HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON

UNITED STATES MILITARY STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Tuesday, October 27, 2015

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:02 a.m. in Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. John McCain, chairman of the committee, presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN MCCAIN, U.S. SENATOR FROM ARIZONA

Chairman McCain: Good morning. The committee meets today to receive testimony on U.S. Strategy in the Middle East.

And I want to thank our distinguished witnesses for appearing this morning and for their service to our Nation.

Before I proceed, I'd like to remind our witnesses, this committee's rules require written testimony to be submitted 24 hours in advance of a hearing, and I'd like, from now on, to try -- for our witness to try to adhere to that.

The tragic loss last week of Master Sergeant Joshua Walker, a veteran of 14 combat deployments, reminds us of the high stakes of our mission in the Middle East and how grateful we are to those Americans serving there. We need a strategy worthy of those who carry it out. And, unfortunately, we don't have that.

What's worse, it appears the administration has not even defined the problem correctly. A policy of "ISIL first" fails to understand that ISIL, for all of the threat it poses, is actually just a symptom of a deeper problem, the struggle for power and sectarian identity now raging across the Middle East, the epicenter of which is Iraq and Syria. That is why ISIL exists today with the strength that
it does. And this problem will only get worse the longer this conflict rages on.

We hear it said all the time, quote, "There is no military solution to this problem," which is a truism. But, that, too, is misleading. The real problem is that there can be no diplomatic solution without leverage, and there is a clear military dimension to this problem. Secretary Kerry can take all the trips he wants to Geneva, but, unless the military balance of power changes on the ground, diplomacy, as has been amply proven, will achieve nothing. Changing those conditions is what the administration has consistently failed to do. Instead, it is assumed our Nation could withdraw from the Middle East and avoid the conflict at its heart. Moreover, on those occasions when the administration has felt compelled to respond, after the use of chemical weapons, for example, or with the rise of ISIL, and now amid the worst refugee crisis in Europe since World War II, the administration has merely addressed the symptoms of the underlying problem rather than the problem itself, and, all too often, made that problem worse.

There is no clearer example of this than the Syrian train-and-equip program. From the start, the administration said the fighters in this program could only fight ISIL, not Assad's forces, which have slaughtered and displaced exponentially more Syrians than ISIL has. In addition, the
administration made no commitment, until only recently, to
provide these forces with any meaningful military support
once they returned to Syria. After millions of dollars and
months of effort, the program failed to come anywhere close
to the Department's original expectations.

The President has expressed surprise about this
failure. It was not a surprise. It was completely
predictable, and many of us here did predict it. Only
someone who does not understand the real problem, which is
the underlying conflict in Syria and Iraq, or does not care
to, could think that we could effectively recruit and train
large numbers of Sunni Syrians to fight only against ISIL,
with no promise of coalition assistance if they came under
fire from Assad's forces. Rather than fixing the problem,
the President suspended it. But, this is tantamount to
killing the program, because it's destroying what little
trust our Syrian partners have left in us, to say nothing of
allies like Turkey and Jordan, which invested their own
money and prestige in this program.

The President now says, incredibly, the failure of this
program -- his program -- the President's program -- proves
he was right for not wanting to do it in the first place.
Harry Truman must be spinning in his grave. If there is an
opposite for Commander in Chief, this is it.

The training and effort in -- the training effort in
Iraq has its own challenges. Indeed, it is déjà vu all over again. We don't have enough U.S. forces to train and advise Iraqi units at the right levels. We're still not providing sufficient support to Sunni tribes, which are the center of gravity in this fight against ISIL. We're looking the other way as Shi'a militias go on the offensive in the Sunni heartland. We hear complaints that Iraqis have no will to fight. But, we're prohibiting U.S. forces from bolstering their will to fight by advising them in combat or calling in airstrikes. We learned all of these lessons in Iraq just a few years ago, and apparently we have to relive these failures now.

For nearly 7 years, the administration has tried to extract America from the Middle East. Instead, we have created a massive power vacuum that has been filled by ISIL, al-Qaeda and its affiliates, on the one hand, and Iran and its proxies, on the other. Now into this vacuum has stepped Vladimir Putin. Putin's intervention in Syria really began in Ukraine. The administration's failure to impose greater costs on Russia, particularly by providing defensive arms to Ukrainian forces, allowed Putin to annex Crimea, dictate the terms of a frozen conflict in eastern Ukraine, and then pivot to Syria. It's also confirmed Putin's belief that the administration is weak. And, to Putin, weakness is provocative.
The administration's response, thus far, to Russia's intervention in Syria has only made this problem worse.

First, it urged Russia not to build up its forces in Syria. Putin ignored these warnings. The administration then tried to deny Russia the airspace to move into Syria. And failed.

Putin responded by bombing moderate Syrian forces, many of whom are allied with the United States. And what has been the result? The number of U.S. airstrikes in Syria has dropped. The train-and-equip program in Syria was halted just as it was starting to show some battlefield results.

And the administration scrambled to pen a so-called "deconfliction agreement" with the Russians that spells out more of what we will not do in Syria. Indeed, this agreement means the United States is now moving out of the way and watching as Russian aircraft, together with Iranian, Hezbollah, and Assad's ground forces, attack and kill brave Syrians, many of whom our Nation has supported and encouraged. This is not only harmful to our interests, it is immoral.

What we must do to hasten the end of the conflict in Syria and Iraq, in particular, we must stop Assad's use of airpower and his horrific barrel bombs, which are the major killer of Syrians and driver of refugees out of the region. We must establish areas in Syria where civilians can be safe and do what is necessary to protect these areas in the air
and on the ground. We must recognize that Putin is not interested in a negotiated solution in Syria that favors U.S. interests. So, we should, instead, impose real costs on Russia, not just in Syria, but everywhere we have leverage to do so. Finally, as General David Petraeus has recently said, we must devise a strategy to confront Iranian power and designs in the region rather than acquiescing to them.

Some will object, as they have for years, that we cannot bear the costs of these actions. But, consider the costs of our current inaction and half measures. Mass atrocities in Syria will continue. Our allies and partners in the Middle East will be put at greater risk of existential danger. Europe will continue to be destabilized and consumed by the internal challenge of managing the refugee challenge. The cancer of ISIL will grow more potent and spread across more of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, posing a greater threat to our national security. Iran will be emboldened in its pursuit of its malign regional ambitions. Putin will establish Russia as a dominant military power in the Middle East for the first time in four decades. And all the while, America's credibility and influence will continue to erode.

Make no mistake, this is the course we are now on. This will be the consequences of our current policy. No one
believes there are easy answers to the underlying problems in the Middle East, but this much should be clear: We cannot go on pretending that we can somehow avoid these problems or that the current approach of trying to treat the symptoms of the disease, rather than its cause, will work if only we give it more time. It will not. Policies of gradual escalation never do.

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

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

Let me join the Chairman in welcoming back the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Thank you, gentlemen, for your service.

Today's hearings comes in the midst of a series of events altering the security situation in the Middle East. These include a massive wave of refugees fleeing the continued violence on the ground in Syria and Iraq, the deployment of Russian air and ground forces in Syria, the suspected ISIL attack in Turkey that killed over 100 people and injured hundreds more during a peace rally in Ankara, and the deployment recently of Lieutenant General McFarland, the new commander of Operation Inherent Resolve, Secretary Kerry's recent meetings with the Foreign Ministers of Russia, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. In addition, the hearing also comes only weeks before the G20 summit in Turkey, where these issues and the international response will be at the forefront.

General McFarland has been in the command of military operations in Syria and Iraq for a little more than 45 days. I understand that he has used this time to evaluate the situation on the ground and may be recommending changes to the campaign. General McFarland's arrival comes at a
critical time, as the coalition military campaign requires a
reevaluation of our strategy.

In Syria, the coalition faces a series of intermingled
conflicts, including the counter-ISIL fight, the Syrian
civil war, a regional proxy war between the Gulf states and
Iran, a sectarian Sunni-Shi'a conflict, our counterterrorism
fight, and the intervention of Russia, a potential great
power struggle. Considering these challenges, it is
important that we continually assess the role of our
Nation's military in helping to bring about the conditions
for an acceptable and sustainable settlement.

In Iraq, the recent visit by Chairman Dunford and
General Austin have focused attention on the coalition's
effort to train and equip the Iraqi Security Forces.
However, taken as a whole, the ISF have not shown the will
to make necessary advances in the operation to take Ramadi,
for example. And the political leaders in Baghdad have not
made the progress needed in the broader agenda of improving
the inclusiveness of the Iraqi government and addressing the
longstanding grievances of Kurds, Sunnis, moderate Shi'a,
and minorities.

The recent operation by Kurdish Peshmerga forces,
accompanied by U.S. Special Operations Forces in northern
Iraq, despite the tragic loss of one of our finest soldiers,
demonstrated that such targeted efforts can have significant
success in protecting innocent civilians and degrading ISIL. These kinds of operations can also result in critical intelligence to support the coalition's broader campaign against ISIL. While these operations are obviously not without risk, the time may have come to evaluate whether the tempo of such counter-ISIL operations can be increased and whether our troops can play an even more active role in enabling the ISF, including by accompanying their forces at lower echelons, especially when direct contact with the enemy is not expected.

According to reports, the coalition's provisions of close air support to Syrian Kurdish forces have shown success in northern Syria. The recent decision by the administration to equip a group of Sunni tribes who have come together to form a Syrian Arab coalition to fight alongside Syrian Kurdish forces shows promise for placing additional pressure on ISIL in Raqqa and the surrounding areas. If successful, this would be a positive development towards the objectives of the broader campaign. However, I am concerned that the decision to completely suspend the Department's overt train-and-equip program may not enable us to accomplish our goals in Syria. Where the program clearly failed to live up to heightened expectations, my understanding is that the Combined Joint Interagency Task Force had recently recalibrated the program based on lessons
learned, and that later graduates today are having a direct impact as enablers in the fight against ISIL. The coalition cannot succeed in Syria without a reliable Sunni force on the ground to hold any territorial gains. Building this force will require time and patience. And, critically, it will require the building of trust through training engagements and persistent contact between the coalition and our new partners on the ground. I hope the Secretary and the Chairman will provide the committee a clear understanding of the conditions required to reengage in training of vetted individuals or small groups.

The deployment of Russian forces in Syria, and their indiscriminate military operations targeting the moderate opposition, have the potential to set off another wave of refugees across Europe. More specifically, Russia's military operations in Syria have complicated the coalition air campaign and have the potential to draw the attention of moderate Syrian operation — opposition forces, rather, away from counter-ISIL operations. Russian operations have also negatively impacted the distribution of humanitarian and other nonlethal aid to the Syrian people.

In the coming months, I hope General McFarland will be provided with the operational flexibility to implement necessary modifications to the campaign against ISIL.
in your recommendations for how to ensure that General McFarland receives the operational flexibility and support needed to be successful, going forward.

    Thank you, and I look forward to your testimony.

Chairman McCain: Welcome the witnesses.

Secretary Carter.
STATEMENT OF HON. ASHTON B. CARTER, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Secretary Carter: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Reed, members of the committee. Thanks for inviting us to come here today before you to discuss the counter-ISIL campaign in Iraq and Syria, and, along the way, to address some of the concerns, Mr. Chairman, that you raised, and to share with you, Senator Reed, some of the plans and initiatives that the Chairman and I are formulating for our campaign in both Iraq and Syria.

This is the first time, for me, appearing before this committee alongside Chairman Joe Dunford, who was just in the region last week, as was noted. I'm grateful to Joe for answering my and the President's call to step down from what every marine knows is a higher position -- namely, Commandant of the Marine Corps -- to become Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And to this committee, for conforming Joe, thank you.

I'm glad to have you here with me today.

Before I turn to the subject of today's hearing, I want to reiterate, as I've said consistently since March and continue to believe, that Washington needs to come together behind a multiyear budget deal that supports our defense strategy, the troops and their families, and all elements of Americans' national security and strength. I understand
significant progress was made on this overnight, and I'm looking forward to reviewing the details. But, I welcome this major positive development, and applaud the members of this committee for what you're doing to help us get there.

The Middle East presents a kaleidoscope of challenges. But, there, as everywhere, our actions and strong military posture are guided by what's in America's interests. That's our North Star. And amid this region's complexity and uncertainty, those interests are to deter aggression, to bolster the security of our friends and allies, especially Israel, to ensure freedom of navigation in the Gulf, to check Iran's malign influence even as we monitor the implementation of a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL. This last one, ISIL, poses a threat to our people and to friendly countries, not only in the Middle East, but around the world.

Today, I will, first, outline the changes in the execution of our strategy that we have considered and are now pursuing militarily to gather battlefield momentum in the fight against ISIL. Then I'll address what Russia is doing in Syria and why we won't let it interfere with our campaign against ISIL.

When I last spoke to this committee about our counter-ISIL campaign and its nine lines of essential military and nonmilitary effort, I made three things clear about the
military aspects: first, that we will deliver ISIL a lasting defeat; second, that truly lasting success would require enabling capable, motivated local forces on the ground, recognizing that this will take time and new diplomatic energy; and third, that our strategy's execution can and must and will be strengthened. All that's still true. Our determination is unchanged even as the situation continues to evolve and we continue to adapt to execute our campaign more effectively. And today, I'd like to elaborate on the third point and explain how we're adapting our campaign to do more, reinforcing what we know works.

The changes we're pursuing can be described what I -- by what I call "the three R's": Raqqa, Ramadi, and raids. Before I explain what they mean, let me also note that I took actions to streamline command and control of the counter-ISIL military campaign by assigning the entire effort to a single general officer, Lieutenant General Sean McFarland, where, in the urgency of the early phase of the campaign last year, several layers were added to the general officer already present in Iraq.

The first "R" is Raqqa, ISIL's stronghold and administrative capital. We've been clear for some time that we need to keep up pressure on Raqqa. And, to that end, we will support moderate Syrian forces fighting ISIL that have made territorial gains near Raqqa. Indeed, some of them are
within 30 miles of Raqqa today. The Syrian Arab coalition, which we plan to strengthen through our new equipping approach -- more on that in a moment -- will work over time with other Syrian anti-ISIL forces to push towards Raqqa.

To the south, we plan to further strengthen our partner, Jordan. And, from the skies above, we expect to intensify our air campaign, including with additional U.S. and coalition aircraft, to target ISIL with a higher and heavier rate of strikes. This will include more strikes against ISIL high-value targets as our intelligence improves, also its oil enterprise, which is a critical pillar of ISIL's financial infrastructure. As I said last Friday, we've already begun to ramp up these deliberate strikes.

Part of this pressure includes our new approach to the Syria train-and-equip program. I, like President Obama and members of this committee, was disappointed with that program's results. We, accordingly, examined the program this summer and have since changed it. I use the word "change," not "end." "Change" the program. While the old approach was to train and equip completely new forces outside of Syria before sending them into the fight, the new approach is to work with vetted leaders of groups that are already fighting ISIL, and provide equipment and some training to them, and support their operations with airpower. This approach builds on successes that local
Syrian Arab and Syrian Kurdish forces have made along Syria's northern border to retake and hold ground from ISIL with the help of U.S. airstrikes and equipment resupplies. If done in concert, as we intend, all these actions on the ground and from the air should help shrink ISIL's territory into a smaller and smaller area and create new opportunities for targeting ISIL, ultimately denying this evil movement any safe haven in its supposed heartland.

The second "R" is Ramadi, the capital of Iraq's Anbar Province, which serves as a critical example of the Abadi government's commitment to work with local Sunni communities, with our help, to retake and hold ground from ISIL, and, in turn, to build momentum to eventually go northward to Mosul. Under Prime Minister Abadi's leadership, the Iraqis have begun to use American-made F-16s to support counter-ISIL operations, and have empowered capable battlefield commanders to step forward. As we see more progress towards assembling capable and motivated Iraqi forces under Baghdad's control and including Sunni elements, we're willing to continue to provide more enabling capabilities and fire support to help them succeed. However, the Iraqi government and security forces will have to take certain steps militarily to make sure our progress sticks.

We need to see more in the direction of multisectarian
governance and defense leadership. For example, we've given the Iraqi government two battalions' worth of equipment for mobilizing Sunni tribal forces. As we continue to provide the support, the Iraqi government must ensure it is distributed effectively. Local Sunni forces aren't sufficiently equipped, regularly paid, and empowered as coequal members of the Iraqi Security Forces, ISIL's defeats in Anbar will only be temporary.

The third and final "R" is raids signaling that we won't hold back from supporting capable partners in opportunistic attacks against ISIL or conducting such missions directly, whether by strikes from the air or direct action on the ground. Last week's rescue operation was led by Iraqi Kurdish forces with U.S. advisors in support. One of those accompanying advisors, Master Sergeant Joshua Wheeler, heroically acted to ensure the overall success of the mission, and lost his life in the process. The death of any servicemember is a tragedy. And, as I told his family and teammates this weekend, we offer our condolences to Master Sergeant Wheeler's loved ones for their loss.

While our mission in Iraq is to train, advise, and assist our Iraqi partners in situations such as that operation, where we have actionable intelligence and a capable partner force, we want to support our partners, and we will. At the same time, the raid on Abu Sayyaf's home,
the strikes against Junaid Hussain, and, most recently, Sanafi al-Nasr, should all serve notice to ISIL and other terrorist leaders that, once we locate them, no target is beyond our reach.

As we've looked at how to gather momentum and adapt to the changing battlefield, some have discussed putting a buffer zone, humanitarian zone, or no-fly zone in Syria. We have analyzed various options, and the political and military requirements of each. These options are complex and raise some challenges, which I'm prepared to discussed in answer to your questions.

Let me now turn to Russia's involvement in Syria. To be clear, we are not cooperating with Russia, and we're not letting Russia impact the pace or scope of our campaign against ISIL in Iraq and Syria. While we negotiated a document on safety of flight with the Russian Minister of Defense, we do not align ourselves more broadly with their military actions, because, instead of singularly attacking ISIL, as they said they were going to do, they're primarily attacking the Syrian opposition, as the Chairman has noted, which further fuels the tragic civil war there. Their actions suggest a doubling down on their longstanding relationship with Assad, sending advisors, artillery, and aviation to enable and support the Assad regime and Iranian forces in attacking moderates who oppose the regime and are
essential to Syria's political transition. And it appears
the vast majority of their strikes, by some estimates as
high as 85 to 90 percent, use "dumb bombs," which obviously
increases the possibility of civilian casualties.

So, as Russia acts in a coalition of two with Iran at
its side, the United States will continue to strengthen our
65-nation global coalition. Even as we've reached an
understanding with the Russians on safety protocols for
coalition pilots over Syria, we will keep prosecuting our
counter-ISIL campaign unabated. We will keep supporting the
moderate Syrian opposition, along with our other commitments
to friends and allies in the region. And consistent with
our strong, balanced approach towards Russian aggression
elsewhere in the world, including NATO and Ukraine, we will
keep the door open for Russia to contribute to efforts
towards a political solution in which -- which, in the final
answer -- analysis, is the only answer to the Syrian
conflict.

I've discussed the military strategy and accompanying
campaign, but, before I conclude, I remind the committee
that defeating ISIL and protecting America requires
coordinated efforts across all of the so-called "nine lines
of effort," to include supporting effective governance in
Iraq, enhancing intelligence collection, disrupting ISIL's
financing, countering ISIL's messaging, stopping the flow of
foreign fighters, providing humanitarian support, and
protecting our homeland, where other departments and
agencies of our government have the lead.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Secretary Carter follows:]
Chairman McCain: General Dunford.
STATEMENT OF GENERAL JOSEPH F. DUNFORD, JR., USMC,
CHAIRMAN OF OTHER JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

General Dunford: Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, distinguished members of the committee, thanks for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss our challenges in the Middle East, and specifically the military dimension of our campaign against ISIL.

I've been in my current position for just short of 4 weeks, and spent much of that time reviewing our counter-ISIL campaign. I also followed up on a commitment I made in my confirmation hearing to visit the region early in my tenure. Last weekend, to get a personal perspective on the campaign, I visited Israel, Jordan, and Iraq. I was extremely impressed with the focus and commitment of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines that I met during the visit. And, thanks to your support, I can report that they are well trained and equipped.

Before taking your questions, I'd like to share a few thoughts on the counter-ISIL military campaign in Iraq and Syria. ISIL's primary source of strength is its claim to be a caliphate. To be successful, the coalition's military campaign must reduce ISIL's territorial control, destroy its warfighting capability, and undermine its brand and aura of invincibility. There are two critical elements of the military campaign:
The first is to conduct strikes against ISIL targets. The strikes are intended to kill key leadership and fighters, interdict their lines of communication, and deny them sources of revenue.

The second critical element in the military campaign is to develop and support effective partners on the ground to seize and secure ISIL-held terrain.

Many weeks before I became the Chairman, the leadership across the Department recognized that we needed to increase pressure on ISIL from multiple directions to generate momentum in the coalition's military campaign. As with any campaign, we're continuing to examine ways to enhance the effectiveness of our operations.

But, we all recognize that ISIL is a transregional threat requiring a broader strategy. The immediate priority is to bear down on core ISIL across Iraq and Syria simultaneously. The framework for the campaign is the same for Iraq and Syria, but the conditions on the ground present unique challenges and opportunities. The end state is to defeat ISIL. Without a partner on the ground, Syria has clearly presented the most difficult challenge. No one is satisfied with our progress to date. Moving forward, we must continue to work with our Turkish partners to secure the northern border of Syria. We must do all we can to enable vetted Syrian opposition forces willing to fight
ISIL. And we must be more aggressive in strikes that will deny ISIL the access they have to oil revenue.

The Secretary has already addressed the adjustments to the Syrian train-and-equip program. And I support the refined approach. While there will be challenges, we'll be supporting groups who have already demonstrated the will to fight ISIL. And our support will be contingent upon their attacking specific objectives in meeting specific standards. We'll look for opportunities to support vetted opposition groups in both the north and along the border with Jordan.

In our initial efforts to build ground forces in Syria, Major General Mike Nagata and his team were operating under extraordinarily difficult conditions, and I'd like to thank them for their hard work. Due to their efforts, we have a much better understanding of the operating environment and the opportunities. We'll be able to leverage their initiative and lessons learned as we make course and speed corrections.

Last week, we began to move the campaign forward in another important way by striking a major oil facility and source of revenue for ISIL. Based on some superb analytic work and planning, CENTCOM is now postured to accelerate broader interagency efforts against ISIL's economic means. The Central Command is also continuing to work with Turkey to secure border -- the border area in northwest Syria. And
we still have some work to do.

In Iraq, we've also been frustrated with the pace of operations. That said, there's been recent progress in Baji, some movement around Ramadi, and the Peshmerga have made progress in the north. After talking to the commanders on the ground, I believe we'll have an opportunity to reinforce Iraqi success in the days ahead. We've developed a variety of options to do that.

To be successful in Syria and Iraq, in addition to the initiatives I've mentioned and those outlined by the Secretary, we also need to continue to improve how we leverage our intelligence capabilities and do more to cut the flow of foreign fighters. I have a better understanding of these two issues after my visit, and those will be a priority for me in the days ahead.

We will also continue to look hard at other ways to increase the effectiveness of coalition operations in the tempo of the campaign. The Secretary and the President have made it clear that they expect me to bring to them all of the options that may be -- that may contribute to our winning the fight against ISIL. I've made a commitment to them that I would do that, and I'll meet that commitment.

In closing, as I complete my initial assessment of the campaign, I believe we've identified and started to implement a number of initiatives to move the campaign
forward. We're not satisfied or complacent about where we are, and we won't be satisfied until ISIL is defeated.

Thank you again for the opportunity to join you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Dunford follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]
Chairman McCain: Thank you very much, General.

Secretary Carter, the President's spokesman, after it was clear that the arm and train and equip by the DOD program had failed -- President's spokesman said that the President was -- felt vindicated that this program had failed, because he never supported it to start with. This was a program that we invested 43 million, at least, of a $500 million program. I'm not sure how many young people were killed in trying to implement this failed program. Did you feel vindicated when this program failed?

Secretary Carter: Mr. Chairman, I thought that the effort -- and I want to repeat something that the Chairman just said -- I think that General Nagata, who was given this program, which was conceived last summer --

Chairman McCain: Yeah, I just asked --

Secretary Carter: -- approved through the winter --

Chairman McCain: -- the question whether you felt vindicated, or not --

Secretary Carter: No, I was --

Chairman McCain: -- as the --

Secretary Carter: -- disappointed.

Chairman McCain: -- President's spokesman --

Secretary Carter: I was actually -- no, I was disappointed in it.

Chairman McCain: I see.
Secretary Carter: I wished it had turned out differently.

Chairman McCain: I see.

Secretary Carter: However, we --

Chairman McCain: But, the --

Secretary Carter: -- are learning our lessons from that, and, therefore, our new approach differs in --

Chairman McCain: Well, then would one of those --

Secretary Carter: -- a fundamental way from --

Chairman McCain: Go ahead.

Secretary Carter: And I can describe the difference between the old and the new. But, we think that we have learning lessons from that.

Chairman McCain: So, you don't feel vindicated that the program failed.

Secretary Carter: I was disappointed that it failed.

Chairman McCain: I see. But, the President obviously wasn't. He felt vindicated, according to his spokesperson.

In this change that you were talking about -- and already we're seeing some of the changes -- does that mean that we -- these young people that we train and equip and send in to fight -- that we're going to protect them from being barrel-bombed and attacked by Russian aircraft?

Secretary Carter: I think we have conveyed the same obligation last time I was before you --
Chairman McCain: Right now, as we speak --
Secretary Carter: -- to protect --
Chairman McCain: -- Russian aircraft --
Secretary Carter: -- these forces --
Chairman McCain: -- are bombing -- right now, as we speak, Russian aircraft are bombing moderate Syrian forces in Syria while we have deconflicted. Do you believe that we should be protecting those young people --
Secretary Carter: Our Title 10 forces, we have an obligation to protect. We've stated that. We will have --
Chairman McCain: Are we protecting them?
Secretary Carter: -- options to do that. We have authority to do that.
Chairman McCain: Are we protecting them now?
Secretary Carter: They have not come -- they're operating in a -- they have not come under attack by either Assad's forces or Russia's forces --
Chairman McCain: Russia's air has not been --
Secretary Carter: -- the Syrian Arab --
Chairman McCain: -- attacking --
Secretary Carter: -- coalition and the Kurdish YPG.
Chairman McCain: No, no, I'm asking about the moderate Syrian forces that are there, some of whom we trained.
Secretary Carter: I'm sorry, I was speaking of our train-and-equip --
Chairman McCain: I'm asking the question about those
that we -- some of those we trained and equipped, moderate
Syrian forces that are now being bombed by Russia.

Secretary Carter: With respect to the Title 10 forces
that the Department of Defense trains and equips in Syria,
they have not come under attack, but we have expressed --

Chairman McCain: None of the moderate forces that --
some of whom we have trained, are -- have come under attack
by Russia from the air?

Secretary Carter: Not in our train-and-equip program,
our Title 10 program, no.

Chairman McCain: That's fascinating. It --

Secretary Carter: But, let me be clear, Chairman, the
Russians -- and, obviously, Assad -- do attack moderate
Syrian forces --

Chairman McCain: Yes.

Secretary Carter: -- which are supported by --

Chairman McCain: Primarily --

Secretary Carter: -- the international coalition. And
the -- one of the reasons why the Russian approach is so --

Chairman McCain: So, are we going to train --

Secretary Carter: -- wrongheaded --

Chairman McCain: -- are we going to train these young
people, you say, in the change -- are we going to send them
into Syria to fight -- are we going to protect them from
being barrel-bombed by --

Secretary Carter: The ones --

Chairman McCain: -- Bashar Assad and protected from --

Secretary Carter: The ones that --

Chairman McCain: -- Russians --

Secretary Carter: Yes, the ones that we --

Chairman McCain: Anyone we send in and --

Secretary Carter: -- train and equip --

Chairman McCain: -- train, we're --

Secretary Carter: -- we have that --

Chairman McCain: -- going to --

Secretary Carter: -- obligation.

Chairman McCain: -- protect from Russian air attacks.

Secretary Carter: We have an obligation to do that, and we've made that clear, right from the beginning of the train-and-equip program.

Chairman McCain: We haven't done it. We haven't done it --

Secretary Carter: They have not --

Chairman McCain: -- Secretary --

Secretary Carter: -- come under attack.

Chairman McCain: -- Carter.

Secretary Carter: But, I've --

Chairman McCain: I promise you they have. We will --

Secretary Carter: -- we have an obligation --
Chairman McCain: We -- you will have to correct the record.

Now, General Petraeus and General -- and former Secretary Gates, SECDEF, and now, we understand, Secretary Clinton, have all stated that they think we should stop the barrel-bombing and that we should train and equip, and we should have no-fly zone or aircraft exclusionary zones. And I might point out, General Dunford, as complicated as it is, we were able to do Northern Watch and Southern Watch rather successfully in Iraq, although it's not exactly the same. So, are you recommending that we should stop the barrel-bombing, as General Petraeus and Secretary -- former Secretary Gates and now Secretary Clinton -- have suggested, to stop the barrel-bombing, to provide a no- -- an aircraft exclusionary zone in order to protect the innocent civilians that are being driven into refugee status, in the greatest refugee situation since the end of World War II?

Secretary Carter: Yeah, Chairman, I -- we have, as I indicated in my statement, analyzed zones of various kinds and -- humanitarian zones, buffer zones, and you're talking about --

Chairman McCain: Yeah

Secretary Carter: -- no-fly zones. And I can give you some of the considerations --

Chairman McCain: And stop the barrel-bombing.
Secretary Carter: -- the -- that would be one of the --

Chairman McCain: Yeah.

Secretary Carter: -- intents of a no-fly zone. And if you'd like, I can tell you some of the considerations that --

Chairman McCain: I'd just like to know whether you support, or not.

Secretary Carter: We have not made that recommendation to the President. He has not taken it off the table. I can explain some of the reasons for our recommendation -- or our --

Chairman McCain: It's not an issue that has not been examined, Secretary Carter. It's been recommended for years by some of us. I mean, you have to examine it --

Secretary Carter: But, we have looked at it quite --

Chairman McCain: -- all over again?

Secretary Carter: We've looked at it quite closely. And I'm prepared to describe it. I know the Chairman is, as well.

Chairman McCain: It's not a -- it's a matter -- it's an issue that's been on the table for 3 or 4 years that I know of. It's not a -- we received information when General Dempsey said it would cost a billion dollars a day or something incredible. But, it's not a new issue.
Secretary Carter: It is not a new issue. It is a substantial military --

Chairman McCain: So, it seems to me you should have a position on it.

Secretary Carter: We have not recommended that. We have analyzed it. We've presented the alternatives --

Chairman McCain: So, you do not --

Secretary Carter: -- to the President.

chairman -- support --

Secretary Carter: We've not --

Chairman McCain: You do not agree with General Petraeus and former Secretary Gates and Secretary Clinton.

Secretary Carter: We do not have a concept of operations for a no-fly zone at this time that we're prepared --

Chairman McCain: After all these years, we don't have a concept of operations.

Secretary Carter: That we're prepared to recommend.

Chairman McCain: Senator Reed.

Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just, Mr. Secretary, want to clarify. You have spoken exclusively about forces trained by the Department of Defense. You kept -- Title 10, but there are a lot of titles in the U.S. Code. But, there are other forces on the ground that our coalition partners have trained, that have
come under attack by the Russians. Is that -- that's clear, correct?
Secretary Carter: Absolutely true.
Senator Reed: But, the forces that are subject to direct training by the Department of Defense have been placed in areas which, for many reasons, have not been subject to aerial attack --
Secretary Carter: Well, they're fighting ISIL.
Senator Reed: They're fighting ISIL.
Secretary Carter: And so -- and the Russians, as I stated, are not, even though they said they were.
Senator Reed: Now, let me go back to the points you made about the train-and-equip program. It has shifted from trying to train individual units, insert those units into the counter-ISIL fight, to identifying leaders and providing some training to the leader, and then --
Secretary Carter: Right.
Senator Reed: -- some support. There is another aspect of this approach which I'd like to clarify. That is training not just leaders, but individual enablers, people with technical skills that can go into a deployed unit and provide those skills. Is that still being done?
Secretary Carter: Yes, that is still part of the approach. That was part of the old approach, as well. But, the big difference is that, rather than trying to form
brand-new units, we are identifying units that are already fighting ISIL, providing them equipment, and, as you point out, after vetting their leadership, providing them with selected abilities that help them leverage our enablement, particular with -- from the air.

Senator Reed: From the air. So, the program still is able to do that and, in addition, grow not so much units, but teams of Syrian nationals that can go in as specialists on a whole range of issues: air support, medical support, logistics support -- and aid these units in Syria.

Secretary Carter: Exactly. Now, we're very transactional in this, so we are giving some equipment, seeing how they perform, give some more equipment, and how -- see how they perform. But, these are groups that already exist. The Syrian Arab Coalition, moving in the areas north of Raqqa, is an example of that.

Senator Reed: Thank you.

General Dunford, you just returned from Iraq, and you had conversations with the -- Prime Minister Abadi because there were disconcerting reports of invitations to the Russians, collaboration at the intelligence level with the Russians. What's your latest estimate of that? Is it something that was a more political statement by the Prime Minister, or is there actual ongoing, real efforts?

General Dunford: Senator, thanks -- I asked that
specific question to all the senior ranking leaders that I met with, and I explained to them how difficult it would be for us to continue to provide support if the Russians were invited in to conduct airstrikes. And I was assured, at every level, that that wouldn't be the case.

Could I follow up on the train-and-equip?

Senator Reed: Yes, sir.

General Dunford: In your opening statement, you mentioned that we completely suspended the program, and I just wanted to clarify one point. The individuals that we had previously trained, we are still supporting them when they're still in the fight. And there are a number of them that are doing exactly the kind of things you spoke about, Senator Reed. They're providing JTAC-like support for forces that are fighting ISIL.

Senator Reed: And it's -- based on the Secretary's comments, it's our intention to expand that as rapidly as we can.

General Dunford: Where there are opportunities. And I would just say, you know, for the T&E program, although we're talking now about the Syrian Arab Coalition and training those large groups, my perception and the guidance that we have from the President is, where there are other opportunities, we should bring those forward to him. And when I talked to the team on the ground, I made that clear
to them, that, when we see opportunities, we ought to
develop concept of operations, bring that back, and expand
the program, where it will work. And we'll look to do that
both in the northern part in Syria as well as along the
Jordanian border.

Senator Reed: One final question, General Dunford, is
that -- and you -- both your testimonies highlighted this
inability of the government in Baghdad to fully support
Sunni forces in Anbar, particularly. And some of that is
historic mistrust, et cetera. Do your -- from your
testimony, they're -- you're considering having American
advisors at -- not at the company level, but higher up, and
the one function they could perform is to be an honest
broker, which would allow the payment of troops, would allow
the government of Baghdad to feel that they have some
control, and, in addition, demand, on behalf of Sunni
forces, that they get the fair share. Is that part of your
thinking, going forward?

General Dunford: It is, Senator. And I think there's
actually four reasons why you might consider putting forces
in an accompany role. The first is what you're suggesting,
which is to really to bring some campaign coherence. I
think the other is to ensure that our logistics support is
effective. Another challenge we've had is situational
awareness and intelligence. And so, that would be another
-- that would be another advantage of doing that. And then, also the better delivery of combined arms. So, there's really four factors, I think, that would be considered. And if it had operational or strategic impact and we could reinforce success, that would be the basic framework within which I'd make a recommendation for additional forces to be colocated with Iraqi units.

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

Chairman McCain: Just to make the record clear, Secretary Carter, there are coalition-supported and American-supported forces that are in Syria that are being attacked by Russian aircraft. Is that true or false?

Secretary Carter: I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. There are moderate Syrian opposition forces --

Chairman McCain: Coalition-supported.

Secretary Carter: -- in Syria supported by the coalition, and, of course, people that we think are part of Syria's future and part of the Syrian political transition.

Chairman McCain: It's hard to be part of --

Secretary Carter: They are being attacked. And that's -- and not ISIL -- and that's why the Russian approach is backwards, or --

Chairman McCain: And that's why --

Secretary Carter: -- I've called it wrongheaded.

Chairman McCain: And that's why it's immoral to train
people in and watch them -- to go in and fight, and watch
them being destroyed and maimed and killed --
Secretary Carter: For our part --
Chairman McCain: -- by Russia.
Secretary Carter: For our part, in our train-and-equip
program, as I've said before this committee before, we have
a moral obligation --
Chairman McCain: You are making a distinction without
a difference, Mr. Secretary. These are American-supported
and coalition-supported men who are going in and being
slaughtered.
Secretary Inhofe -- Senator Inhofe.
Senator Inhofe: Yes. My understanding, Mr. Chairman,
that Senator Cotton is presiding, so I'll defer to him and
then ask that we return to regular order.
Senator Cotton: Thank you, Senator Inhofe. Yes, I do
have to go preside over the Senate. And, General Dunford,
that's the Senate equivalent of staff duty for a junior
officer.
Secretary Carter, you talked about our "nine lines of
effort." Not all of those are military lines of effort. Is
that correct?
Secretary Carter: That's correct.
Senator Cotton: Now that General Allen has departed as
our envoy in charge of those "nine lines of effort," who are
minding those nondefense lines of effort?

Secretary Carter: Well, it's a good question. And what -- one of the things that I have proposed, and Secretary Kerry has accepted, that he and I meet periodically with the other agency heads who have the other nine -- the other lines of effort. General Allen's been present at those meetings. His successor, Ambassador McGuirk, will be present at them. And I thought -- it's one of the things I noticed when I began to look at this campaign -- that since all of these lines of effort are -- it is necessary to have moving in concert, we needed a better effort to do that. So, Secretary Kerry's agreed to do that with me. We've had, I think, four meetings -- General Dunford was at the last one -- focused on -- counterfinancing was the last one. Before that was foreign fighter flow both into the conflict region and out of the conflict region to Europe, around the world. We are addressing messaging and ISIL's messages and efforts to recruit people online.

So, there are lots of different dimensions to this that are not military, per se, but I believe that they're opportunities to make the whole greater than the sum of the parts, and I've sought to seize those opportunities with Secretary Kerry, now with General Dunford, and make sure that all these different efforts are coordinated. They're
all important. And the other participants are doing important things -- the diplomatic people and the intelligence people and the homeland security and law enforcement folks. But, I think the whole can be greater than the sum of the parts. And, just per your question, that's exactly the intent.

Senator Cotton: Is that a detailed way of saying there's not a single person taking over all of the nondefense lines of effort?

Secretary Carter: There has not been a single person who had that responsibility. Remember, General Allen, who was superb -- General Allen had the responsibility for assembling the coalition, which he did with great skill, and, to his credit and Ambassador McGuirk's, we have a broad coalition. I'm talking about something different, which is assembling the mechanics of all of the nine lines of effort. And so, that's something I'm undertaking to do with Secretary Kerry, and we're gathering in the other parties that are involved. And Ambassador McGuirk will be part of that effort. But, I think it's necessary --

Senator Cotton: I'd like to --

Secretary Carter: -- necessary organizational change.

Senator Cotton: I'd like to shift briefly now to Russia's move into Syria. A few weeks ago, before the major Russian movement into Syria, the United States Government
requested that Bulgaria and Iraq close its airspace to
Russian aircraft. How did we transmit that request to Iraq?

Secretary Carter: I do not know what the mechanics of
that were. Can I get back to you on that, Senator? I
simply don't know.

Senator Cotton: Is that something the State Department
would --

Secretary Carter: I'm happy to --

Senator Cotton: -- typically do? The Department of
Defense?

Secretary Carter: I --

Senator Cotton: The White House?

Secretary Carter: I -- Joe, go ahead.

General Dunford: Senator, I believe that message would
have been delivered by Ambassador Jones, in Baghdad.

Senator Cotton: And Iraq obviously declined our
request, while Bulgaria accepted it.

General Dunford: Declined the request --

Senator Cotton: And let Russian aircraft fly through
their airspace.

General Dunford: There was -- there has been Russian
aircraft that's flown through Iraqi airspace. My
understanding is, it was not at the invitation of the Iraqi
government.

Senator Cotton: Does it -- does the Iraq air force
have the capability to protect its own air force and exclude
a foreign air force like Russia's?

General Dunford: They have limited capability,
Senator. They recently were fielded with F-16s, but they
have limited air-to-air capability.

Senator Cotton: So, if the United States Government
requested that the Government of Iraq close its airspace to
Russia, surely the United States Government was prepared to
assist Iraq in closing its airspace and stopping Russian
aircraft from flying over Iraq?

Secretary Carter: Well, it's a sovereign decision
by Iraq, but, I'll tell you, we're not uninterested in it.
And -- but, you're raising a very important question, which
is, Is Iraq going to cooperate with the Russian -- what I
would regard as mis- -- I called it wrongheaded approach I
Syria? We have received -- and I believe that General
Dunford received, just last week -- from Prime Minister
Abadi, in no uncertain terms, the statement that he will not
work with the Russians, he will -- he will not allow them to
be partners with Iraq in that regard, that we are the
preferred partners of Iraq. We've been insistent on that
point. And Prime Minister Abadi has repeated those pledges
to us. I only say that because I -- we feel emphatically
about that -- receiving those pledges, and intend to have
them implemented by Prime Minister Abadi. But, he has not
been ambiguous about that. And I believe the most recent
conversation was held by General Dunford, and perhaps you'd
like to say something about that, Joe. It's a serious
issue.

    General Dunford: No, Senator, I raised it both with
the Minister of Defense and the Prime Minister and, again,
tried to explain to them that our continued support really
would be problematic, were they to invite the Russians in to
conduct strikes. I was assured that they had not extended
that invitation, and they did not intend to extend an
invitation to do that.

    Senator Cotton: Well, in closing, I would say it's
problematic for Russia to be resupplying its forces in Syria
by flying through Iraq. We should renew our request that
they exclude Russian aircraft from their airspace, and our
military should be prepared to assist them in excluding
Russian aircraft from their airspace.

    Thank you, Senator Inhofe, Chairman.

    Chairman McCain: Senator Manchin.

    Senator Manchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

    Thank you both for your service and for being here.

    Let me -- I think my question would be, What is our end
game? And the end game would be -- we've been there, bogged
down for quite some time. And if you look at -- when I go
home to West Virginia and talk to the citizens, you know,
they say, "Well, to stop this migration, you're going to have to have a no-fly zone. You have to have protection where people feel like they're safe. And as the country regroups or rebuilds, that -- there are still people there that, basically, are peace-loving, well-educated." So, we haven't made a decision on that. And I know the Chairman has asked directly on that.

And then I start looking at, basically, with Russia's involvement, and Russia being involved to protect Assad. Russia is more involved in protecting Assad and working with Iran to have some influence of what happens there, in my evaluation. And then, you look at the United States. We're more concerned about fighting ISIL, if you will -- or it looks to be -- more so than protecting or fighting with our coalition, who wants to defeat Assad.

So, what would be the end game? And who -- what part are we going to be able to play in this unless we take on Russia or basically check Russia from what they're doing, unless we have some type of diplomatic relations with Russia and an agreement with Russia? I see Russia as being in a situation -- and they have involved themselves -- to where they're going to be a major broker in that region, because Iran seems to be, if you will, more influential, as far as in Iraq and in Syria, with Assad. Now with Assad being helped and propped up by Russia, we're out there fighting
ISIL. We don't -- we're not protecting the people that can basically put any security back into Syria. I just -- it's a very confusing situation. It's hard for us to say, "Okay, at the end of the day, here's our end game."

And if somebody has any explanation for that and tells me what we're trying to accomplish, I'd be happy to hear it.

Secretary Carter: I'll take that, Senator.

The -- for us, the paramount objective is the defeat of ISIL. That will require --

Senator Manchin: That's our number-one --

Secretary Carter: -- in Iraq --

Senator Manchin: -- priority right now in Syria.

Secretary Carter: -- because they're trying to attack Americans.

Senator Manchin: I gotcha.

Secretary Carter: And we have to take that very seriously.

Senator Manchin: Okay.

Secretary Carter: They must be defeated, and they must be --

Senator Manchin: And you agree --

Secretary Carter: -- defeated very --

Senator Manchin: I'm sorry, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary Carter: Sorry.

Senator Manchin: You do agree that Russia's primary is
to protect Assad.

Secretary Carter: Yeah. They said they were going to fight ISIL, and that's not what they're doing.

Senator Manchin: Okay. So --

Secretary Carter: They're propping up --

Senator Manchin: -- we --

Secretary Carter: -- Assad, which just fuels the civil war, which is the point the Chairman was making --

Senator Manchin: Okay.

Secretary Carter: -- and fuels the --

Senator Manchin: So, we have two different --

Secretary Carter: So, they're on the --

Senator Manchin: -- objectives right now --

Secretary Carter: -- they're on the wrong side of the --

Senator Manchin: The United States and Russia has two complete different objectives.

Secretary Carter: Well, they say they have the same objectives, but --

Senator Manchin: But, we don't --

Secretary Carter: -- their actions --

Senator Manchin: -- see that. I gotcha.

Secretary Carter: -- belie that.

Senator Manchin: And they're basically in line with Iran in helping prop up Assad and protect Assad.
1 Secretary Carter: Iran has also supported Assad, absolutely, as well.
2 And so, to get to the question of the end game, the end game in Syria has to be a transition in which Assad is no longer running the country. We would like to see that transition occur in as peaceful and prompt a way as possible, because we would like there to be the -- a --
3 Senator Manchin: Is it obvious that -- basically, that Russia and Iran will have more influence on who the next leader or the leadership of Syria's going to be than we will?
4 Secretary Carter: Well, I think that -- I wouldn't --
5 I don't think they can be sure of that, because the --
6 Senator Manchin: But, I'm saying they're --
7 Secretary Carter: -- the future of --
8 Senator Manchin: -- positioning themselves for that.
9 Secretary Carter: -- Syria -- the future of Syria will be in the hands of the Syrian people, and many of those are Syrian moderate opposition leaders who are being attacked by Assad's forces, with Russia's help, right now.
10 Senator Manchin: Have we --
11 Secretary Carter: That's why Russia's --
12 Senator Manchin: -- been able to assist --
13 Secretary Carter: -- on the wrong side of --
14 Senator Manchin: -- the migration of the people from
Syria as being --

Secretary Carter: Some of them.

Senator Manchin: -- more of the leaders --

Secretary Carter: Some of them.

Senator Manchin: -- more of the well-educated, more of the peace-loving?

Secretary Carter: Yes. There's a spectrum there that goes all the way over to true extremists, like al-Nusra and al- -- and ISIL, all the way through groups --

Senator Manchin: Can I ask, General --

Secretary Carter: -- much more moderate.

Senator Manchin: -- Dunford, if -- on this -- General, I know that we've talked before on some of this, but it's just so -- it's so hard to go home and explain our involvement unless we're going to have a no-fly and protect those who want to be there to rebuild their country. We're not going to have much to work with.

General Dunford: The Chairman said something important in his opening comments. And I think that's exactly what the military campaign is designed to do, and that's to provide some leverage. And I think what we owe -- what we owe the President is options that will allow us to generate the kind of momentum and confidence in the military campaign against ISIL that will give us leverage politically.

So, the decision's been made that the issue with Assad
is being solved politically right now. So, I think there's
two separate approaches, here, in Syria that'll come
together at some point in the future. One is that we're
dealing with ISIL on the ground, and we're doing that
militarily, and that's with the strikes and the partnership
capacity that I spoke about a minute ago. Meanwhile, there
are broader political negotiations that are taking place to
determine the future of the transitional government. I
think right now it's pretty clear to me what we should be
doing on the military side, and that is taking the fight to
ISIL, generating momentum, keeping the coalition together,
giving confidence in the campaign. And then, again --

Senator Manchin: If I can just --

General Dunford: -- the Chairman talked about --

Senator Manchin: Mr. Chairman, if you indulge us, one
more.

If I can just ask: Is the rebels or the coalition
forces, which we are supporting in Syria -- are they more
intent on fighting Assad or fighting ISIL?

General Dunford: The individuals that we are
supporting, specifically those in the north, are supporting
-- fighting ISIL.

Senator Manchin: More so than Assad.

General Dunford: More so than Assad.

Senator Manchin: Even though --
General Dunford: So, that includes the Syrian Arab Coalition and the YPG and some smaller groups that we've supported. And we have some other groups that we're beginning to negotiate with in the south that have expressed the same intent.

Senator Manchin: Thank you, sir.

Chairman McCain: Senator Inhofe.

Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Our committee rules have always been to submit the statements 24 hours in advance, and I -- that didn't -- it's really helpful to us if we can get that. And so, I'd ask you, in the future hearings, to do that.

Appreciate the fact that both the Chairman and you, Secretary Carter, mentioned by name Josh Wheeler. Josh Wheeler is from Roland, Oklahoma. He's one who is certainly a -- he was a hero before all of this happened, and, by his actions, he saved 70 lives of hostages and fellow members of the Coalition Task Force. And I -- so, I appreciate very much your talking about him.

I -- since the -- you were here before, Secretary Carter, in July, ISIL still controls much of the northern and western Iraq, despite more than a year of U.S. airstrikes and the loss of Ramadi. Significant setback. Russia continued its military buildup in Syria, as we've been talking about, and began operations to support Iraq.
Iran Quds Forces in Syria have been joined by Iranian support forces from Lebanon's Hezbollah to support the Assad regime. All under the command of General Soleimani, who previously directed attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq. And we talked about the change in the train-and-equip program, which I would like to get -- have you elaborate a little bit more on. But, in your statement that we got this morning, Secretary Carter, you said, quote, "To be clear, we are not cooperating with Russia, and we are not letting Russia impact the pace and scope of our campaign against ISIL in Iraq and Syria."

Last week, we had -- well, some time ago, we had Dr. Kissinger in as a witness, but then last week we had five professors that were there in one of our really good hearings that we had on -- I think it was on Wednesday or Thursday. And we quoted Dr. Kissinger when he said, quote, "Syria is the latest symptom of a disintegration of the American role in stabilizing the Middle East order," unquote.

Now, do you think that's inconsistent with the statements that you've made, Secretary Carter?

Secretary Carter: I think that the Middle East is certainly very tumultuous, but, once again, I come back to: our role is to protect American interests in that circumstance. And that's --
Senator Inhofe: Yeah, but are --

Secretary Carter: -- what we're doing. Whether it be the fight against ISIL, our alliances and partnerships with Gulf countries, and Israel, our posture in the Gulf, all of that is intended to protect American interests in the Middle East. And is the Middle East tumultuous? You bet it is. But, our anchor is the protection --

Senator Inhofe: Well, when I read your statement, it seemed to me that it's not totally consistent with that.

What do you think, General Dunford, about Kissinger's statement, in terms of our role in that part of the world?

General Dunford: Senator, thanks.

I mean, I -- what I would agree with, with former Secretary Kissinger, is that we have a critical role to play in the Middle East. We have national interests in the Middle East, and we should be decisively engaged in advancing those national interests.

Senator Inhofe: Yeah, okay, but -- and I know this is about the Middle East, but -- and Ukraine is another good example of what our posture is in that part of the world. And a lot of us here were actually -- well, I was there during the last election that they had, in October, when, for the first time in 96 years, they don't have one Communist on -- in their Parliament in the Ukraine. And so, Poroshenko and Yatsenyuk and -- they're all -- that was a
pro-Western effort. And then, immediately, Putin started killing them all. And our response was sending blankets and K-rations -- well, they don't call them K-rations anymore, but -- anyway, do you agree, General Dunford, that this is the right response that we should have had, to maintain what you have always perceived to be our role?

General Dunford: Senator, I don't want to be evasive, but I'm not sure it would be appropriate for me to comment on an issue of policy and what we ought to do. I mean, it -- I think my job is to provide military options to our leadership --

Senator Inhofe: Okay.

General Dunford: -- in support of the policy.

Senator Inhofe: Okay. We've been -- let me ask you a question, because I don't know. What is the current status of Fallujah?

General Dunford: Fallujah, right now, is being held by insurgents. And that is one of the areas that's been identified for future operations by Iraqi Security Forces.

Senator Inhofe: Well, yeah, that's -- you know what --

Chairman McCain: That's comforting. We know it's been identified.

Senator Inhofe: All right. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCain: Senator Heinrich.
Can't make it up.

Senator Heinrich: Secretary Carter -- Secretary Carter, if there is one lesson it seems to me we should have learned in the Middle East and North Africa by now, it's that every time we think it can't get worse, if there's not an end game, it can. Removing Saddam Hussein at the cost of thousands of American lives gave us a chaotic civil war, an ethnic war that led to the vacuum that helped spawn ISIL. In Libya, we removed a brutal dictator, only to see chaos and extremism reign across what can now only loosely be called a country.

So, to reference Senator Manchin's comments that we need to think about an end game, here, I think about the fact that many of our colleagues now believe that the solution to Syria today is to focus directly on the removal of the Assad regime rather than the current administration focus on ISIL.

So, I want to ask you: Were the Assad regime to fall without a plan in place for follow-on governance and a political settlement that could create some sort of stability, how confident are you that Syria wouldn't just slip into an even more chaotic state, you know, potentially threatening our allies in the region, creating new opportunities for ISIL, and creating a new wave of refugees that could make the current outpouring of refugees look
modest?

Secretary Carter: Well, that -- the end game we seek is both the defeat of ISIL and a transition in Syria. And, you're right, the sooner that occurs, the more likely it is that their -- the structures of Syrian society aren't completely destroyed by the time that transition occurs. That's why hastening that political transition -- Assad out and the political forces, to include the moderate Syrian forces now opposing Assad, have the opportunity to rebuild the country. That's the only way to put Syria back together. And the sooner that occurs, the better. That's why we -- we're supporting that political transition. But, at the same time, we have to defeat ISIL. They have to be militarily defeated. There's no --

Senator Heinrich: My point with respect to Assad is that, should Assad fall, we need to be thinking about what comes next so it's not just an opportunity for ISIL and other extremist groups in that region.

Secretary Carter: I believe that the talks that Secretary Kerry is having with various partners -- parties in the region this week are precisely aimed at deciding what the contours of that political settlement would be and what would come after it. But, one of the reasons why it's so important that this occur quickly is that the structures of the Syrian state are going to be important to the future,
and we don't want them to disintegrate entirely. And that's
why fueling the Syrian civil war, which is what the Russians
are doing, is so wrongheaded.

Senator Heinrich: General Dunford, with respect to the
potential no-fly-zone issue that was brought up earlier,
what would be the limitations of that kind of course of
action, given particularly the new fairly sophisticated air
defenses from Russia that are now inside Syria?

General Dunford: Senator, from a military perspective,
we can implement a no-fly zone, and we have the capability
to do that. The challenges are political, legal, and then a
diversion of the resources that are currently fighting ISIL
in support of that no-fly zone. So, those are among the
factors that were considered when we looked at the no-fly
zone.

Senator Heinrich: Moving back to you, Secretary
Carter, during your previous appearance before this
committee, in July, you emphasized that Prime Minister Abadi
was doing everything he could to recruit Sunnis to the
fight. And I think you said that, quote, "Only" -- or --
"Sunnis can take back Anbar." Do you still feel this way?
And can you update the committee on the progress, or lack of
progress, in training Iraqi Security Forces?

Secretary Carter: It is still true. The recapture of
western Iraq is going to require Sunni forces that
participate in that recapture and then, of course, that keep
the peace after the peace is won. That's why we're in -- so
intent on getting Sunni fighters into the fight. And the
legacy of Prime Minister Maliki was to make the armed forces
of Iraq more sectarian, to the detriment of the Sunnis.
That's one of the things that led to ISIL. I think that
Prime Minister Abadi is trying, but I think they -- that --
I'm going to be honest with you -- Iraq needs to --
Senator Heinrich: A lot of that --
Secretary Carter: -- do more --
Senator Heinrich: -- damage has been done.
Secretary Carter: -- to attract -- well, but if we're
going to reverse it, we need to try to recruit, pay, arm,
and equip the Sunni forces. That is our purpose. That's
what we're doing with the Iraqis. And that needs to be part
of the future.
If I can also address the no-fly zone, I just -- I just
want to be clear. We have studied the no-fly zone as -- the
Chairman's absolutely right, one knows how to do that. And
I thought it -- I'll give you some of the considerations
that go into that. And, by the way, I should -- the
President hasn't taken anything like this off the table.
You asked whether we've recommended that. At this stage,
we've not. A no-fly zone would be intended to prevent the
Syrian air force from, as the Chairman said, "barrel-
bombing" or otherwise using airpower, both fixed-wing and rotary-wing, against the civilians population. Where they're doing that is over in the western part of the country, which is not the area where we're flying in now, because we're flying and attacking ISIL, further to the east. That area is protected by the Syrian Integrated Air Defense System. So, were we to fly there, we would need to deal with the Syrian Integrated Air Defense System, which is a substantial undertaking of its own that we have, as the Chairman indicated, analyzed, and we certainly have capabilities to do. And then, we would be interdicting both fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft that were attacking the Syrian population.

The -- I should note that it -- however, that most of the civilian casualties inflicted by Assad's forces on the civilian population have been from artillery. And, obviously, this wouldn't do anything about artillery, but it would do something about airstrikes.

It's a substantial new undertaking. We've analyzed it. We've not made the recommendation to do it at this time. But, I respect people who are making recommendations for these kinds of zones. And then there are also humanitarian zones, which have been referenced also, which are a portion of Syria, now speaking conceptually, where people could congregate and be protected. Now, those -- a zone thus
created would be contested by ISIL, by al-Nusra, at a minimum, and so it would have to defended. So, again, it's a substantial military undertaking. The people who live there would, therefore, take a ground force, with accompanying air forces, to accomplish that. And the people who were protected could be people who live there or -- and I think some people who have moved into Turkey, whom Turkey wishes to move back. But, I just want to be clear that, to keep it safe would require fighting to keep it safe, because the people who want to terrorize the population would attempt to attack such a zone. So, you need to think, in each case -- and we've thought through several different cases -- who's in, who is kept out, and how the enforcement of it is done.

So, there are air zones and there are ground zones. We have considered all of them. And again, the President hasn't taken anything off the table. We've not made any specific recommendations in that regard, but we've looked at a variety of such possibilities.

Let me ask the Chairman if he has anything to add to that.

Chairman McCain: Senator Graham.

Senator Graham: Thank you, to my colleagues, for letting me jump ahead. I appreciate it very, very much.

I want to see if I've got this right. We're going to
train people inside of Syria to fight ISIL, rather than
training them outside of Syria; equip them inside and train
them inside, right? New strategy.

Secretary Carter: Yes. That's where they are.

Senator Graham: Okay. So, you know, count me in for
trying to help. Do we still want to replace Assad?

Secretary Carter: Oh, absolutely. I mean --

Senator Graham: Is that a goal of ours?

Secretary Carter: A -- yes -- a transition from Assad

Senator Graham: Okay.

Secretary Carter: -- to a government --

Senator Graham: Okay.

Secretary Carter: -- of Syria that is --

Senator Graham: General Dunford --

Secretary Carter: -- inclusive and moderate --

Senator Graham: Right.

Secretary Carter: -- and together.

Senator Graham: Right.

Secretary Carter: Absolutely.

Senator Graham: General Dunford, is it smart to let
Russia fight ISIL and we stay out of the fight?

General Dunford: Russia is not fighting ISIL, Senator.

Senator Graham: But, that wouldn't be a good idea, to
rely on Russia to fight ISIL for us.
General Dunford: Senator, I think we need to be engaged in advancing our own national interests. We have a national interest in dealing --

Senator Graham: Okay.

General Dunford: -- with ISIL, and --

Senator Graham: Okay.

General Dunford: -- we should be doing that.

Senator Graham: Okay, here's --

General Dunford: We can do it --

Senator Graham: -- the question.

General Dunford: -- it more effectively. I'm not confident --

Senator Graham: Right.

General Dunford: -- that Russia --

Senator Graham: Right.

General Dunford: -- is effective --

Senator Graham: I am --

General Dunford: -- would be effective at doing it.

Senator Graham: I'm a million percent with you.

Are we going to supply air support for the people we train to fight ISIL?

General Dunford: We are, Senator.

Senator Graham: Do those same people want to take Assad down?

General Dunford: The ones that we are supporting right
now are focused on ISIL, sir.

Senator Graham: Do they have a goal to take Assad down?

General Dunford: Senator, I don't know.

Senator Graham: What do you mean you don't know?

General Dunford: Well, the ones we're -- we -- I don't know because --

Senator Graham: Don't you think most people in Syria want two things: they want to fight -- they want to destroy ISIL and get rid of Assad, the person who's killed 250,000 of their family?

General Dunford: The --

Senator Graham: Is that really a mystery?

General Dunford: No, it's not --

Senator Graham: It's not --

General Dunford: -- Senator.

Senator Graham: -- a mystery. Okay. Is Russia going to fight for Assad?

General Dunford: Russia is fighting for Assad.

Senator Graham: Will Iran fight for Assad?

General Dunford: They are doing that, sir.

Senator Graham: Will Hezbollah fight for Assad?

General Dunford: They were doing that.

Senator Graham: When the people we train to fight ISIL turn on Assad, which they surely will, are we going to fight
with them to replace Assad?

General Dunford: I can't answer that question, Senator.

Senator Graham: Can you answer it, Secretary Carter?

Secretary Carter: Yeah, I -- just to be clear, let's take the --

Senator Graham: That days is coming.

Secretary Carter: -- YPG Kurds -- well, I -- the --

Senator Graham: Do you see a scenario where the --

Secretary Carter: Let me just --

Senator Graham: -- people in Syria --

Secretary Carter: Let me just address the --

Senator Graham: -- don't take --

Secretary Carter: -- the people that --

Senator Graham: -- on Assad?

Secretary Carter: -- the people that are -- that we are equipping are people who live in or come from ISIL-occupied territory, and they're --

Senator Graham: Do they want to take Assad down?

Secretary Carter: -- on defeating ISIL and --

Senator Graham: Do they want to take Assad down?

Secretary Carter: For the most part, they're focused on defeating --

Senator Graham: Do they want to take Assad -- have you asked them?
Secretary Carter: We know what their intent is, and it is to fight ISIL.

Senator Graham: Come on.

Secretary Carter: They're fighting ISIL now.

Senator Graham: You know as well as I do, both of you know, that the average Syrian not only wants to destroy ISIL, but they're intent on destroying Assad because he's killed 250,000 of them.

And here's the question for this committee. How do we leverage Assad leaving, when Russia's going to fight for him, Iran's going to fight for him, Hezbollah's fighting for him, and we're not going to do a damn thing to help people take him down? And you both know that. So, when Kerry goes over to Geneva, he is turning over Syria to the Russians and to the Iranians.

Is there any credible military threat to Assad now that Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah's on his side? Do you see any credible military threat to take him down, General Dunford?

General Dunford: I think the balance of forces right now are in Assad's advantage.

Senator Graham: Not his advantage. He is secure as the day is long.

So, this is what's happened, folks. The strategy is completely fallen apart. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah are going to fight for their guy, and we're not going to do a
damn thing to help the people who want to change Syria for the better by getting rid of the dictator in Damascus.

Do you see a scenario, Secretary Carter, where we would fight to support an effort to take Assad down, that we would fight alongside of people who want to take Assad down in Syria? Is that remotely possible?

Secretary Carter: We are -- our approach to removing Assad has been to --

Senator Graham: Does it have a military component?

Secretary Carter: It is principally a political effort in Syria. Our --

Senator Graham: So, the answer --

Secretary Carter: -- military effort in Syria --

Senator Graham: -- is no.

Secretary Carter: -- our military effort in Syria --

Senator Graham: Are we going to fight with people who want to take Assad down? Are we going to provide them military help?

Secretary Carter: Our train-and-equip program --

Senator Graham: The answer is no.

Secretary Carter: -- is to provide --

Senator Graham: The answer is no --

Secretary Carter: -- is supportive of people --

Senator Graham: The answer is no.

Secretary Carter: -- who are fighting ISIL.
Senator Graham: So, let me just end this. If I'm Assad, this is a good day for me, because the American government has just said, without saying it, that they're not going to fight to replace me. The Russians and the Iranians and Hezbollah, this is a really good day for them, because their guy has no military credible threat.

So, now you tell me what kind of deal we're going to get, folks. I'm sure we'll get a really good deal with this construct. So, what you've done, gentlemen, along with the President, is, you've turned Syria over to Russia and Iran. You've told the people in Syria, who have died by the hundreds of thousands, we're more worried about a political settlement than we are about what follows.

All I can say, this is a sad day for America, and the region will pay hell for this, because the Arabs are not going to accept this. The people in Syria are not going to accept this. This is a half-assed strategy, at best.

Chairman McCain: Since a quorum is now present, I ask the committee to consider a list of 1,663 pending military nominations. All of these nominations have been before the committee the required length of time. Is there a motion so -- favorably report these 1,663 nominations --

Senator Reed: So moved.

Chairman McCain: -- to the Senate?

Is there a second?
Senator Kaine: Second.

Chairman McCain: All in favor, say aye.

[A chorus of ayes.]

Chairman McCain: The motion carries.

Senator Kaine.

Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you, to the witnesses, for your service and testimony.

Secretary Carter, you stated that the primary objective of our actions, as you’ve described this morning, is the defeat of ISIL. And I want to dig into that a little bit.

Currently -- I think I'm right on this -- we are engaged in activities against ISIL, military activities in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, and then, when we were on a -- during that week of congressional recess, the President sent to Congress a war powers letter indicating the detachment of, I think, 300 American troops to Cameroon to assist in activities against Boko Haram, which has pledged allegiance to ISIL. Have I omitted any countries where there is currently activity that is either ISIL activity or groups that have pledged allegiance to ISIL?

Secretary Carter: We're watching ISIL all over the world, Senator. As you know, it has aspirations and tries to metastasize, uses the Web. I mean, you -- we have had -- and Director Comey's made this very clear -- Americans who
have self-radicalized --

Senator Kaine: That -- actually, that --

Secretary Carter: And so --

Senator Kaine: That's going to be my --

Secretary Carter: -- this is a --

Senator Kaine: -- next question.

Secretary Carter: -- phenomenon that is around the

world. We're watching it around the world -- not just

ourselves, but in law enforcement and intelligence circles.

It's one of the reasons why ISIL needs to be defeated.

Senator Kaine: In terms of kind of kinetic activities

by the military, though, am I right that currently, it's

Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, and then the

deployment of troops to Cameroon?

Secretary Carter: It depends on what you mean by that.

You want to go ahead, Joe?

General Dunford: Senator, we don't currently have

operations ongoing in Yemen -- direct operations against

ISIL. We don't have operations against -- Libya against

ISIL. And our support in Cameroon is ISR support in support

of operations against Boko Haram.

Senator Kaine: Okay. But, Secretary Carter --

Secretary Carter: We can get you what we're doing --

Senator Kaine: Yeah.

Secretary Carter: -- in each country. But, it's --
[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]
Chairman McCain: And I don't want to get into asking about non-DOD title activity, so I'll omit that, but just -- I think the record, in the public record, about activities in those countries is fairly plain.

Secretary Carter, you indicate we're watching ISIL in other countries. Is it fair to assume, based on your joint professional judgment, that ISIL continues to mutate and find adherents in other countries, and we may well have to contemplate DOD activity against ISIL in nations other than those that I've mentioned?

Secretary Carter: It could come to that. And that's why I think we need to kill the source of it, which is in Syria and --

Senator Kaine: Iraq.

Secretary Carter: -- Iraq.

Senator Kaine: Is it fair to assume -- you know, we pray that this is not the case, but that the death of Master Sergeant Wheeler may not be the last death of an American servicemember in this campaign to defeat ISIL?

Secretary Carter: I think we need to be realistic. We are -- our people will be in positions -- they are right now, every day; there are people flying right now, there are people training and advising forces there, and they are in harm's way. There's no doubt about it.

Senator Kaine: And we've lost service personnel,
before Master Sergeant Wheeler, not necessarily in direct combat or kinetic activities, but, as you say, they were in positions of danger because of their support for this mission against ISIL.

Secretary Carter: Yes. Make no mistake, they are in harm's way in this fight against ISIL. No doubt about it.

Senator Kaine: In your professional judgment, your notion that the primary objective is the defeat of ISIL, how long will that take?

Secretary Carter: It needs to be -- I can't tell you how long it will take, but I think that the -- it needs to be soon, which is why we're so intent upon strengthening our effort, which is why we are working with the Iraqis and trying to get them to field more Sunni forces, strengthening our training and equipping of Sunni forces, why we're prepared to do more with those forces in Iraq. The President's indicated that, and indicated a willingness for the Chairman and me to make him recommendations in that regard. So, to enable those Sunni forces so that they can take back the Sunni territories of Iraq. And, over in Syria, it's Raqqa.

Senator Kaine: If I can --

Secretary Carter: And that's why the Syrian -- the coalition forces that are intent -- to get back to the question that Senator Graham was raising -- they want to
attack Raqqa and --

Senator Kaine: If I can --

Secretary Carter: -- take back Raqqa, which is occupied by ISIL. And they, therefore, deserve our support, and are receiving our support.

Senator Kaine: Mr. Secretary, when you say "soon," let's just be realistic, sitting here today. Aren't we talking -- I mean, with all the countries that we've mentioned, and your acknowledged possibility that there could be more, aren't we talking about an effort that is likely to be a multiyear effort, certainly well into the next administration?

Secretary Carter: That's probably the case. And the reason is that the strategy is to -- and this is an important part of the strategy, and we've said it right from the very beginning -- is to support capable and motivated forces that can retake and hold territory, not to try to substitute for them. That's the only way to have a lasting victory. And that -- it takes some time to identify those forces, to motivate those forces, to train those forces. And it depends upon the political circumstances in both Iraq and Syria. So, it does depend upon the political circumstances. That isn't something that is anything other than a very real factor there. But, that's necessary in order to have a lasting defeat, because we want ISIL not
only to be defeated, but it has to stay defeated. And that means the people who live there need to govern themselves and restore the peace and order. And that's what takes the time, is to develop those forces. And it is hard work, but that's what we're doing in Iraq, and that's what we're doing in the new train-and-equip program in Syria. It will take some time.

Senator Kaine: Mr. Chair, I'll just conclude and say that I think that that answer, about the complexity and the fact that this, under any circumstances, is going to take significant time, is a very relevant one for us. The administration's position about the authority to wage this war is based upon an authorization that was passed on September 18, 2001, before many of us were here, that specifically says the President is authorized to use force against those who planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001. And I would just renew my observation that I think it would have been far beyond the contemplation of the Members of Congress who voted on that at the time, and it's certainly beyond the contemplation of those of us who did not vote on that at the time, that those words would be applying, 15 years later, to an effort in the countries I just mentioned that may mutate to other countries that is, by the admission of our witnesses today, likely to take a good deal more. I
think it's very much time that Congress revisit the question of this authorization and try to provide some underlying legal justification for the ongoing military action.

With that, Mr. Chair, I thank you.

Chairman McCain: Senator Fischer.

Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Carter, would you assess ISIL and al-Nusra to be among the most capable rebelled groups that are on the Syrian battlefield?

Secretary Carter: I would. They -- they're ferocious, they are extremely cruel and brutal. And, of course, some of these forces that are not trying to brutalize the population, but trying to fight Assad, are, as has been indicated, more moderate Syrian forces, and they don't behave that way, and that's why they deserve to be, and will be, part of the Syrian political future after Assad.

Senator Fischer: Are you concerned that the Russian and Iranian attacks are going to further polarize the battlefield and we're going to see more moderate fighters cooperate with ISIL and al-Nusra because those groups are more capable?

Secretary Carter: Well, that's precisely the point I've made to the Russians. The way I put it is, they -- pouring gasoline on the civil war in Syria by supporting Iraq, and they're going to -- they're going to enhance the
very extremism that they say they fear, and they have every reason to fear, because now ISIL and other groups, including Syrian opposition groups of all stripes, are turned against Russia. And Russia's had very bitter experience with extremism in their own country. And this is why their actions are not consistent with their words and are -- I keep using the phrase "wrongheaded."

Senator Fischer: Have you --

Secretary Carter: They say they're doing one thing, and they're actually doing another.

Senator Fischer: Have you told Russia not to attack units that have been trained by the U.S. or to avoid certain areas where U.S.-affiliated groups may be operating? Or have you indicated to the Russians in any way that the United States will respond to such attacks?

Secretary Carter: Well, we've certainly indicated that we intend to prosecute our counter-ISIL campaign unchanged, and we don't intend to make any changes, and that we're determined to do that. And we haven't.

Senator Fischer: So, you have communicated to the Russians that, if there are attacks on U.S.-trained troops -- or U.S.-trained units in any way, that we will respond.

Secretary Carter: I've said earlier in this testimony, and I've said publicly, that we have an obligation to our -- the forces that we've trained and equipped, to protect them.
And we intend to do that.

Senator Fischer: But, that does not include the coalition-trained troops -- units. Is that correct?

Secretary Carter: Well, we don't control all of the opposition forces to Assad. This gets back to the earlier question. Our train-and-equip program that the Department of Defense runs is oriented towards fighters whose principal preoccupation is fighting ISIL. There are others who are fighting Assad, and they do come under attack by the Russians. And that's why -- and -- because some of them --

Senator Fischer: Would it --

Secretary Carter: -- deserve to be part of the Syrian political future, that's a serious mistake on Russia's part.

Senator Fischer: Would it be a serious mistake on Russia's part to attack any units that have been trained by other agencies besides the Department of Defense? Would we have a response in that case?

Secretary Carter: I -- that's something we'd have to talk about separately, Senator.

Senator Fischer: Under Secretary Warmuth stated that Article 2 of the Constitution allows the President to use force against Assad if he attacks Syrian rebels trained by the U.S. I would assume that a similar determination has been made with respect to using force against Russian planes if they attack U.S.-trained rebels. Is that true?
Secretary Carter: Let me just repeat what I said about the -- for the Department of Defense forces that we are training and equipping in Syria, we have an obligation to protect them. They're fighting ISIL. They're far from the territory that is contested or where the Russians are operating. But, we do have an obligation to defend them.

With respect to other Syrian opposition forces and so forth, that's something we'd have to discuss in a closed --

Senator Fischer: Would the United States take action against Russian planes if Russian planes were attacking U.S.-trained units?

Secretary Carter: I -- just to repeat, we have indicated that we have an obligation, we have options, to protect our people, whom we have trained, against attack.

Senator Fischer: I would appreciate if you could provide us with some more information for the record. Specifically, if United States forces have the legal authority to intervene if Assad's forces attack U.S.-trained fighters, but not if Russia attacks such fighters, if you could provide some clarification there; specifically, legal authority.

Secretary Carter: Will do. But, the short form is, as I say, we have an obligation, I believe we have the legal authority to do that. But, I'm happy to put that in more detail.
[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]
Secretary Carter: And then, there are other aspects that you're alluding to that we'd simply have to talk about in closed session.

Senator Fischer: Okay.

Thank you.

Chairman McCain: Senator King.

Senator King: Mr. Secretary, before Senator Graham began his important line of questioning, I wrote, in my notes, "The opposition will never push Assad out as long as Russia and Iran are all-in." I think that's just the reality. And the question is, What do we do about that? And there will be no -- we can't say, "Well, there'll be a political solution, there'll be negotiations." The negotiations will flow out of the military situation. They've already shown they're not going to negotiate as long as they think they're solidly in power, which they clearly think they do. On the other hand, talking about a no-fly zone, which would bring us in direct conflict with the Russian air force, raises very large geopolitical questions.

But, give me some more thoughts on Senator Graham's line of questioning. Let's be realistic. You know, wishing is not going to make a policy. Assad is going to be there as long as Russia and Iran are willing to stay all-in. How do we change their calculus without a significant additional commitment of military power?
Secretary Carter: Two things. The -- first of all, the -- Russian support to Assad is having the effect of increasing and catalyzing and motivating the opposition to Assad. And so, I believe that both the Russians and the Syrians will see the effects of that on the battlefield. You're right, there will be -- conditioned by the military situation on the ground there.

With respect to the political transition and at what point Russia would recognize that its actions were fueling Syria's civil war and fueling the extremism it fears, I can't say -- speak to that.

Senator King: That's what that --

Secretary Carter: Now, that is --

Senator King: They --

Secretary Carter: -- what Secretary --

Senator King: The --

Secretary Carter: Kerry is exploring with the Russians.

Senator King: The Russians --

Secretary Carter: But, I can't --

Senator King: -- have to decide --

Secretary Carter: -- say when and whether they will reach that conclusion.

Senator King: They have to decide that ISIS is a bigger threat to them than the loss of Assad. And I don't
know when that's going to occur; but I agree with you, that's the narrow diplomatic opening. But, right now, they seem to be trying to have it both ways. And you -- as you point out, they can't. As long as they prop up Assad, they're essentially propping up ISIS.

Secretary Carter: This is --

Senator King: Because Assad is --

Secretary Carter: This is the --

Senator King: -- the stimulus.

Secretary Carter: -- logical contradiction in their approach. There's no question about it. I've said that from the day that it started, and I said that to the Russian counterpart, why it's so wrongheaded, their approach. And at what stage they'll recognize that, I don't know. I do commend Secretary Kerry for talking to them and trying to find a different way, but they'd have to reach that recognition, and a part of that will be learned on the battlefield, and part of it will be learned in terms of extremism and how it is turned on Russia.

Senator King: But, I think the question that the administration has to address is, How do we ratchet up pressure on Assad to change the military calculus in such a way that it's going to move that calculation?

Let me just change the subject for a minute. Both of you used the term, with regard to the Iraqi army, "capable,
motivated Iraqi forces." Isn't that an oxymoron? You, yourself, have pointed out that this -- that's what's been missing in Iraq. Is there any likelihood that that's changing? Do we --

Secretary Carter: There are some --

Senator King: -- have any intelligence on that?

Secretary Carter: There are some, but not nearly enough. For example, the Counter-Terrorism Service, the Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service, which has been trained by the United States over time, is an effective, capable, motivated force. What we lack enough of in Iraq are capable and motivated Sunni forces. That is the type of force that is in short supply, and that is why it's so important that the Government of Iraq continue to recruit Sunnis, pay them. We will equip them and train them, and we'll support them in the battlefield. But, it will require Sunni forces to retake Sunni territory --

Senator King: Does Abadi understand that in his gut, or is he just giving lip service to this inclusion? Because if he doesn't, if this isn't real inclusion, we're sunk.

Secretary Carter: He has been consistent in what he has told us, and --

Senator King: But, is his actions --

Secretary Carter: -- including --

Senator King: -- are his actions bearing that out?
Secretary Carter: I think you have to be -- I'd have to be candid and say that Prime Minister Abadi does not have his -- complete sway over everything that happens in Iraq. We have insisted that anything we do to support Iraqi forces must be by and through the Government of Iraq. But, very clearly -- and you see it -- there are militias of various kinds, Shi'a militias, that are inadequately under the control of the government in Baghdad, and that's one of the challenges there. But, the forces --

Senator King: Well --

Secretary Carter: -- we support are those that are under the control of Prime Minister Abadi. And I have talked to him, and I believe he is sincere in wanting to do the right thing there. But, again, wanting to do the right thing and having a complete authority are two different things in Baghdad. I think his authority is growing in that regard, but we do not yet have all the Sunni forces recruited, paid, enrolled, trained, and so forth, that we need and want.

Senator King: Well, I certainly hope we'll use our influence to the maximum, because if that doesn't -- if that inclusion doesn't happen, then this whole enterprise is for naught.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCain: Senator Ernst.
Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, thank you for being here today. Thank you very much for your service.

It's a very difficult time, General Dunford. I was in theater with a handful of colleagues about the week before you were in theater. I was very disturbed at what I see going on on the ground. It's a very tumultuous time.

Chairman Dunford, you did state that we need to take the fight to ISIL, and we need to continue the momentum. And it's concerning, because to continue the momentum, we actually have to have momentum, going forward. And, right now, the only group that I see in Iraq that's fighting ISIL that has momentum is the Kurdish Peshmerga. And again, everybody knows how I feel about this. They've been great allies to us. And, in testimony before this committee over the past several months, we've had many, many prestigious military -- former military commanders and governmental officials, such as General David Petraeus, General Mike Hayden, General Jack Keane, and, of course, former Secretary Bob Gates. And all of them agree that we really do need to enhance our support to the Iraqi Kurds as part of a more comprehensive strategy against ISIS.

And I'm very concerned that right now our current strategy piecemeals the weapons, the equipment, and -- my gush, we have so many various types of calibers of weapons
-- that's going from our coalition partners and the United States to the Kurdish Peshmerga. And, as a logistician, as a transporter, you know, supported those forces, our forces in Iraq, I know how difficult this would be for any army, that we are piecemealing so much up to the Peshmerga.

So, what is our strategy to develop a more capable Peshmerga force for the long-term fight for ISIS? Secretary Carter, if you could address that, please.

Secretary Carter: Absolutely. You're absolutely right. The Kurdish Peshmerga are a excellent example of capable and motivated ground forces. And so, they have taken and held territory. We support the -- and most recently, of course, in the operation conducted this past week.

With respect to equipping them -- and you know from your logistics background, as you indicated very well -- that rapidity and certainty of supply are very important to them. And we have a policy of routing equipment to the Kurdish Peshmerga through the government of Baghdad and -- I think that's where -- the hinge on which your question turns -- for the reason -- to get back to what Senator King was asking earlier -- that our approach to Iraq is to try to support a multisectarian government in Baghdad. So, we're trying to do both: supply the Peshmerga and support Prime Minister Abadi as the leader of the country overall.
Now, in the early days, that led -- that issue led to some delay in our supplies to the Kurdish Peshmerga. Those delays do not occur now. And so, we -- and, by the way, it's not just us; I think there are more than 14 other countries that are shipping tons and tons --

Senator Ernst: Quite a few.

Secretary Carter: -- of question to the Kurdish --

Senator Ernst: Quite a few.

Secretary Carter: -- Peshmerga. And so, I do not believe there now is a bottleneck in our supply to the Kurdish Peshmerga. We still do go through the routine of shipping through and with the permission of the government of Baghdad, for the very simple reason that we want to stick up for the principle of --

Senator Ernst: I do believe that we need to do a better job at this.

General Dunford, just very quick, if I could turn to you. How do the Iraqi Security Forces, or the Iraqi Army -- how do their maneuver, fires, and effects units compare to the Kurdish Peshmerga's units?

General Dunford: I think the best of the Iraqis, the CTS forces and some of the brigades we trained, compare favorably to the Peshmerga. The Peshmerga also have, you know, very competent forces. But, I think the best of the Iraqis are about comparable to the Peshmerga.
Senator Ernst: Okay. And we're utilizing them to the best of our capability?

General Dunford: We are. And we -- and, Senator, that's an important question, because the one thing that the commanders told me is, those brigades that we actually have put through training, there is a qualitative difference in their performance. There's two brigades, for example, surrounding Ramadi right now that have gone through our training program, and those two brigades have performed at a much higher level than the other units, as well as the CTS, the Counter-Terrorism Service, who's also performed very well.

Senator Ernst: So, you believe that training and advising and assisting below the division level would be very important in any future operations.

General Dunford: I do --

Senator Ernst: For --

General Dunford: From a training perspective, in particular, yes, Senator.

Senator Ernst: I do believe that needs to be part of our decisionmaking process as we move forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman McCain: Senator Hirono.

Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Dunford, in your testimony, you went over a
number of areas that we need to focus on in our fight to defeat ISIL. And you said that we need to do more to cut the flow of foreign fighters to ISIL. Can you briefly describe what we're doing now and what more we need to do in this area?

General Dunford: I can, Senator. I had an -- we have a team on the ground. They're part of a ten-nation coalition that's working on foreign fighters right now. But, it's mostly a military view of foreign fighters. And so, when I sat down and spoke to that team, you know, one of the challenges that became clear is that we really don't have, amongst all the coalition, kind of a common view of where the foreign fighters come from, how they move back and forth into the area, but, more importantly, not much of a track on where they go once they leave back to their home country. So, from my perspective -- and this is an area that Secretary Carter and I have spoken to Secretary Kerry about last week -- from my perspective, we need to do much more: one, to get a view of foreign fighters as a whole, and then make sure we maximize the legal, the military, and the political tools that are available to us to cut off the flow of foreign fighters.

Senator Hirono: So, is this an area that we're going to see some kind of a measurable improvement?

General Dunford: Senator, for me, when I came back
from my visit, there are two areas that I think we need to focus on to move the campaign forward. Two of many. And the two that I personally engage on is, one, foreign fighters, and the other is intelligence.

Senator Hirono: So, you're -- we're going to see some appreciable, measurable improvements. And I know you can't talk about the intelligence side of things in this setting.

So, Secretary Carter, in response to a question, you said that the timeframe for defeating ISIL is -- it better be soon. And, from everything that we understand, this is -- this whole area of the world is a -- very complicated. And so, it is, I realize, difficult to really hone in, I suppose, on what a reasonable timeframe may be. At the same time, with regard to Assad, there were indications that he was about to collapse, that his regime was about to collapse. But, now that Russia has come in to bolster the Assad regime, two questions: How long do you think that Assad can be propped up by Russia's actions? And, two, do you think that Putin really is looking at a long-term scenario, where Assad stays in place, or is he much more interested, long term, in the stability of Syria for Russia's own interests?

Secretary Carter: I can't say what Vladimir Putin is thinking about Assad's future, but I can tell what his behavior suggests. And that is that he is -- does want to
support, at least for now, Assad, avoid the collapse of the Syrian state, which, as you indicated, I think he believed could occur, and that was one of the things that spurred his support -- enhanced support for Assad. I've told you what I think of that approach. I think that it has the -- it's going to backfire, and that is have the opposite of the effect that he is seeking. It enhances the opposition to Assad, and it also enhances the extremism he says he fears. So, it's not a very sensible strategy, but that appears to be what his behavior is --

Senator Hirono: Well, that --

Secretary Carter: -- suggests.

Senator Hirono: That appears to be his immediate goal, but I think that Putin is also smart enough to figure out that if he really wants stability in Syria, he may not be able to get it as long as Assad is in power.

I wanted to get to the no-fly zone. What would we need to do -- if a no-fly zone is declared in Syria, what would we need to do to make sure that that no-fly zone sticks?

Either one of you.

Secretary Carter: Yeah, I'll start, and then maybe the Chairman can say.

So, we have now, for quite a while, and preceding my time as Secretary of Defense, analyzed the possibility of no-fly zones. And I've tried to give you some of the -- an
indication of some of the considerations there. That would involve operating in the part of the country which is not generally where we're conducting air operations now and where there are Syrian air defenses.

Senator Hirono: Yes.

Secretary Carter: And if we were going to put air crews in that environment, we would have to take care of those air defenses, which is a substantial military undertaking in its own --

Senator Hirono: So, one scenario could --

Secretary Carter: -- right.

Senator Hirono: -- be that Assad would be -- would not abide by a no-fly zone, and we would need to protect --

Secretary Carter: No. I think you have to --

Senator Hirono: -- it. Therefore, we would be in --

Secretary Carter: -- assume it would be contested.

Senator Hirono: -- direct conflict --

Secretary Carter: Yeah, I think you have to assume --

Senator Hirono: -- with Assad.

Secretary Carter: -- that these -- an air -- no-fly zone would be contested by Assad, because --

Senator Hirono: Yes.

Secretary Carter: -- its very intent was to engage his air force. And just, again, to get back to Senator Graham's point, we have not undertaken to have U.S. forces engage
1 Assad's forces in a war for control --
2     Senator Hirono: And that's probably one of the reasons
3         --
4     Secretary Carter: -- of Syria.
5     Senator Hirono: -- with that kind of --
6     Secretary Carter: We haven't taken that step.
7     Senator Hirono: -- excuse me -- with that kind of
8     likely scenario, it's probably one of the reasons that we
9     hesitate in --
10    Secretary Carter: That's a --
11    Senator Hirono: -- creating a no-fly zone.
12    Senator Hirono: -- substantial and new military
13    undertaking. And, likewise --
14    Senator Hirono: Thank you.
15    Secretary Carter: -- zones on the ground would be have
16    to be defended, as well, so there are military implications
17    to the declaration of such zones. We have thought them
18    through, but we have not made recommendations to --
19    Senator Hirono: Thank you very much, Chairman.
20    Chairman McCain: What you're saying is the strongest
21    nation in the world with the most capable military can't
22    even establish a no-fly zone to protect people from being
23    barrel-bombed by Bashar Assad. That's -- it's an
24    embarrassing moment.
25    Secretary Carter: Just to be --
Chairman McCain: Senator Tillis.

Secretary Carter: -- clear, Chairman, we could do it.

I -- but I --

Chairman McCain: Of course we could do it. People like General Petraeus and General Keane and every other military leader that I have know of -- and we're talking about having to shoot down all the -- all we have to do is protect it and tell them not to fly into it, show -- history shows that they won't, if they're going to get shot down.

Senator Tillis.

Senator Tillis: General Dunford, Secretary Carter said that the Russian presence in Syria has not affected the pace or the scope of U.S. operations there. Is that because the pace is slow and the scope is narrow? How does that -- I mean, how does that happen, when we have the administration saying that we're not going to have any sort of conflicts with Russian air presences in Syria? It would seem like it is affecting the pace and scope. Do you agree with Secretary Carter?

General Dunford: Senator, I do. We are -- because we're focused on ISIL, and the Russians are largely conducting operations to the west, we are not operating in the same area as the Russians right now. And we've had two or three incidents where we've had contact with Russian aircraft, and those preceded the Memorandum of Understanding
that was signed on the 20th of the month.

Senator Tillis: So, that -- I guess that goes back to what Chairman McCain said. A part of that is because we're not necessarily providing support to those who are not trained, who are trying to take the fight to Assad but were not specifically trained by us. Is that -- I mean, is that --

General Dunford: That's correct, Senator. We're operating in two different areas.

Senator Tillis: I want to get to Iraq, and specifically in your meetings in Iraq. First, I'd like an update on Iranian presence there; and then, secondly -- I've only been here for 10 months, and the discussion about having the Iraqi government reengage the Sunnis is already a broken record. Over the last year, is there any tangible evidence that they've actually acted on the words --

General Dunford: Senator --

Senator Tillis: -- of reengaging?

General Dunford: Yeah. Senator, with the caveat that we're not satisfied with the outreach to the Sunni, and very aware that that's a necessary condition for us to be successful, is that we actually do have an inclusive government, inclusive of the Sunni, there has been some progress. For example, in the Anbar Province, there was an agreement to train and equip 8,000 Sunni. We've had about
5,000 that have been identified, have been recruited, and have been trained, of that 8,000 number. So -- and that's slow progress --

Senator Tillis: Is that more --

General Dunford: -- for some --

Senator Tillis: Is that more transactional -- sorry, General Dunford, I want to be sensitive to time -- is that more of a transactional win, or do you -- are you seeing any sort of systemic changes that are going to make sure that that remains sustained and that we build on it?

General Dunford: I can't tell you that I've seen systemic changes, Senator.

Senator Tillis: I don't think there is any.

What about the Iranian presence in Iraq right now? Where are they? What are they doing? And what should we be concerned with?

General Dunford: Well, they still have the provisional forces that are there.

Senator Tillis: So, that's --

General Dunford: Soleimani's --

Senator Tillis: -- still around 1,000?

General Dunford: You know, Senator, the numbers have been bounced around. I think it's been more -- you say 1,000?

Senator Tillis: Uh-huh.
General Dunford: Yeah, I think there's more than 1,000 Iranians that are on the ground in Iraq.

Senator Tillis: And in Syria?

General Dunford: In Syria, we think the numbers are probably something less than 2,000, is our assessment.

Senator Tillis: Secretary Carter, I appreciate you mentioning Sergeant Wheeler. I know that he was from Oklahoma, but he and his wife and four sons, including a 3-month-old, live down in North Carolina. I think that, in that particular operation, you made a comment that those are the -- those are operations that are probably occurring frequently, if -- not a daily basis, but frequently, and American soldiers are at risk. In my opinion, I think the Peshmerga would consider that a combat operation. Do you consider what Sergeant Wheeler was doing a combat operation?

Secretary Carter: Sure. He was killed in combat. It -- that wasn't the intent, obviously. He was accompanying those forces. But, when he saw that they were running into trouble, he very heroically acted in a way that all the reports suggest spelled the difference between the success and failure of that important mission.

Senator Tillis: Thank you.

Secretary Carter: So, it clearly was a --

Senator Tillis: My final --

Secretary Carter: -- heroic.
Senator Tillis: -- question. I want to start with General Dunford.

General Dunford, were you consulted by the President before he vetoed the NDA?

General Dunford: I was not, Senator.

Senator Tillis: Do you consider the NDA being having been passed either positive or negative to the men and women in uniform in your efforts?

General Dunford: Senator, I think my job is to identify the requirements that we need to support the force --

Senator Tillis: Do you think some of those requirements were fulfilled by our passage of the NDA?

General Dunford: There were -- absolutely, sir.

Senator Tillis: Okay. And --

General Dunford: Inside the ND--

Senator Tillis: -- as a result of the veto, those requirements are not going to be fulfilled unless we can come up with a solution?

General Dunford: Unless there's a solution, Senator.

Senator Tillis: Thank you.

Senator -- or, Secretary Carter, were you consulted by the President before he vetoed the NDA?

Secretary Carter: I was, yes.

Senator Tillis: And what was your recommendation to
Secretary Carter: My recommendation was to support his veto.

Senator Tillis: Was to support his veto?

Secretary Carter: I did -- I supported it. I'll tell you why. Two --

Senator Tillis: That was going to be my next question.

Secretary Carter: Sure. Two principal reasons. The first is that I -- and I started saying this in March, and I -- it -- I believe it --

Senator Tillis: Mr. Carter, I'm going to be out of time. There may be other people --

Secretary Carter: Well, let me just --

Senator Tillis: -- following up with it, but I --

Secretary Carter: -- tell you what those two --

Senator Tillis: Let me -- let me finish.

Secretary Carter: It's an important subject.

Senator Tillis: And then, to the extent the Chair will let you continue, I will defer to him.

But, are you telling me, then, that you think that the President's veto leaves our military -- of the NDA -- better than with it?

Secretary Carter: I -- the President's veto of the NDAA is something that reflected two facts, just to get back to what I was going to say. One is that we need -- and I
believe the Department of Defense needs -- budget stability
greater than a 1-year horizon --
Senator Tillis: And so, taking a step back --
Secretary Carter: -- and a foundation of base funding
that is adequate --
Senator Tillis: Mr. Secretary, nobody on this --
Secretary Carter: -- to our needs --
Senator Tillis: -- committee disagrees with you.
That's a well-worn path in discussions that goes all the way
back to sequestration. But, I find it remarkable, given the
circumstances we're in now and the testimony today, that we
would take a step back with this NDA while we continue to
fight that fight, because that's going to require a willing
administration. And one thing's clear to me, this
administration is not willing to confront the challenges
that these men and women have in uniform today. Taking a
step back in these dangerous times, I don't think makes
sense. And I respectfully disagree with your recommendation
to support the veto.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Secretary Carter: Well, if I can just say, I think
that I -- just to say what I think we need. What we need is
what I hope is going on now, which is a true budget
agreement, where Washington comes together behind a honest,
straightforward budget with some multiyear horizon. That's
what the Department deserves, and that's what I've been saying for months. And perhaps that is occurring as we speak.

But, I can only be honest and say what I think is best for the Department. And that's, honestly, what we need. I realize that no individual member or individual committee can deliver that. It requires a coming together of gridlocked Washington behind an overall budget deal. I fervently hope that that occurs. I know there's some indication -- I'm not involved in it -- over the last couple of days that that might occur, and that is what I have been urging ever since March. And I fervently hope that can occur. That's what the troops deserve. That's what the world needs to see.

Chairman McCain: I would point out that OCO will be part of this agreement, as well.

Mr. Secretary, if you want to complete your answer, please continue. Or have you completed it?

Secretary Carter: There's just one other aspect that I'd ask the committee, also apropos of the NDAA. There are a number of reforms that we have requested now for several years consecutively that have been denied in the authorization bill. And I'd ask for --

Chairman McCain: For example?

Secretary Carter: -- that they be -- some having to do
with healthcare, some having to do with readjustments in force structure. These are things that the relevant armed services have determined are the optimal use of their resources. And the authority to carry out those reforms has been denied. And I'd just appeal to you not to -- to allow those reforms, because it is the professional judgment of the Department of Defense that better use for those funds can be had. And in years when it's difficult to find funding for the Federal Government -- and I understand all the reasons for that -- we have to use every dollar we do get to the -- for the -- to best use. And we're not able to do that with some of the restrictions that are in the NDAA. And that's another reason why I'd ask you to reconsider some of its provisions.

Thank you for the time to elaborate on that, Senator.

Chairman McCain: Well, I'd also point out that there's about $11 billion in savings, including in a mandatory 7-and-a-half-percent-per-year reduction in headquarters staff, which we'll be glad to show you the dramatic growth in those, tooth-to-tail, and many other reforms that have been made. And I look forward to looking at further reforms with you as we begin new hearings when we resolve this issue and further very necessary reforms that we feel are called for.

And I'm proud of the reforms, frankly, that, in a bipartisan basis, this committee enacted. I am proud of the
fact that we have dramatically revised the retirement system. I am proud of the fact that we are finally trying to get a handle on the cost overruns that has characterized acquisition practices.

So, you may have some concerns. I can't tell you, after being on this committee for nearly 30 years, how proud I am of the bipartisan product that we've produced. And I hope that maybe sometime you might recognize that.

Senator Blumenthal.

Secretary Carter: May I just second that?

Chairman McCain: Yes, go ahead.

Secretary Carter: We're proud, too. I -- and I thank you. And I thank you, personally. I don't mean to say there -- --

Chairman McCain: No problem.

Secretary Carter: -- that reforms haven't been enacted. There are some additional ones that we would like to have. But, I salute the committee. And the only way we can ask the taxpayer to give us more money for defense, which we need, is if we can also show that we use every dollar well. So, I appreciate your leadership in that regard.

Chairman McCain: Well, I thank you, Mr. Secretary. We do look forward to it. We'll have hearings, beginning this week, on restructures that I -- restructuring that I think
are necessary. We want to work very closely with you. And
I'm very proud to work very closely with a graduate of West
Point.

Senator Blumenthal.

Senator Blumenthal: Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

And I thank both of you for your service to our Nation,
and for your candid and forthright answers today in an area
that is exceedingly difficult.

As you may know, I'm working with a number of
colleagues who both supported and opposed the Joint
Comprehensive Plan of Action to strengthen United States
policy toward Iran; in other words, to improve and
strengthen that agreement -- among other ways, by providing
more military assistance to our allies in the area, and
anticipating that some of the financial windfall will go
toward increased extremism and even terrorist violence in
that area. And so, to bolster the defenses and military
capacity of our allies in that region, this legislation will
reassert the United States policy that a nuclear-armed Iran
will never be permitted. It will reaffirm our dedication to
imposing sanctions related to terror financing and human
rights abuses. And it will ensure that our allies, most
especially Israel, will be provided with the assets that
they need so that their defense will be bolstered and they
will be able to deter Iran.
General Dunford, you've just visited the area. Can you
tell us what additional assets we can provide? And can you
commit -- and, Secretary Carter, I ask you to join in this
question -- that the United States will, in fact, bolster
assets going to Israel and our other allies in the Middle
East, and comment on this legislation?

Thank you.

General Dunford: Senator, I can't talk to the details
now. I can tell you that the Minister of Defense from
Israel is here today for meetings with Secretary Carter.
We'll have dinner with him this evening. And, as you
probably know, they're developing their perspective on what
cooperation further we might have with them, to include the
details of capability development that I had some initial
discussions with their Chief of Defense -- Minister of
Defense and Prime Minister last week during my visit.

Senator Blumenthal: In the conversations that preceded
our votes on the agreement, I was assured -- and I think
other colleagues were assured -- that, in effect, Israel
will receive all the necessary assistance to make sure that
its qualitative edge is not only maintained, but enhanced.
Is that the policy of the administration?

Secretary Carter: Yeah, qualitative military edge of
Israel is an important part of our overall policy toward the
Middle East, and that's exactly what I'll be talking to --
along with the Chairman -- the Defense Minister of Israel about today. And, of course, that's one ingredient of our overall support for Israel and also, I should add, other Gulf partners and allies.

And I also need to add, since you're asking about the Iran nuclear agreement, the maintenance of the military option, which we are charged with continuing to do. And I continue to pay personal attention to that. I believe the Chairman does, as well. And our efforts to counter Iranian malign influence around the region and protect our friends and allies. So, there are a lot of dimensions to what we do there.

And all of that, which is our activity, remains unchanged with this Iran agreement. All of those things -- the military option, support to Israel, support to other Gulf countries -- that is longstanding pursuit of American interests in the Gulf, and we're going to keep doing that.

Senator Blumenthal: I recognize that the policy remains unchanged, but the military assets will have to be increased, won't they?

Secretary Carter: We will be doing more with Israel. That's one of the reasons -- that's one of the subjects of my discussions with Defense Minister Ya'alon, as it was when I visited there a couple of months ago and he hosted me the way I'll be hosting him over the next couple of days.
Senator Blumenthal: And can you tell us whether you're satisfied with the progress that's been made in those discussions?

Secretary Carter: He and I have a very good relationship, a very easy relationship, so these -- we -- these discussions are discussions among friends. We do things with Israel and have a closeness there that we have with very few other countries around the world. And I can't go into all the details here, but we can share them separately. But, it's a very close defense -- and a trusted defense relationship.

Senator Blumenthal: I would appreciate your sharing those details in a different forum. I am very interested in the details of the discussions that are underway now, and I want to be satisfied that we are fulfilling the commitments that were made to myself and my colleagues in the course of our discussions before the Iran agreement vote.

Thank you very much, to you both.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCain: Senator Sullivan.

Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen.

You know, like Chairman McCain's statement today, General Petraeus was here recently, and in his testimony, he also emphasized that, in the Middle East, there's no easy
answers, but that inaction has costs, whether it's others filling the vacuum, like we're seeing with Russia in the Middle East and in Syria, or whether U.S. credibility is undermined, especially when inaction contradicts policy statements. I think this is a -- I think most of the members of the committee see this as a significant problem, not only in the Middle East, but beyond.

General Dunford, do you believe that inaction has its own costs? And how does the U.S. military weigh the costs of inaction, of doing nothing, when you're presenting options to the President for -- options on what we should be doing in the military -- in the Middle East?

General Dunford: First of all, Senator, you know, I absolutely agree that inaction is unacceptable when we talk about protecting our national interests. So, there's no question about that.

And with regard to when we provide military options to a particular challenge, absolutely I think it's my responsibility to clearly articulate both the opportunity costs and the risk associated with not taking action against a particular issue.

Senator Sullivan: Thank you.

Secretary Carter, you know, many members of the committee have been concerned about U.S. inaction in another part of the world, in the South China Sea. And a lot of us
on this committee saw that inaction was raising costs and
undermining U.S. credibility. There was a number of us who
were complimentary of your speech at the Shangri-la
Dialogue. I was going to express concern about that, but
just read in the paper about the freedom of navigation
operation that we evidently conducted inside a 12-mile zone
of a built-up Chinese island, just yesterday. Is that true?
Did we do that?
Secretary Carter: We have made a commitment -- and I
appreciate your support -- as part of our rebalance to the
Asia-Pacific, which is so important to America's future.
We're doing more at sea, we're doing more in the way of
presence. And, just to give a general answer to what you
said, we have said, and we are acting on the basis of
saying, that we will fly, sail, and operate wherever
international law permits --
Senator Sullivan: Did we send a destroyer yesterday
inside the 12-mile zone of one of the --
Secretary Carter: -- to do that. There have been
naval operations in that region in recent days, and there
will be in the weeks and months --
Senator Sullivan: Inside the 12-mile zone of a China
--
Secretary Carter: I don't want to comment --
Senator Sullivan: -- built-up --
Secretary Carter: -- on a particular operation, but --

Senator Sullivan: You don't want to comment? It's all over the press right now.

Secretary Carter: I'm sure it is, but I -- we reserve the right to conduct --

Senator Sullivan: If we do that within a built-up island that was undersea submerged rock, is that within -- is that consistent with international law?

Secretary Carter: Yes, it is.

Senator Sullivan: So, should we be doing that on a regular basis, in terms of freedom of navigation exercises?

Secretary Carter: We will fly, sail, and operate wherever international law permits and whatever -- whenever our operational needs require --

Senator Sullivan: It would be good to know, just for the committee's --

Secretary Carter: -- that we will --

Senator Sullivan: -- perspective, whether or not the press reports are accurate on what we did.

Let me ask another question about another area in the world where it seems like U.S. inaction clearly seems to be inviting more Russian aggression, where Russian actions are changing facts on the ground. Mr. Secretary, in your confirmation hearing, you talked about the Arctic is going to be a major area of importance to the United States, but
-- strategically and economically in the future -- but you said it's fair to say that we're late to the recognition of that. I think it's also fair to say that the Russians are not late to the recognition of that. Since your confirmation, the Russians have done the following in the Arctic: a new Arctic military command, four new Arctic brigade combat teams, 14 new operational airfields in the Russian Arctic, announcements of up to 50 new airfields in -- by 2020, a 30-percent increase of Russian special forces in the Arctic, 40 icebreakers -- we have two, one is broken -- huge new land claims in the Arctic, increased long-range air patrols with their Bear bombers, the most since the Cold War, a major military exercise in March that caught the U.S. military completely off guard -- 45,000 troops, over 3,000 military vehicles, 41 naval ships, 15 submarines, 110 military aircraft, numerous elements of Russia's western military district and elite airborne troops in that exercise. A lot of this concerns the committee. In the NDAA, which the President vetoed, we had a unanimous agreement here to have -- to create an operations plan for the Arctic. That's an important step to ensuring we have continued good options in the Arctic.

Can I get your commitment, both of you, to work with this committee on a robust -- a robust -- military O-Plan that will enable us to check Russia's aggressions in the
Arctic, keep our options open, and maintain our credibility in that important area of the world, given that that's in the NDAA right now?

Secretary Carter: Yeah, you have mine. And I appreciate your leadership in this regard. The Arctic is an important region for the United States, and actually for the entire world. And so, we need to do more there. And I appreciate the fact that you are a champion of that and can consider me a supporter. And I appreciate -- and we'll have a chance, actually, to discuss that in Alaska later this week --

Senator Sullivan: Yes, sir. Thank you.

General Dunford?

General Dunford: Yes, Senator.

Senator Sullivan: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman McCain: Mr. Secretary, sometimes here in this committee we have a sense of frustration. The news reports, all day, are about a U.S. destroyer, naming the destroyer, going inside the 12-mile zone around these islands. Why would you not confirm or deny that that happened, since all the details and the action happened? This is what frustrates members of this committee, when it's out there in the media, throughout, saturating the media, and you won't even tell us. Is it -- what -- maybe you understand our
frustration, here, Mr. Secretary. That's --

Secretary Carter: I do understand your frustration, and I'd just match it with my own frustration, which is that -- these are operations that we should be conducting normally, and --

Chairman McCain: But, the American people should know about it. And we're their representatives. And you refuse to even confirm or deny something that is all over the media and confirmed by everyone? And you come before this committee and say you won't comment on it? Why?

Secretary Carter: Well, I don't -- I'm going to not be coy with you. I don't like, in general, the idea of talking about our military operations. But, what you read in the newspaper is accurate. And -- but, I don't want to say more than that. And I don't want to say when, whether --

Chairman McCain: Well, at least --

Secretary Carter: -- and how we operate anywhere in the world. One of the things --

Chairman McCain: I don't that --

Secretary Carter: -- about freedom of navigation --

Chairman McCain: -- that the Senator asked you to tell why, when, and how. He just asked you to -- whether you could confirm it, or not.

Secretary Carter: I can.

Chairman McCain: Thank you.
Mr. Donnelly -- Secretary -- Senator Donnelly.

Senator Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to get back to Syria and to some of the questions the Chairman was asking about safe zones. We seem lost. We seem lost and at -- confusion about what to do next, unable to put any real marker down or have any plan for success. The people are voting, and they're voting with their feet. They're leaving. There's refugees all over the world now. And we have the opportunity to set up safe zones. And what I hear is, we're worried about the Russians, we're worried about the Syrians, we're worried about all of these things. I mean, at what point do we put a plan together, execute the plan, tell them what we're going to do, and say, "Stay out of the way"?

Secretary Carter: With respect to a safe -- I'd distinguished a safe zone from a no-fly zone. A safe zone is a zone on the ground. We have analyzed them and discussed them with partners in the region. They are principally not in regions where we would expect them to be contested so much by Assad as by ISIL and al-Nusra. And therefore, they have to be defended against that threat, and that's a military undertaking --

Senator Donnelly: And are we unwilling to --

Secretary Carter: -- people in the region who -- we have not made that recommendation. And the reason --
Senator Donnelly: At what point -- how many people
have to leave before we make that decision?

Secretary Carter: Senator, let me go back to -- if you
create a zone like that, then you do have to ask who is
going to come into the zone. Are there people who have left
Syria who are going to return to Syria from Turkey or Europe
to occupy a zone from which they didn't come? Are there
people elsewhere in Syria who are going to come to that
zone? So, you do have to ask yourself: For whom would it
be attractive to be in such a zone? And then, secondly, who
is going to defend --

Senator Donnelly: Probably some of the folks in
Germany and in other countries who would rather have stayed
in their own country.

Secretary Carter: If they wished to return to the part
of the country for which the zone -- in which the zone is
created. But, again, it would depend on where it was, and
it would be contested --

Senator Donnelly: Well, let me ask you --

Secretary Carter: So, this --

Senator Donnelly: -- in barrel bombs -- we've talked
this time and after time here -- why are we unwilling to
send a message to Assad that if he continues with barrel-
bombing, we will stop him and crater his runways?

Secretary Carter: We have not undertaken to engage, as
the U.S. military, the Syrian military. We have not taken
that step --

Senator Donnelly: So, how do you ever stop the barrel-
bombing?

Secretary Carter: The way that the civil war in Syria
will end, just to get back to what we've been saying
repeatedly, is for Assad to depart and for there to be a
political --

Senator Donnelly: Why would he depart, at this point?

Secretary Carter: Because the opposition to him is
intense, and strengthening.

Senator Donnelly: Well, as far as I can see, he's had
three or four additional allies come onboard. If anything,
the calculation for him is, his cards are getting better.

Secretary Carter: Yeah. Again, our priority has been
to combat ISIL. We are not, as the U.S. military,
undertaking to combat Syrian --

Senator Donnelly: Well, let me just ask you --

Secretary Carter: That's not a decision --

Senator Donnelly: -- this. In the process of --

Secretary Carter: -- not a decision --

Senator Donnelly: -- combating ISIL, does the United
States stand by as another nation barrel-bombs the people
we're trying to protect?

Secretary Carter: We have sought now, for some time,
and continue to do, a political transition in Syria that
would end the Syrian civil war. We have not pursued a
military solution --

Senator Donnelly: Well --
Secretary Carter: -- to that.
Senator Donnelly: -- I would just say, from my
perspective -- and I am not an expert like both of you -- we
seem lost. And I have extraordinary confidence in the
leadership at this table, but we seem lost. And I would
love to see alternate plans that may be out there.

General Dunford, I was in Iraq a few months ago, was
with the Sunni tribal leaders, and I just want to ask your
best military judgment. In spending time with them, they
said, "Look, if you showed an interest in us, if you showed
-- you know, had a helicopter come by every now and then,
showed you really wanted to provide us with guidance, with
logistics, with advice, et cetera, that partnership, that
friendship we've always felt, we'll be there. We'll get the
job done." Do you think they have that capability?

General Dunford: Senator, I do. There are Sunnis that
absolutely can take the fight to the enemy, and we've seen
that in the past.

Senator Donnelly: So, while we try to continue to hope
and pray that the Iraqi Security Force gets better, are we
sitting here with Sunni tribal leaders who have the
individuals who can actually start to move ISIS out of Ramadi?

General Dunford: I think if the central government would do better at outreach to the Sunni, we absolutely could recruit more, train more, equip more, and support more Sunni in the fight.

Senator Donnelly: So, I think it's almost fair to say the team is ready to go; they just need to get the signal to go.

General Dunford: It would take some work, Senator, but there are people out there that we could put together to fight ISIL.

Senator Donnelly: And that's how we start to move ISIL out, I think.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Reed [presiding]: Thank you.

On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me recognize Senator Lee.

Senator Lee: Thank you.

And thank you, Secretary Carter and General Dunford, for appearing in front of our committee today, and for your service to our country.

The White House has been sending mixed and, at times, contradictory messages about what our interests are and what threats to our security exist in the Middle East. Many
Americans are understandably coming to find our current strategy somewhat reminiscent of the old Warren Zevon song, since the President's reaction to -- it seems to be to send in lawyers, guns, and money whenever and wherever a crisis breaks out.

The situation in the Middle East is a very complicated problem for our current posture, but it's certainly not historically aberrational. For more than 100 years, this region has been dominated by either external powers or internal authoritarians who have destroyed cultural institutions and disrupted the natural development of societies. The decentralization of power in these states, compounded by radical Islamism and ancient sectarian grievances, amounts to a time-tested recipe for the kind of conflict and instability that we're seeing today and that tends to threaten our security.

We continue to receive mixed contradictory reports about the effectiveness of ongoing efforts to retain, train, and equip the Iraqi Security Forces. When I ask why we believe it will work this time around, I'm usually told by Defense officials something like the following, something like, "Well, we have a better political partner in Baghdad now than we did before, and we have a partner who will not repeat the mistakes of his predecessor." Now, this is not encouraging, as we know how quickly political institutions
political situations and calculations can change in the Middle East, particularly right now.

So, General Dunford, I'm more concerned by what your predecessor, General Dempsey, described as the "will to fight" factor among the ISF. And I believe that extends beyond simply having a better leader in Baghdad. Do you believe the kind of united Iraq that we have seen for the past century -- that is with borders drawn by the British and French, and held together either by a Western-backed monarchy or a Ba'athist dictator -- is something for which the people of Iraq have the genuine will to fight, especially when they don't have emergency assistance from a coalition like they have right now?

General Dunford: Senator, I think, for most people in Iraq, it's a lot more local than it is national. And I do think that if a central government, for example, would outreach to the Sunni in the Anbar Province and provide basic services, that we would get Sunni fighters that would fight on behalf of the government. We've seen that in the past.

Senator Lee: So, I'd like to expand the question a little bit more broadly, to places like Syria or Yemen. Do people of those countries have the will to fight for united governments in places where current territorial lines may have been imposed by a foreign force?
General Dunford: There's no evidence that I would know of that would indicate that they would.

Senator Lee: Unfortunately, I think that we're looking too hard for an easy answer -- or a simple answer to some of these complicated questions. And I encourage my colleagues and the American people to thoughtfully consider options in the Middle East before continuing down paths that I believe may lead to mission creep and to an indefinite U.S. military presence to prop up weak and sort of artificially created states designated around unsustainable boundaries.

Now, the Department of Defense's Syria train-and-equip program failed. It failed by a longshot. Define and train the level of fighters desired under the vetting requirements established by Congress and the White House. Congress put these requirements in place because we were very concerned about who would be using U.S. assistance, and for what purposes they would be using it.

Secretary Carter, does the failure of this program indicate to you that the viable ground force we desire for Syria simply does not exist within the parameters that the American taxpayer may be willing to support?

Secretary Carter: Well, I was disappointed in it, as well, but I don't draw that conclusion. There are forces in Syria willing to fight ISIL and capable of fighting ISIL. The -- we talked about the Kurd -- Syrian Kurds as an
example of that, the so-called Syrian Arab Coalition. And in the new train-and-equip effort that we described today, we will look to identify and then support capable and motivated forces in -- on Syrian territory that are willing to take on ISIL. We have identified some of them already. And the new approach is to enable them, train them and equip them, rather than trying to create such forces anew, which was the previous approach.

And I do understand why that approach was taken, and, you're right, it was authorized by this committee last December. And I understand the considerations that went into that. I have concluded, and the President concluded, that that approach wasn't working the way that it was conceived of a year ago, and that's precisely why we've changed the approach.

So, we have a different approach that we think will allow us to gain more momentum and, in particular, to allow us to put pressure on the city of Raqqa, which is the self-declared capital of the caliphate. So, on the Syrian side of the counter-ISIL fight, that is our intent, and we're trying to gather momentum in that and several other ways that we detailed.

Senator Lee: Okay. Thank you.

I see my time's expired, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Reed: On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me
recognize Senator McCaskill.

Senator McCaskill: Yes. Senator Reed --

Thank you all for being here.

And, by the way, let me, just at the beginning of my

questions, give a mention to Master Sergeant Joshua Wheeler.

He is -- there probably is no better example of someone who

has run to danger for this country over and over and over

again. I believe this was his 14th deployment. So, I

wanted to mention his name in the hearing today. We all

mourn his loss and the loss of his family, and we support

them as they move through this trying time.

Senator Reed asked you about the new Syrian forces in

northern Syria. Have we provided resupply to those forces?

General Dunford: We have, Senator.

Senator McCaskill: Okay. And have they successfully

called in airstrikes?

General Dunford: They have, Senator.

Senator McCaskill: Okay. And can you tell us, for the

record, how many?

General Dunford: I cannot, Senator. I can get that

information for you. I don't know the number.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]
Senator McCaskill: That would be terrific.

On Iraq train-and-equip -- as you all know, I have a tendency to read those IG reports. The one that came out September 30th raised several concerns that I'm worried about. One is asking us to refurbish the conditions under which these Iraqis are training. The DOD IG recommends that the coalition work with the Iraqi Minister of Defense to devise and implement a plan that clarifies the contributions of Iraq and the United States to improve their living conditions. Evidently, they are -- the IG is saying that we're having desertions because they're living in such squalor, in terms of the conditions under which they are training. I just think of the billions and billions on infrastructure we spend in Iraq, and I'm trying to get my arms around: Are we going to go in and fix up something that's going to rot when we leave, or is Iraq going to step up and do what's necessary to make these conditions palatable for our -- the recruits?

General Dunford: Senator, what I would tell you -- and this is my perspective, and I think this is where we're at right now -- is that our relationship with Iraq has to be transactional, and there has to be certain conditions that they would meet before we would provide support. And that absolutely is the framework within which I'll provide recommendations for any support to the Iraqi forces -- would
be that it would be based on their behavior and their willingness to be true partners and meet certain conditions that would indicate they'd be heading the direction that you described.

Senator McCaskill: Capital expenditures, you know, just really grate, I think, on many of us who have watched the amount of money that we wasted on capital expenditures in Iraq. And on that same line of questioning, the MRAPs that are coming from Afghanistan, the same IG report points out that many of them are missing parts, and there's a real question whether they have the capability of maintaining these MRAPs, going forward. Once again, are there discussions about who is going to bear the costs of making these MRAPs that we're giving them actually operational?

General Dunford: Senator, are you talking about the MRAPs we gave to the Afghan Security Forces?

Senator McCaskill: I'm talking about the ones -- the excess ones that we're moving over -- U.S. is providing 250 MRAPs to the Iraqi Army. They're excess defense items and being shipped to Iraq from Afghanistan. Those are the MRAPs I'm talking about.

General Dunford: Yeah. I can't comment on what the arrangements are, but I'll get that information for you, Senator, in terms of what arrangements were made of giving them. Typically, when we provide that equipment, it's in
as-is condition when we provide it to another country. And I assume that's the rule --

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]
Senator McCaskill: I just want to make sure we're not going to the expense of sending them something that isn't operational, that we don't want to have to spend a lot of money to fix up, and, secondly, that they don't have the capability of maintaining. You know, sustainability. I mean, Secretary Carter knows this has been a refrain from the very beginning. It does us no good to give them things if they cannot sustain it. And, of course, that's one of the reasons that we're having the problems in Iraq we have right now, is they were politically incapable of sustainability.

Briefly, on a separate subject, I just want to bring this up. And I won't go into the details here, but I am desperately trying to get at helping the veterans that were subjected to mustard gas experiments. And I'm having a really difficult time with your folks about this. They're saying that even if I have the name of a veteran and the privacy waiver, they will not give me information out of your mustard gas database without a letter from the Chairman. I don't understand why this is so hard. Why is everyone not opening up these records and doing everything we can to get the word to these people? There are a lot of folks out there that were subjected to mustard gas experiments. And the VA wants to point at you. And I'm hitting a wall at DOD on this. And I really need a
commitment from you all today that you will get me the information as to why this is -- why me trying to help veterans who maybe have been exposed to mustard gas -- why this should be so hard. Would you all be willing to make that commitment, that you will work with my office instead of --

Secretary Carter: Yeah, I --

Senator McCaskill: They just keep throwing up roadblocks. I've been at this for months.

Secretary Carter: Senator, I'm not familiar with this issue, but, as always, I will make sure that we support your request. I'll look into it, and we'll -- with the Chairman -- and we'll get back to you, as appropriate.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]
Senator McCaskill: And I've been waiting since July for evidence to back up your claim that there was justification for the $36 million, 64,000 square-foot building in Afghanistan. There was a call for discipline for the people who had okayed that building. It's sitting empty. And I've been asking since July as to -- you said that you didn't think -- Secretary Carter, you contested the findings and said that you didn't think disciplinary action was appropriate. I've asked what the evidence is that would indicate disciplinary action is not appropriate. And I've been waiting since July. So, if you could get that on your To Do List, too, I would really appreciate it.

Secretary Carter: I will do that.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]
Senator McCaskill: You've got an able helper behind you there who ought to help with this.

Thank you very much.

Senator Reed: On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me recognize Senator Sessions.

Senator Sessions.

Thank you, Senator.

Senator Sessions: Thank you very much.

Senator McCain laid out some serious criticisms of how we're being -- how we're conducting our policy in the Middle East. I share most of those. I don't think they're little matters. They're important matters. And I think we've made some mistakes and struggled in ways that are not well, not good. I think it's -- so, I'll just leave it at that.

What I'd like to address today is the need for a strategy, long term, in the Middle East. I asked Kenneth Pollack, of the Brookings Institution, several months ago -- he had mentioned in his statement, "This may take a long time." So, I asked him -- the whole problem of extremism in the Middle East, this spasm of violence we're seeing throughout the entire region, how complex it is and how -- and I asked him -- and so, I followed up with him and said, "So, you're saying this could last 10, 20, 50 years." And I remember very vividly. He looked at me, and he gave an answer you don't often get. "Yes." That was his answer.
So, we've -- and do we need a strategy -- a long-term strategy that could deal with that? I've asked that question to Walter Russell Mead, and he said he's never seen us, as a Nation, be so unfocused in a strategy, the historian that he is.

The entire panel, I believe, week before last -- General Jimmy Jones, President Obama's National Security Advisor, General Keane, Ambassador, another scholar -- all agree that we need a strategy, and we really don't have one.

Then I asked Secretary Gates, last week, and this is what he said that I think is relevant. He said, "My concern is that I don't see an overreaching -- or overriding strategy on the part of the United States with this complex challenge for the next 20 or 30 years." And one of the benefits of containment -- and there are lots of disagreements about how to apply it and how the wars we've fought under it, and so on -- but, I will always believe that critical to our success in the Cold War was that we had a broad strategy, called containment, that was practiced by nine successive administrations of both political parties. It had bipartisan support, the general notion of how to deal with this. So, we don't have anything like that with respect to the Middle East. And I think that is long -- and so, we're kind of dealing with each of these crises individually rather than backing up and saying, "What's our
long-term game plan, here? And who are going to be our allies? Who are going to be our friends? Where do we contain? Where do we let it burn itself out?" We just haven't really addressed those long-term questions, because it seems to me we're thinking strictly in the short term of month-to-month.

What -- I know we've got nine points, Secretary Carter, but I don't sense anyone in the region or anyone in the Congress believes that we have a deeply studied and long-term policy for the Middle East that could extend for decades. First of all, do you think we need one? And do we have one?

Secretary Carter: We have a strategy toward the Middle East. And many elements of it are, in fact, of longstanding -- decades longstanding. And again, the -- our strategy begins with the pursuit of American interests, and that involves protecting our own country and our people, defending longstanding friends and allies, who include the Gulf states and especially Israel, which was discussed already, opposing the introduction of nuclear weapons to the region, which gets us to the Iran circumstance, and, in the current matter of ISIL, protecting our people and our friends and allies against ISIL by defeating it where it began, which is in Iraq and Syria. We described, today, that -- the implementation of the strategy in both of those
places to defeat -- degrade and defeat ISIL. So, we're doing that.

So, I -- it is a complicated region. I called it kaleidoscopic in my statement. But, American interests are not unclear. They're clear. And we -- our strategy is intended to pursue those interests, and that is what we're doing. And strengthening the pursuit of that strategy is why the Chairman and I have been describing to you today the new steps we're taking in Iraq and Syria and with respect to unilateral actions.

Senator Sessions: Well, I know that's the position of the administration, but, frankly, our Middle East allies that we talk to and come and visit us don't feel confident that they know what the long-term goals of the United States are. Were they to defend Iraq against ISIL, who we'd shared shoulder-to-shoulder, General Dunford, for a decade? Are we going to pull out all troops? Apparently not, now, in Afghanistan, regardless of the situation on the ground. What about red lines in Syria? Are we going to honor those?

Look, you can say that, but I think it's clear that confidence in understanding of where we stand and what we're going to do for the next 10, 20, 30 years, as any leader of a Middle Eastern nation has got to think, and as we should think, as a great Nation, I don't think we're there.

So, I really believe more work needs to be done. I'm
talking to my colleagues in the Senate. I believe we can
reach a bipartisan policy. I really do. I don't think it's
impossible. And I'm going to work toward that goal.

Senator Reed: Thank you.

Senator Sessions: One more thing. My time is over.

But, I believe the Defense Department may underestimate the
critical nature of the refugee crisis. This is not like
Iran-Iraq war that went on for many, many years. This is
impacting Europe right now. It is a humanitarian crisis.
It's being exploited by everyone else in the Middle East
that would like to come to Europe. Europe is facing what
one top diplomat told me was the greatest crisis since the
-- World War II. And I think we've got to think about this
safe haven, these safe zones, and get busy on it. And if we
-- and General Petraeus said it might have to have some of
our people at risk, defensively, to try to protect those
areas, but we wouldn't take a lot. You and I talked,
Secretary Carter, about it. Can't we get moving on this?
How many more millions are going to have to flee and being
lined up in areas that we don't -- before we act? Just
morally, my judgment is that Europe needs to know there is a
place for these refugees to go, other than to flee the
entire region. That will strengthen them. Can we not do
that?

Quickly.
Secretary Carter: Well, the -- insofar as the refugees are coming from Syria -- they're actually coming to Europe from several --

Senator Sessions: All over.

Secretary Carter: -- places, but, to the extent they're coming from Syria, this is why it is so important that the Syrian civil war be put to an end. And our approach to that is political. It's not military. And that's been a persistent subject of discussion here. We have not undertaken to achieve that goal militarily. Our approach to that is political. We hope that that transition occurs and that the civil war in Syria ends. And that is something that --

Senator Sessions: What if it takes 3 years? Can't we provide some sort of area there for people who are in danger to have safety and not have to leave the entire region?

Secretary Carter: I'll just -- I'd just repeat what I've said. We have analyzed it. I'm prepared to have shared with you the analysis we've done of safe zones, buffer zones, and no-fly zones. We have looked at the advantages and costs of those. And the President has not taken them off the table, but we have not undertaken to create any of those zones at this time. I don't rule that out in the future, Senator. And we're happy to discuss it with you, and discuss, in a different setting, the analysis
that we have done.

Senator Reed: On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me recognize Senator Ayotte.

Senator Ayotte: I want to thank the Chair. Also thank Senator Donnelly. Appreciate it.

I wanted to ask Secretary Carter -- recently, the Iranians have actually tested a long-range missile, in violation of existing U.N. Security Council resolutions. This is something that Ambassador Power has confirmed. And, in fact, if you look at what the Iranians have done post-agreement, not only have they tested this missile, but, of course, they've wrongfully convicted a Washington Post reporter in Iran, and they -- of course, we've had a lot of discussion today about the cooperation between Russia and Iran undermining stability in Syria and our interests there.

So, I've also brought -- been brought to my attention recently that the Supreme Leader of Iran has actually said, about the recent agreement, that, "Any imposition of sanctions at any level under any pretext, including repetitive and fabricated pretexts of terrorism and human rights on the part of any countries involved in the negotiations, will constitute a violation of the JCPOA."

So, here's my question to both of you, and primarily to you, Secretary Carter. What are we going to do about their violation of already existing U.N. resolutions when it comes
to testing ballistic missiles and long-range missiles? And you know -- you're the one that testified before this committee, the "I" in ICBM is "intercontinental." And, as I see it, already Iran is violating resolutions, with no response from us. Already the Supreme Leader is basically saying, "You impose sanctions on any reason, even our support for terrorism or other human rights violation, we're going to walk away from the JCPOA." So, do you not agree that their violation of the missile resolution warrants a response from the United States of America? And what is that response going to be? Because, at this point, I haven't seen any response.

Secretary Carter: I think that it's -- it needs to be very clear -- it's certainly clear to us, in the Department of Defense -- that the conclusion of the nuclear deal with Iran, assuming it gets implemented, which was part of what your question gets to you -- does not address all of our security concerns with respect to --

Senator Ayotte: But, let me ask you this.

Secretary Carter: -- Iran. And --

Senator Ayotte: Just yes or no, should we respond to their testing of this missile, that violates existing U.N. resolutions?

Secretary Carter: I -- I'll describe one response that is in our area, and that is our continuing commitment to the
development of missile defenses. That's one of the reasons why we are developing and fielding --

Senator Ayotte: I understand that we're developing missile defenses, but what is our response when they behave badly already? Shouldn't there be a response from the United States of America? We had, recently, a panel of experts here, and I asked each of them -- and they came from different perspectives -- if we should respond. And they all agreed, "Yes."

Secretary Carter: Well, the -- in our area of responsibility, I would say this, Senator. I'll let the -- Ambassador Power and Secretary Kerry address the diplomatic side of it. But, in our area of responsibility -- and I made this clear right from the beginning of the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear deal, that that does not end all of our security concerns with respect to Iran.

Senator Ayotte: I mean --

Secretary Carter: That is why we --

Senator Ayotte: Mr. Secretary, I'm sorry --

Secretary Carter: -- continue to --

Senator Ayotte: -- I don't have a lot of time, but ending -- it seems not ending. It seems like it's just beginning, really, as we think about this unholy alliance between Russia and Iran, undermining our interests in Syria, as we think about them testing, in our faces, this long-
range missile, as we think about what the Supreme Leader has basically said, "Any sanctions, we're going to walk away from the JCPOA." I would say that it's really just beginning.

That said, before I leave -- I don't have much time, but I need to ask question of you, General Dunford. I had the privilege of, recently, on Friday, going to the Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility and meeting with our men and women who serve there. And they're doing an excellent job under difficult circumstances, as you know. And one of the issues that was brought to my attention -- and I know that you, as a leader in our military, one of your jobs, having been a commander and serving, obviously, in the highest position in our military, understand that taking care of our men and women in uniform is so critical. And yet, we have a situation down there where we met with women guards who are being prevented from fully performing their mission because the five 9/11 attackers, who are charged with killing 3,000 Americans, will not allow them to perform their duties because they're women. Can you tell me what you think about that and whether you think that is right, and how we should be addressing that?

General Dunford: Senator, I can tell you how I feel about it. I feel the same way as the Commander, U.S. Southern Command, General Kelly, who describes it as
outrageous. And I read his weekly report, and have read it for about -- probably the last 7 or 8 weeks, to include the 2 or 3 weeks before transition. So, it's outrageous. He's identified it. And, as you probably know, Senator, that's being worked by lawyers. It's an injunction. I don't -- I'm not using that as an excuse, I'm just sharing with you that's actually the -- where it's at right now. It's being worked by lawyers. The Commander has identified it. I think it ought to be -- it is outrageous. It ought to be fixed. It hasn't been, to date.

Senator Ayotte: I'd like to see the administration speak out against this. Here we talk about giving women more opportunity in combat, but this is a area where these women that we met with, by the way, that are serving there, they're the very best. And they are not being able to perform the full responsibilities of their positions simply because they are women, because 9/11 terrorists are manipulating the system to say that our women cannot guard them.

Secretary Carter, I hope you would agree with me that this is outrageous. And I would hope that the administration would do everything in its power to stand up for our women in the military.

Secretary Carter: I do want to associate myself with what the Chairman said. It is outrageous. And what General
Kelly said, this is the -- pursuant to an action of a
Federal judge, and I understand that. But, if you're -- I
think it is counter to the way we treat servicemembers,
including women servicemembers, and outrage is a very good
word for it.

Senator Ayotte: Well, I appreciate both of you being
here.

Thank you.

Chairman McCain [presiding]: Mr. Secretary and General
Dunford, I've known both of you for many years, and I have
appreciated very much your outstanding work. And I am great
admirers of both of you. And I appreciate your service.

But, could I, again, caution you, Mr. Secretary. It
isn't helpful to our relations and members of this committee
when there's a widely spread story stating the name of the
ship, where it went, how it went, and then you come and tell
us that you can't confirm or deny something that is out
there in the media. So, meaning that somebody has leaked
all that information to the media and it's out there, but
you can't tell this -- members of this committee, who have
the responsibility -- it isn't a privilege, it's a
responsibility to exercise oversight.

The second issue I want to mention to you is
Guantanamo. I understand that the President has said many
-- on numerous occasions, that one of his objections is
Guantanamo. You and the President's top aide came to my office and said you were going to give me a plan. I've always favored closing Guantanamo, for a whole variety of reasons. And yet, we still haven't got a plan from you. In fact, not only not a plan -- until I asked you about it specifically, there was no communication, after coming to my office and saying that you're going to give me that plan and I said we needed it before we marked up the defense authorization bill. We got nothing. Not an update, not a briefing on what was going on. So, we put in the language in Guantanamo, and the President then voices his strong objection to Guantanamo.

Finally, this issue of whether we are protecting those people who we are asking to fight against Bashar Assad and ISIS. Isn't it true that we've dropped munitions, General Dunford, to these -- to a group of people who we are supporting in Syria?

General Dunford: It is true, Senator.

Chairman McCain: It is true? And yet, are we going to protect them from Russian air attacks?

General Dunford: Senator, we have the authority, we have the capability, and we have options to defend the forces that we've --

Chairman McCain: But, is it true that the Russians are already attacking them?
General Dunford: The ones we have trained, it -- they have not.

Chairman McCain: I'm not asking the ones we've trained. The ones we dropped munitions to.

General Dunford: No, the Russians have not attacked the ones we've dropped munitions to, Senator.

Chairman McCain: They have not.

General Dunford: No, Chairman.

Chairman McCain: And they have not --

General Dunford: To make sure that you and I are speaking of the same group, the group I'm referring to is what's known as the Syrian Arab Coalition. They're operating in the northeast part of the country, north of Raqqa. And we recently provided resupply to those individuals -- ammunition --

Chairman McCain: And if they're attacked by the Russians, we'll defend them.

General Dunford: Senator, we have the capability to do that, and we'd provide options. I can't answer that question.

Chairman McCain: They'd be interested. They'd be interested --

General Dunford: Yes, sir.

Chairman McCain: -- in knowing, I think, if we're going to give them equipment and ask them to fight, and then
they're going to be -- we can't answer to them whether we're
 going to protect them, or not. I don't think -- I think
it's a degree of immorality.

So, anyway, Chairman, this --

Secretary Carter: May I -- the two parts you raised,
just take a moment?

First of all, again, I don't mean to be coy about the
ship sailing. And I know things are in the newspaper. I'm
just going to tell you where I'm coming from on that. It
has nothing to do with this particular operation. There are
all kinds of things in the newspaper that -- and it -- and
that should not be in the newspaper. I don't like to talk
about military operations publicly. You are, of course,
entitled to know everything, and be briefed on everything.
But, talking about things in a public setting, I'm, in
general, not --

Chairman McCain: But, what --

Secretary Carter: -- not in favor of.

Chairman McCain: Why shouldn't --

Secretary Carter: So, I don't want you to think I'm
being coy --

Chairman McCain: But, what is --

Secretary Carter: -- or evasive. I --

Chairman McCain: But, what is classified about it?

What is it that you wouldn't want -- I mean, it's -- in
fact, I think literally every member of this committee applauds it. So, I'm not sure that -- what the reason is, why you wouldn't want to just state what has already been, from somebody that works for you -- the name of the ship, where it went, when it went, how it went, but yet you won't tell us. That causes frustration, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary Carter: Okay. All right. Well, I don't mean to cause you frustration. I just wanted you to know where I'm coming from.

Chairman McCain: Well, I hope you understand our frustration.

Secretary Carter: Yeah, I do. I do. But, I -- and maybe my hesitation is excessive, but I don't like to talk about military operations in public. And perhaps this one should be an exception.

But, let me go on to the other thing you said, about Gitmo. I, too, favor, like you, closing Gitmo, if that is at all possible. That -- because some of the detainees in Gitmo are not -- cannot be safely transferred to another location, in order to close Gitmo, as you know, we would need to find a location in the United States, or locations, in which they could continue to be detained. What has taken the time, Chairman, is that we had to survey a number of sites. We've done that in a number of sites around the country. We've completed that -- and we have -- some of
those are Department of Defense sites, some of those are
Bureau of Prisons sites. And we needed to have them
nominated by the Justice Department and then to do the site
surveys there. All of that took some time.

Chairman McCain: I understand.

Secretary Carter: And the process is now complete, and
I expect you'll get your proposal shortly.

Chairman McCain: All right. I understand, but I would
have appreciated an update. And the cynicism over on this
side, at the Capitol, is, to my view, somewhat justified,
because the law was broken when Mr. Bergdahl was swapped for
two people. The law required that the President of the
United States notify the Congress of the United States. And
he didn't do it. So, frankly, there's a credibility gap
that is huge, when the President acts in direct violation of
the law, and using the excuse, well, he was afraid there was
going to be a leak. Well, to me, that's not sufficient
reason to violate the law. And so, therefore, the cynicism
here is immense. And to expect -- the President complains
about the NDAA -- to expect that this committee would act,
after the President has violated the law and there is no
plan, is, of course, something that is not -- neither
reasonable nor in keeping with our responsibilities.

And so, could I say, again, of my respect. I
appreciate the great work that both of you do. As I've
said, we've known each other a long time. But, I also have
to tell you, there's a certain amount of frustration here
because of the lack of communication. What we just talked
about, of Guantanamo, is one. Another one is this policy,
or lack of policy, about what people we train and equip, and
whether we're going to defend them, or not. The lack of a
strategy to say that we can -- have to take out Syrian air
defenses in order to establish a no-fly zone is simply not
true. You can ask -- I'll ask any military expert. That's
not true. You don't have to take out Syrian air defenses.
It's Syrians that can't fly into our places. And we've had
military's -- members like General Petraeus and General
Keane and many others who obviously have a very different
view of the whole issue of what we're going to do, which, by
doing nothing, has triggered a flood of millions of
refugees, which is a problem we're going to be grappling
with for many years to come. It didn't have to happen.

Well, I look forward to more conversations with you. I
appreciate you coming to the committee, I appreciate your
service.

And this hearing, I'm sure you'll be glad to know, is
adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:00 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]