: We are not. We are in a ceasefire.

12 Senator Duckworth: The Strait of Hormuz remains
13 blocked, right? You are engaged in a blockade, are you
14 not?

15 Admiral Cooper: The blockade is against Iranian
16 ports, commerce going in and coming out. The last thing we
17 would want to do is blockade the Strait of Hormuz, and as
18 we have seen in the last week, there have been instances of
19 ships coming in and out, including our own.

20 Senator Duckworth: But under international law, a
21 blockade is an act of war. So if you are blockading,
22 actively blockading Iran, then we are currently in an act
23 of war with Iran, under international law. A blockade is
24 one of the definitions of an act of war, under
25 international law.

1 Admiral Cooper: Consistent with the direction we have
2 been given, those characterizations are best done through
3 the Department's legal counsel or the White House.

4 Senator Duckworth: it is not characterization. It is
5 international law. It is listed. A blockade is an act of
6 war.

7 We have now engaged -- the United States and Iranian
8 forces are trading fire as they continue to launch
9 missiles, drones, small boat attacks. President Trump says
10 the ceasefire is on life support, and he repeatedly
11 threatens to renew U.S. military strikes, and to be clear,
12 no one is disputing the valor and professionalism of our
13 military. But the civilian leaders are abdicating their
14 responsibility to craft a clear strategy, and
15 servicemembers and the American people are the ones who
16 will suffer under this leadership vacuum.

17 Admiral Cooper, before operation Epic Fury began, what
18 desired end state for the operation were you given by your
19 civilian leadership?

20 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I was given crystal-clear
21 guidance. Our military mission was to degrade Iran's
22 ability to project power on its neighbors and U.S.
23 interests. It included three specific objectives: degrade
24 Iranian ballistic missiles and their defense industrial
25 base, degrade their drones and the defense industrial base,

1 degrade their navy and the defense industrial base. All of
2 those were achieved, as I have discussed.

3 Senator Duckworth: And because they were achieved,
4 that is why the operation ended, or did the operation end
5 because the President said "let's end the operation"?

6 Admiral Cooper: Operations commencing and ending are
7 made by civilian leadership and not a military decision.

8 Senator Duckworth: Okay. Well, that civilian
9 leadership, President Trump, has provided many possible end
10 states in only 2 months, including, in just 2 months, he
11 said unconditional surrender and regime change in Iran,
12 which have not happened. He has talked about, okay,
13 operations will end when there is destruction of Iranian
14 nuclear sites, allegedly already accomplished last summer
15 under Operation Midnight Hammer. He has also said that
16 Iran will never have nuclear weapons, which cannot be
17 accomplished with only a bombing campaign. He said that
18 his goal was to destroy the Iranian military forces and
19 infrastructure completely, which the intelligence community
20 assesses has not happened. And now he said that it is the
21 reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, which, as a reminder,
22 was open before the war began. So if we do not know what
23 we are fighting for we certainly do not know how long we
24 will be fighting.

25 Admiral Cooper, have you been given any timeline for

1 how long our forces will be in the Strait of Hormuz or near
2 Iran or blockading Iran, whether by a timeline or a
3 condition at end state, for how long you will be blockading
4 Iran?

5 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I think it is important,
6 from the military perspective, that my advice related to
7 options be provided to both the Secretary and the
8 President. We have done that. The decisions on timeline
9 and execution are up to our civilian leadership.

10 Senator Duckworth: Okay. So you mentioned the
11 Secretary of Defense, who only talks tactics, and a
12 President who changes his strategy on social media multiple
13 times a day. This is who is giving you the orders.
14 Secretary Hegseth has touted the destruction of tens of
15 thousands of targets across Iran. He said that Iran's air
16 defenses are "flattened," his word, and its industrial base
17 overwhelmingly destroyed, and claims that Iran's Navy is at
18 the bottom of the sea. Every metric that the Secretary
19 offers is one of destruction, and destruction alone is not
20 an end state, especially not with new public reporting that
21 U.S. intelligence officials believe Iran has operational
22 access to most of its missile capacity and that Iran is
23 clearly still capable of controlling the Strait of Hormuz.
24 Americans are not safer, our servicemembers are at
25 risk, prices at home are higher, and Iran has more control

1 over the Strait of global economy than it did before this
2 whole thing started. The American people and our
3 servicemembers deserve clear answers, what does "done with
4 the war" look like and how do we get there. We have no
5 strategy. As we saw in Afghanistan, if you do not have a
6 sound strategy you keep doing tactics forever. This is not
7 your fault, but this is where we are.

8 Admiral Cooper, have you been asked for your advice,
9 and under what conditions would you advise deploying ground
10 troops for any purpose in Iran?

11 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I think it would be
12 inappropriate to talk about any contingency planning in
13 this particular forum. It is my obligations as the
14 combatant commander to provide a broad range of options to
15 the Secretary and to the President.

16 Senator Duckworth: Can you answer that question for
17 me in the SCIF at a later time?

18 Admiral Cooper: I would be more than happy to talk
19 about anything classified.

20 Senator Duckworth: Okay, thank you. Thank you, Mr.
21 Chairman.

22 Chairman Wicker: Senator Kelly.

23 Senator Kelly: No further questions, Mr. Chairman.

24 Chairman Wicker: Sorry. I didn't mark off Senator
25 Kelly. Senator Peters.

1 Senator Peters: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
2 Gentlemen, thank you both for being here. I speak for
3 myself and I think everybody on this panel. We appreciate
4 the incredible professionalism of the men and women in
5 uniform and the job that they do every day, with
6 professionalism and heroism, and thank you for doing that.

7 But we do have a number of questions about how we win
8 this war and end it going forward, and those are usually
9 political questions related to political leadership. The
10 men and women in uniform execute those orders, and they
11 have demonstrated that they are certainly the best in the
12 world.

13 But Admiral Cooper, you mentioned that the current
14 mission right now is basically the U.S. blockade of Iranian
15 ships or ships that are transiting the Strait of Hormuz to
16 Iranian ports. That is in response to Iran basically
17 effectively shutting down the Strait of Hormuz before that.

18 As you know, experts across the political spectrum and
19 multiple administrations, political administrations, have
20 all agreed that a war against Iran, Iran's first moves
21 would be to mind the Strait of Hormuz, to prevent tanker
22 traffic. But despite these known risks and repeated claims
23 that the DoD has planned -- and I am sure you have plans.
24 I have been to the War College. I served in the Navy.
25 There is no shortage of plans that we have -- that you have

1 plans to deal with the closing of the Strait. We had four
2 minesweepers that were stationed in the Middle East that
3 were just retired last year, and our remaining minesweepers
4 were either stationed in Japan or not prepositioned in the
5 region.

6 This is despite public reporting that we currently
7 already have limited unmanned mine clearance capacity. And
8 reports from The New York Times and Reuters has also
9 indicated that Iran still has hundreds, if not thousands,
10 of small boats that can lay mines or perform hit-and-run
11 attacks on top of their existing land missiles and drones,
12 which I am sure they are building at a furious pace right
13 now to restock what they have. And this is on top of
14 existing land missiles and drones.

15 The American people, as we all know, are already
16 paying higher prices in the United States. Inflation is up
17 as a result of chaotic tariffs that President Trump has put
18 into place. And now, thanks to this war and the Strait's
19 closure they are paying high gas prices that continue to
20 rise, as well, putting a strain on family budgets.

21 So my question for you is, if there was advanced
22 planning, and I am sure there was advanced planning, about
23 the Strait's closure, why were the minesweepers not
24 prepositioned in the region when it had been publicly
25 reported that already have limited unmanned mine clearance

1 capacities? When you have a plan, usually before you
2 execute the plan you make sure that all your assets are in
3 place to actually execute that plan. So it is curious that
4 those assets were not there. Why?

5 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I think it is best to talk
6 specific tactics and operations in a classified
7 environment. What I can say here is we did have
8 sufficient, and continue to have sufficient, mine clearance
9 capability in the theater. Because it happened to not be
10 in those four vessels that were decommissioned after
11 decades of service is an interesting point. The support
12 and the ability to conduct countermining comes in a lot of
13 different flavors, best to discuss in a classified
14 environment.

15 Senator Peters: And I do not mean to get into that.
16 I understand that totally you do not want to do it. But it
17 is clear that there is a concern about mines. We are not
18 seeing ships go through there. Commercial companies do not
19 want to go through the Strait so they are not going to put
20 their ships at risk, so they do not feel safe. To me that
21 speaks volumes as to whether or not it is safe, that there
22 is a real concern there. And we know that the Iranians
23 have significant capabilities to deal with that.

24 You know, I asked a previous question related to
25 strategy and really talked about von Clausewitz's On War,

1 which is, as you know, the seminal text on strategy, that
2 is taught in all the war colleges. And you know it better
3 than I will ever know it. The concept of that is that in
4 order to win a war you have got to know the center of
5 gravity of your enemy, and you have to be focused on being
6 able to neutralize that. What is the center of gravity in
7 Iran? How are you planning? And that is a military
8 decisions as to what is the center of gravity. That is the
9 kind of advice you would give a President. What is the
10 center of gravity?

11 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I really would defer to our
12 policymakers to determine what they view from a policy
13 perspective is the center of gravity. From a military
14 perspective, we are focused on achieving military
15 objectives, which is exactly what our men and women have
16 done, and they have done it extremely well.

17 Senator Peters: Well, as you know, every war plan has
18 a center of gravity that you identify, and then you work
19 around that. So the war plan that we have for Iran would
20 have the center of gravity. Why can't you share what that
21 is? In the past it has been, before we knew the center of
22 gravity, the Persian Gulf War, for Iraq, Colin Powell said
23 it was the Republic and Guard troops, Iraq's lead unit
24 there. The Obama administration, in Afghanistan, Admiral
25 Mike Mullen defined the center of gravity as building

1 Afghan government support. They made this public. They
2 were not hiding the center of gravity. Our enemy knows
3 what our center of gravity is, and we know what theirs is.
4 There is no reason to keep that secret because the American
5 people have a right to know, what is it that we are trying
6 to accomplish. And that is outlined very clearly in that
7 term, a part of every military plan that is put forward.

8 Admiral Cooper: Yes, sir. I agree every war plan has
9 a center of gravity, and those war plans are classified. I
10 would be more than happy to talk about it in a classified
11 environment.

12 Chairman Wicker: Fair enough. Senator Rosen.

13 Senator Rosen: Thank you, Chairman Wicker, and thank
14 you Admiral Cooper, General Anderson, for your service and
15 your willingness to continue to serve our nation.

16 Admiral Cooper, I want to talk about the International
17 Stabilization Force. It has been publicly reported that
18 CENTCOM is going to play a role in the proposed
19 International Stabilization Force in Gaza. -- we will just
20 call it ISF, going forward -- though many questions remain
21 on what the ISF is, when it will be deployed, and how it
22 will operate. So can you clarify the roles of the U.S. and
23 CENTCOM in the ISF, specifically is the vision for CENTCOM
24 to retain command and control, or is there a timeline and
25 mechanism for transitioning oversight to a multinational or

1 civilian-led structure?

2 Admiral Cooper: Senator, first, great to see you
3 again, and thank you for the question. Our role can be
4 simply defined as one of support right now. The
5 International Stabilization Force commander, who has been
6 designated, is also dual-hatted as the Commander of Special
7 Operations Command Central. He has about 45 members of the
8 Joint Force presently working for him.

9 We are really at the infancy of forming that
10 International Stabilization Force. Thus far there have
11 been four countries who have committed to provide forces.
12 So I think as we look to the future I would be happy come
13 back and talk on what that looks like later on.

14 Senator Rosen: Come back and talk to us.

15 Admiral Cooper: We are heading in the right
16 direction, but we are just at the infancy of the process.

17 Senator Rosen: Thank you. And speaking of hitting in
18 a direction, we need to talk about munitions sustainment,
19 because, Admiral Cooper, according to publicly available
20 resources the U.S. has fired at least 45 percent of its
21 Patriot missile interceptors and more than half of its
22 THAAD interceptors so far in Operation Epic Fury, and has
23 had to move air defense from other theaters.

24 So can you talk to me about how this constrains our
25 air and missile defense and those of our regional partners

1 and allies, like the Israel, UAE, and others, who are also
2 under attack?

3 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I have all the munitions
4 necessary to both defend our forces as well as conduct a
5 broad range of contingencies. Our partners also have the
6 sufficient munitions necessary for defensive operations.

7 Senator Rosen: Do you have estimates about how long
8 it would take us to replenish or rebuild our stockpile?

9 Admiral Cooper: I would really defer to the folks who
10 do this on an everyday basis, both in the Department and
11 the services.

12 Senator Rosen: Thank you. I am going to continue on
13 you and then we will move over to General Anderson in a
14 minute, because I want to just take a moment to talk about
15 Lebanon. Because I do appreciate that you have applauded
16 the Lebanese Armed Forces for their efforts to disarm
17 Hezbollah. While the current effort in conflict has
18 demonstrated the extent to which Hezbollah has rearmed, a
19 strong Lebanese Armed Forces remains the best pathway for
20 Lebanon through which Hezbollah can be disarmed once and
21 for all, and we know that needs to happen.

22 So what can the U.S. do to support the Lebanese Armed
23 Forces to ensure that they have the necessary capacity to
24 disarm Hezbollah while also holding them accountable?

25 Admiral Cooper: Senator, taking on the disarming of

1 Hezbollah is a tall order. They have been funded by Iran
2 for decades, with billions of dollars, and Hezbollah is
3 inculcated into every fabric of the Lebanese society. I
4 think right now our continued commitment with modest
5 dollars to the Lebanese Armed Forces is helpful. They
6 have, in particular, several units who can do more. I
7 believe our commitment could be to provide the funding
8 necessary so that they can do more.

9 Senator Rosen: Thank you. I am going to move over to
10 AFRICOM now, General Anderson, because ISIS and Al Qaeda
11 affiliates, well, we know they span the African continent.
12 And so understanding, of course, this is an open setting,
13 can you talk about the extent to which these franchises,
14 that they work cross-borders, within local settings to
15 coordinate with one another, and the threat that this poses
16 to our priorities in the region. And do you think there is
17 a need for a comprehensive CT strategy on the continent,
18 and if so, could you outline again, considering it is an
19 open setting, broadly what that strategy might include,
20 please.

21 General Anderson: Yes, Senator, I appreciate the
22 highlighting of the transnational threat that both Al Qaeda
23 and ISIS pose. I can say in this setting that ISIS has
24 several affiliates across the continent that are
25 coordinating more and more, whether that is in the Golis

1 Mountains of Somalia or the Lake Chad basin in Nigeria, or
2 in the Sahel, as well as Mozambique and others. So this
3 terrorist network has to be addressed holistically. We
4 have to look at the entirety of the network. It is not any
5 single node anymore.

6 So as we look at this I coordinate very closely with
7 Admiral Cooper, because ISIS still has a strong presence in
8 CENTCOM's AOR, as well as Al Qaeda. As we look at this,
9 the strategy to go after this is to work with our partners,
10 whose willing and capable partners, enable them, first and
11 foremost, to take on this threat. When they are unable to
12 do that then bringing in only the unique capabilities that
13 the U.S. can bring in order to address those threats. We
14 have seen that in the Golis Mountains where we have been
15 able to bring intelligence, limited ISR, some limited
16 strike capabilities, as they have been able to disrupt
17 their leadership network.

18 This need to be applied across all of these areas, so
19 investments in additional ISR, investments in expeditionary
20 capabilities such as a forward staging base like the
21 Hershel Woody Williams, that allow us to move to the point
22 of need, at the time of need. And then the force
23 protection requirements that are necessary to protect that
24 force in the expeditionary area.

25 And I would add not just the force protection as a

1 counter-UAS and the integrated air missile defense, which
2 are critical, but also investments in emerging technologies
3 that allow austere medicine, forward medicine, remote
4 medicine, automated CASEVAC. These types of things allow
5 us to become more expeditionary in order to get after these
6 critical threats. And only the critical threats that pose
7 a threat to the U.S., and then enable partners as able to
8 address these common threats.

9 So it is a multifaceted strategy. I could even go
10 into more, and I won't in this detail, but really
11 maintaining the relationships and the engagements are
12 equally important, and having that pragmatic approach,
13 opening dialogue with the AES states and the Sahel again,
14 addressing this with places like Algeria and Morocco and
15 Libya, even, who share these concerns, building those
16 relationships are absolutely vital because you cannot surge
17 trust.

18 Senator Rosen: If the Chairman would indulge me can I
19 have a follow-up question on the Sahel, since you brought
20 it up?

21 Chairman Wicker: Yes. Why don't you do that.

22 Senator Rosen: Thank you. You brought up the Sahel,
23 but last month the JNIM and local militias in Mali executed
24 coordinated, nationwide offensive attacks, attacking Mali's
25 capital, seizing key towns, killing the Malian defense

1 minister. Those these attacks were greater in scale and
2 intensity than any other since 2012, they clearly
3 demonstrate the attackers' ability to strike against an
4 expansive geographical area.

5 So you are talking a little bit about the Sahel, but
6 the permissive environment in the Sahel that is making
7 these attacks possible, what more would you like to add, if
8 you want to speak a little bit more about the stability
9 there.

10 General Anderson: Senator, there are a few things I
11 would like to add in this setting, and I can talk to you
12 more in a classified setting, that would be highly
13 appropriate to this.

14 But to your point there is no effective external
15 counterterrorism effort in the Sahel right now. The
16 Russians have claimed to do that, but we saw that they had
17 to withdraw from Kidal. We are unable to defend against
18 that threat there. They are providing some limited
19 support, but we do not see the same Western presence.
20 Because of that, then how do we enable the partners, the
21 other nations that are there, how do we look at
22 expeditionary capabilities again that we can result in
23 this?

24 One of the key areas that we would need some
25 assistance with is the authorities and ability to bring in

1 and experiment with emerging technologies, whether that is
2 in the surveillance and ISR type of technologies or in
3 other over-the-horizon type capabilities, like I mentioned
4 with the medicine and others, in order to reach, when there
5 is a threat that threatens the homeland, to be able to
6 reach it and take care of it. But more importantly,
7 continue to enable the partners to address the threats in
8 their local areas, and a lot of that is through
9 intelligence sharing.

10 I would be happy in a classified environment to talk
11 more in depth.

12 Senator Rosen: Thank you. I appreciate that. Thank
13 you, Admiral, General. Thank you, Chairman Wicker.

14 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Senator Rosen,
15 and I am glad you brought up Lebanon and Hezbollah. So I
16 am going to take another round, Admiral Cooper, and stop me
17 when I am wrong. On March 2nd of this year, Hezbollah
18 attacked Israel in response to Operation Epic Fury. Is
19 that correct?

20 Admiral Cooper: That is correct, sir.

21 Chairman Wicker: According to Israel's Foreign
22 Minister, Hezbollah has fired 10,000 missiles, rockets, and
23 drones at Israel during the past 2 months. Is that
24 correct?

25 Admiral Cooper: I believe that is correct, sir.

1 Chairman Wicker: And in response to these attacks,
2 Israel initiated a ground offensive in southern Lebanon,
3 aiming to create an uninhabited buffer zone along its
4 northern border and to push Hezbollah north to the Litani
5 River. Is that correct?

6 Admiral Cooper: That is correct, Senator.

7 Chairman Wicker: To enable this operation, the
8 Israeli military ordered the evacuation of southern
9 Lebanon, displacing over 1 million people and nearly 20
10 percent of Lebanon's population. This is also correct.

11 Admiral Cooper: I do not know that that number
12 specifically is correct, but the concept of the evacuation
13 is correct.

14 Chairman Wicker: While governments of Israel and
15 Lebanon declared a ceasefire in April of this year,
16 Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem announced that his
17 organization would not recognize the ceasefire and would
18 never agree to disarm. Is that correct?

19 Admiral Cooper: His statement, that statement is
20 correct.

21 Chairman Wicker: Yeah, he made that statement.
22 Hezbollah then continued to fire projectiles into Israel,
23 and Israel has continued to strike Hezbollah positions in
24 southern Lebanon. That is also correct, is it not?

25 Admiral Cooper: That is correct, sir.

1 Chairman Wicker: And I think Senator Rosen would
2 wholeheartedly agree with me that peace between Israel --
3 and I cannot ask questions to my friend and colleague, but
4 I think we would both agree that peace between Israel and
5 Lebanon would be a wonderful development, and a wonderful
6 development for America and for Israel. But peace between
7 Israel and Lebanon depends on the Lebanese government
8 having both the capability and the will to disarm
9 Hezbollah.

10 Has the United States provided the Lebanese Armed
11 Forces with approximately \$3 billion since 2006?

12 Admiral Cooper: Sir, I would have to take that
13 specific number --

14 Chairman Wicker: It is a lot of money.

15 Admiral Cooper: -- for the record and follow up. But
16 we have been providing aid for two decades.

17 Chairman Wicker: Is it fair to say that the primary
18 goal of U.S. support for the LAF, the Lebanese Armed
19 Forces, was to counter Hezbollah?

20 Admiral Cooper: Yes, sir.

21 Chairman Wicker: And from 2006 until 2023, is it
22 accurate to say that Hezbollah's rocket and missile arsenal
23 grew from 2006 to 2023, from approximately 9,000 rockets
24 and missiles to 150,000?

25 Admiral Cooper: As a result of decades and billions

1 of dollars of Iranian support, that is correct.

2 Chairman Wicker: Israel's Foreign Minister alleges
3 that Hezbollah fired more than 10,000 projectiles at Israel
4 since the beginning of March of this year. In light of the
5 Lebanese Armed Forces' inaction, was Israel's offensive
6 into southern Lebanon militarily necessary if Hezbollah's
7 attacks were going to be countered? Was there another way
8 to do that?

9 Admiral Cooper: Senator, I would really defer to
10 Israel on intent and effectiveness, but just as a general
11 statement --

12 Chairman Wicker: Militarily necessary, though.

13 Admiral Cooper: It is an option among options, of
14 which there are a few, to deal with the Hezbollah problem.

15 Chairman Wicker: Yeah. I appreciate Senator Rosen
16 bringing this up, and just would go back to the central
17 point. It would be a tremendous achievement for Israel,
18 Lebanon, the United States, and the Middle East if
19 Hezbollah could be eliminated, and allow the Lebanese
20 people and the Lebanese government to resume the happy
21 relations that we once had and strive for between the
22 United States and Lebanon.

23 Would Senator Rosen have any further questions?

24 [No response.]

25 Chairman Wicker: Then this concludes today's hearing.

1 I want to thank our witnesses for their testimony, and I
2 would acknowledge that many of the arrows aimed at these
3 two witnesses were better aimed at people in the civilian
4 leadership who, according to our great Constitution and our
5 principles dating back to George Washington, are in control
6 of policy. And I would commend these two military veterans
7 for adhering to that constitutional principle.

8 And I would inform members that questions for the
9 record will be due to the Committee within 2 business days,
10 and we are adjourned.

11 [Whereupon, at 12:08 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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